

1993

The ritual dramas of El Teatro Campesino

Charles De Wald
San Jose State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/etd_theses

Recommended Citation

De Wald, Charles, "The ritual dramas of El Teatro Campesino" (1993). *Master's Theses*. 532.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31979/etd.hcyb-x33f>
https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/etd_theses/532

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Master's Theses and Graduate Research at SJSU ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of SJSU ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@sjsu.edu.

INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

U·M·I

University Microfilms International
A Bell & Howell Information Company
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
313/761-4700 800/521-0600



Order Number 1353009

The ritual dramas of El Teatro Campesino

De Wald, Charles Gilbert, M.A.

San Jose State University, 1993

U·M·I
300 N. Zeeb Rd.
Ann Arbor, MI 48106



THE RITUAL DRAMAS OF EL TEATRO CAMPESINO

A Thesis

Presented To

The Faculty of the Department of Theatre Arts

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

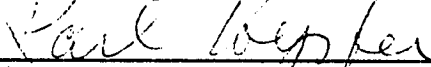
Master of Arts

by

Charles De Wald

May, 1993

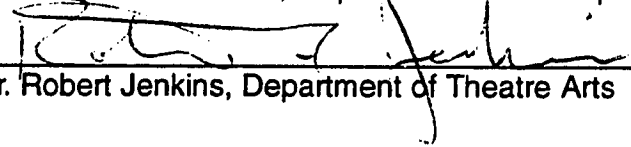
APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE ARTS



Dr. Karl Toepfer, Committee Chairman, Theatre Arts



Dr. James M. Freeman, Department of Anthropology



Dr. Robert Jenkins, Department of Theatre Arts

APPROVED FOR THE UNIVERSITY



ABSTRACT

THE RITUAL DRAMAS OF EL TEATRO CAMPESINO

by Charles De Wald

Each year, El Teatro Campesino, of which Luis Valdez is artistic director and resident playwright, performs ritual dramas for audiences both of Mexican-American descent and general American audiences. In this thesis, three of these ritual dramas--La Pastorela, El Baile De Los Gigantes, and La Virgen Del Tepeyac--are examined from an anthropological perspective, looking at these dramas as rituals.

Research on this subject reveals that Luis Valdez, besides employing sacred beliefs of the Catholic Church and Christianity and Mesoamerican Indian mythology in his plays, has also adopted a Mayan transcendental cosmology in his approach to theatrical production. In an empirical sense, the ritual dramas, by performing in "sacred places" during "sacred times," not only reaffirm religious belief systems and preserve cultural integrity through the reenactment of myths, but also create "social dramas" that serve as catalysts for change in a multicultural society.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to thank the following people without whom this thesis would never have been realized. Thanks to Professors David Kahn, Karl Toepfer, and Robert Jenkins of San Jose State University Theatre Arts Department who patiently gave of their valuable time to help stimulate this student in the fascinating connections that exist between ritual and the theatre. Thanks also to Professor James Freeman of the Anthropology Department of San Jose State University who gave generously of his knowledge and expertise in his chosen field of study.

Very special thanks go to my brothers and sisters in the theatre troupe of El Teatro Campesino (especially Rosa Marie Escalante) who not only graciously allowed themselves to be the subject matter of a graduate student's thesis but who also courageously opened up their lives, hearts, and spirits to enhance a scholarly endeavor. Thanks are especially appropriate to Luis Valdez. For without his artistic vision, this thesis would not have had any basis for study.

It is also necessary to thank all those special friends, family, and the Veteran's Administration. Without their loving and timely support, this thesis may never have been completed

THE RITUAL DRAMAS OF EL TEATRO CAMPESINO

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Ritual analysis	1
Interview and Observation Process	3
Style	4
Limitations	6
Ritual Theory and Theorists	10
Multicultural and Transcendental Implications	13
Anthropology, Ritual and Theatre	15
CHAPTER TWO: DEFINITIONS: RITUAL AND THE THEATRE	19
Ritual Definitions	19
Ritual Elements	20
Transcendence and Transformance	22
Symbolic Anthropology	26
Social Dramas	27
Liminal and Liminoid	29
Efficacy Versus Entertainment	31
CHAPTER THREE: EL TEATRO CAMPESINO: BACKGROUND AND SACRED BELIEFS	33
Mystical Beginnings	33
Residence At San Juan	35
Religious Roots	36
Mayan and Aztec Philosophy	37
Family, Ethnic, and Community Identity	41
CHAPTER FOUR: <u>LA PASTORELA</u>	45
Background	45
Sacred Time and Place	47
The Performance	50
Interpretation	60

CHAPTER FIVE: <u>EL BAILE DE LOS GIGANTES</u>	63
Background and History	63
Time and Place	65
Community Involvement and Workshops	66
More General Background	68
Audience and Performance Space	69
Special Elements	71
The Performance	72
Interpretations	81
CHAPTER SIX: <u>LA VIRGEN DEL TEPEYAC</u>	85
History and Background	85
Community Involvement	87
Two Different Performance Spaces	88
The Mission At San Juan	89
The Theatre and The Mission	92
The Ritual Performance	93
Interpretations	104
CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSIONS	107
General Considerations	107
Modes of Ritual	111
Liminal/Liminoid and Efficacy/Entertainment.	112
Sacred Space versus Theatre Space	115
Valdez' Ritual Dramas as "Social Dramas"	116
"Restored Behavior" and Transcendence	119
BIBLIOGRAPHY	122

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Ritual Analysis

As producer, playwright, and director, Luis Valdez of El Teatro Campesino has presented to the American culture a view of the Hispanic experience. Valdez has researched his historical, transcendental, and cultural past, and incorporated the Chicano experience as it relates to the Catholic Church and Christianity, Mexican-American traditions and rituals, and Mesoamerican Indian mythology into his productions. Each year, El Teatro Campesino, of which Valdez is artistic director, performs theatrical presentations for audiences both of Mexican-American descent and heritage, and for a general American audience. Some of the performances have been labeled as ritual dramas¹ and have been determined to be ritual practices in other scholarly treatises.² Three of these ritual dramas--La Pastorela (The

¹Betty Ann Diamond, "Brown-Eyed Children of the Sun," diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1977.

²Hilary Ursula Cohen, "Ritual and Theater: An Examination of Performance Forms in the Contemporary American Theater," diss., University of Michigan, 1980.

Shepherds' Play), El Baile De Los Gigantes (The Battle of the Giants), and La Virgen Del Tepeyac (The Virgin of Guadalupe)--together comprise the focal point of this thesis.

Even though the ritual dramas of El Teatro Campesino have been documented and recorded for many years by theatre researchers and scholars, these theatrical presentations, for the most part, have only been examined for their mythological and literary content. In this thesis, the approach is from an anthropological perspective, looking at these dramas as rituals.

This thesis considers what Valdez and El Teatro Campesino are attempting to achieve by employing ritual, and what is achieved according to ritual theory. How do these ritual dramas conform to ritual theory? How do the ritual theories apply to what Valdez is trying to achieve? How do the rituals serve their community? How are the audiences and participants affected by the performances of these ritual dramas?

After presenting some basic definitions and theories of ritual, and describing a general background of the sacred beliefs of El Teatro Campesino, each of the ritual dramas, La Pastorela, El Baile De Los Gigantes, and La Virgen Del Tepeyac, is examined in respective chapters for its ritual values. The use of time and space, the symbols and interpretation of their meanings, and the rhythms and other ritual properties are described through ritological analysis. After examining the above mentioned dramas, a theoretical interpretation as to the ritual function of each is determined and, in the closing chapter, some general conclusions are reached regarding the use of ritual by Valdez and El Teatro Campesino.

The dramas are described, analyzed, and studied through personal

interviews with the participants--actors, directors, and audience members--and personal observation, involvement, and attendance at some rehearsals and performances.

Interview and Observation Process

The interview and observation process took place on several occasions over a one year span from 1991 through 1992. Three formal interviews were conducted with Rosa Marie Escalante who is educational director of El Teatro Campesino and director of the ritual dramas examined. Two interviews (May and November, 1992) were held in San Juan Bautista, California, at the resident theatre space of El Teatro Campesino and another interview (May, 1992) was conducted in Santa Barbara, California, where El Baile De Los Gigantes was performed. Questions were asked of Escalante concerning the general composition of casts and audiences, and the relationships between the participants and observers. General questions were posed relating the performances to the Mexican-American culture. Questions were also asked concerning the ritual qualities, attributes, and values that Valdez and his theatre troupe intend in their productions.

The performances examined were observed at different locations and different times of the year to offer a well-rounded base from which to determine the ritual values of each drama. The individual performance locations and times are explained in the examination of each drama, along with the reasons for observing each performance at that time.

Performances of other plays were attended where this participant-observer interacted with the cast and staff of the productions at the theatre in San Juan Bautista, such as the performance of El Fin Del Mundo on the

occasion of "Dias De Los Muertos" or "Days of the Dead," which is traditionally and ritualistically celebrated around the same time as the American "Halloween."

This researcher participated in two performances of Gigantes in Santa Barbara and attended a workshop that explained some of the metaphysical aspects and religious beliefs of the Aztecs and Mayans. Ritual practices of El Teatro Campesino as they related to theatrical performance were also introduced during the workshop.

Actors of El Teatro Campesino were interviewed at various times throughout the year's study--during rehearsal periods, before and after performances, and in informal and formal meetings, receptions, and luncheons. As this researcher was allowed to participate and get to personally know the actors, questions relating to ethnic, theatrical, and cultural backgrounds were asked. Being a member of the "troupe" for a brief time also provided insight into the Hispanic culture and the relationships of the actors to that culture.

This personal interaction with the actors, directors, and audience has positive characteristics yet limitations as well since the observer was no longer isolated from the participants but became an active part of the process and experience. In order to incorporate these characteristics and limitations, the element of personal style must be brought into play.

Style

Ronald Grimes believes that style is the most important element when dealing with the study of ritual, a concept borrowed from ethnographic studies of cultures in anthropology. Grimes states that "style is the total outcome of conscious and unconscious, intellectual and emotional, bodily and attitudinal

aspects of a participant-observer.”³ Believing that style is the product of personal stance and cultural form, he relates that the cultural form involved is that of scholarly theory and interpretation. He also states that it is impossible not to take a personal stance when observing ritual because the presence of the observer has an implicit effect on the enactment of the ritual because of the presence of the observer. Grimes summarized his criteria for the study of living ritual processes:

- 1) Ritological style is a mode of ritual research which articulates as part of the data the gestural and symbolic dimensions of the researchers themselves.
- 2) All the senses, not just seeing must be developed for studying ritual.
- 3) Since the study of ritual is a virtual initiation rite in a subjunctive mode, the intersubjective process, not merely the conclusions, should be treated in scholarly monographs.
- 4) The goal of fieldstudy is to maximize the process of interaction, not to arrive at “conclusions” or make predictions.
- 5) All descriptions of symbolic actions should lead to descriptions of insider/outsider, performer/audience, value conflicts.
- 6) A scholar in the field should pursue a specific set of bodily, imaginative, and intellectual exercises for unlearning, for achieving the no-mind of a student.⁴

Many of these stylistic modes have been adopted in this thesis. For the purposes of this thesis, the third person narrative was selected because of its universal acceptance in scholarly communication. The impressions and descriptions of the ritual dramas, however, are not necessarily devoid of emotional content, intellectual involvement, or artistic reactions. Theatre is subjective and emotions and feelings cannot be detached from the experience of viewing the presentation of a theatrical performance. Even though employing

³ Ronald Grimes, Beginnings in Ritual Studies (Lanham/New York/London: University Press of America, 1982) 3.

⁴ Grimes 14.

a critical and analytical eye, this researcher, with twenty-five years of theatrical experience (including ten years as a theatre critic for various publications), leans towards the creative and subjective side of performance as an analytic aide.

Yet other limiting elements, which can be influential regarding the observer-participant relationships, must be brought into consideration when observing the performances of ritual dramas.

Limitations

To quote James Clifford about the difficulty in interpreting cultures and the forces at work within them such as ritual:

Ethnography is an emergent interdisciplinary phenomenon. Its authority and rhetoric have spread to many fields where "culture" is a newly problematic object of description and critique.⁵

It should be noted that this researcher is not Hispanic in ethnicity and does not speak, read, or write Spanish on a fluent level. As mentioned by Grimes, part of the difficulty in interpreting rituals in a society has to do with the nature of the observer describing the ritual he observes. The participant's experience in the ritual must be taken into account, and possibly the interpreter's vantage point and influence on the experience itself. For example, this researcher was not only often recognized when attending performances because of the interviewing process, but also participated in two performances of El Baile De Los Gigantes. The effect of the presence of this researcher could have made an impact on the performance for that evening or afternoon. In another example regarding the interview process, it must be realized that when

⁵James Clifford and George E. Marcus, eds., Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography (Los Angeles/Berkeley/London: University of California Press, 1986) 3.

questioning the actors, some of them might have responded with answers that they felt the researcher wanted to hear or what El Teatro Campesino or Valdez would have wanted them to say. On the other side of the problem, some difficulties are created when the actors are “having fun,” not being honest, and “playing” with the researcher as actors are sometimes inclined to do, and oftentimes paid to do in front of an audience in a performance situation.

When dealing with the transcendent elements of a society, interpretation also may not be easily objectified. The actual experience cannot be solely determined by the observer himself. It should be noted, again, that this researcher is neither Hispanic nor Catholic and had to rely primarily on the comments and belief systems provided by other scholars, the participants (actors and directors) and observers (the audience), and members of the Spanish-American community for background information and testimonies of faith.

When analyzing the work of Valdez and El Teatro Campesino, religious influences and cosmology predominate in the productions of their ritual dramas. Their sacred belief system (based on Mayan cosmology, Catholicism, native Indian spiritual practices, and other religious faiths) plays a major part in the performance of their dramas. There is no empirical way of scientifically evaluating the effects of these beliefs on the participants and observers except to say that religious beliefs exist for some of the participants who are performing and/or attending the reenactment of these sacred mythologies.

In philosophy, it is important to first accept the premise that an idea exists; in this case, transcendence. This is an easy argument for theologians who readily accept the notion of a power (or powers) greater than ourselves.

Theologian-philosophers “presuppose the ultimacy or co-ultimacy of the historical-cosmic process, and assume that transcendence is a reality intrinsically bound up with this process. They assume the necessity of showing that the Transcendent, however conceived, must be pragmatically as well as (or instead of) formally true.”⁶

If we accept this premise, as the theologians do, that transcendence is a reality and, that in achieving this state of being--an altered state, a possible fourth dimension, or the existence of a state of being beyond our identifiable three-dimensional reality that appeals to the psychological and the spiritual consciousness--we have reached a level of awareness and experience that is beyond our normal state of being--“derived from the possibility that reality houses reservoirs of value qualitatively different from what we normally perceive or assume.”⁷

Another source that should be cited for purposes of clarification regarding transcendence and sacred beliefs is the exhaustive study of religious phenomena in a series of lectures at the University of Edinburgh in 1904 by William James in The Varieties of Religious Experience:

Religion (or, in this instance, transcendence or spirituality), therefore, as I now ask you arbitrarily to take it, shall mean for us the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine.⁸

If we can accept the premise that some things are beyond scientific investigation and certainly open to question, but exist (for the sake of argument),

⁶ Herbert W. Richardson and Donald R. Cutler, eds., Transcendence (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969) xi-xii.

⁷ Richardson and Cutler 9.

⁸ William James, The Varieties of Religious Experiences (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1958) 42.

then Valdez' and El Teatro Campesino's aspirations fall into this category, and the rest of the philosophical and theological questions should be left to be argued by the experts in their respective fields. As William James suggests:

If, for instance, you were to condemn a religion by virtue of your subjective sentiments, and if all the while a deity were really there, you would be making a theoretical mistake by tacitly assuming that the deity must be non-existent; you would be setting up a theology of your own as much as if you were a scholastic philosopher.⁹

There are theories and theologies that attempt to explain the existence of a higher plane of consciousness. These arguments would not do service to this thesis except to express that people believe what they believe. Neither will this thesis enter into the debate over the existence or non-existence of a god or gods and in no way will devalue the rights of people to believe what they want. Transcendence exists for those who have faith and can only be witnessed and testified to in a scientific collection of data from those who experience this phenomenon. To document and interpret these religious beliefs, how they are presented ritualistically by El Teatro Campesino, and how they function in a ritual context, is the primary purpose of this thesis.

Not only does the investigation of ritual occurrences in theatrical presentation have limitations because of the difficulty in scientifically investigating religious phenomenon but also there is reluctance on the part of some Western scholars to accept the existence of an integrated study of ritual practices in the performing arts and other disciplines. This is a somewhat limited and strictly Western point of view, according to one scholar:

If the integration of ritual and theatrical conventions is taken for granted in non-Western performance situations, it is highly

⁹James 257.

questioned in contemporary Western theatre. . . . Ritual (to some Western scholars), with its evocation of negative connotations of primitive, superstitious, and unscientific behavior associated with savage peoples, has no place in the industrialized high-technological Western world of today.¹⁰

Because many Western scholars connote ritual with “negative associations such as voodoo, mumbo jumbo, cult, and superstition,”¹¹ studies of the associations between ritual and theatrical practices have been questioned by some scholars. The fact that Luis Valdez performs ritual dramas that challenge Western thought, and the fact that these ritual dramas may not conform to a specific mode of interpretation as to what constitutes ritual performance, perhaps puts this thesis in a difficult position. Because of these sometimes negative Western beliefs regarding the relationships between ritual and performance, limitations can also exist in relating performance theory and the application of ritual theories to the operation of theatrical ritual dramas.

Ritual Theory and Theorists

At present, the field of ritual studies “has no theory unique to itself,”¹² because it is a relatively new discipline of study. A researcher is forced to develop interpretative strategies that may overlap. When it comes to the interpretation of ritual that goes beyond merely observing and reporting, numerous choices are available, and a researcher must adopt a new point of view. As Grimes points out:

Ritual studies or “ritology,” is a new field, not because doing ritual or thinking about it is new, but because the effort to consolidate methods from the humanities and social sciences for the study of ritual in a

¹⁰J. Ndukaku Amankolor, “The Condition of Ritual in Theatre: An Intercultural Perspective,” Performing Arts Journal PAJ 33, Vol. xi, #3, 1989: 46.

¹¹ Amankolor 46.

¹² Grimes 33.

context that is free to be cross-cultural and comparative is new.¹³

Clifford Geertz refers to the “blurring of genres”¹⁴ in scientific investigations of social phenomenon and specifically between the anthropological field, the humanities and the arts. Cultural anthropology and performance theory are “blurred” in this study in a cross-disciplinary way to help define how the two disciplines compare with Valdez’ theatrical productions. Anthropologists and theatre scholars who have crossed over the boundaries of the different disciplines and who have proposed theories about ritual and theatre are used to analyze Valdez’ theatrical ventures which, according to Valdez, are based on Pre-Columbian ritual dramas and Christian mythology, particularly in the New World.

The investigation begins in Chapter Two with a general definition of ritual and the relationships that exist between ritual and theatre, according to what theorists in anthropology and performance studies have determined. These general assumptions are not an attempt to continue the scholarly debate on an exact definition of ritual or its relationship to theatre, but to clarify, for the purpose of this thesis, a working foundation for the study of the ritual dramas of Valdez and El Teatro Campesino.

Grimes, a ritual specialist, is used as a primary source since he has written extensively on the subject of ritual and the theatre in his book, Beginnings in Ritual Studies. Grimes has studied ritual practices of performing groups in the contemporary American theater and elsewhere, and has formulated ritological research techniques and criteria. His guidelines and

¹³ Grimes, preface.

¹⁴ Clifford Geertz, “Blurred Genres: The Refiguration of Social Thought,” The American Scholar Spring, (1980): 49.

categories for ritual study are widely incorporated in this thesis.

Other principle theorists include Victor Turner, an anthropologist, who began his studies in the forests of Africa. Turner has made certain determinations concerning modern rituals by studying rituals in “pre-literate” cultures, his work and studies ultimately carrying him into theoretical considerations in ritual and theatre. His primary focus being in ritual symbols, Turner has consistently linked his data from ancient and tribal cultures to contemporary concerns, particularly in the area of artistic expression. Turner professes that ritual can affect the culture where it is performed as a “social drama.” His theories of “liminal” and “liminoid” ritual practices in “pre-literate” societies and “post-industrial” societies assist in the theoretical interpretation of Valdez’ work.

Another authority, Richard Schechner, who studied ritual in the avant-garde and in “primitive” tribes and possesses a background in anthropology, is also used as a resource. To Schechner and other theorists, the connection between ritual and the theatre is almost indisputable and undeniable. Theatre scholars, such as Schechner, link ritual and the theatre together, even asserting that ritual is a basic part of the performance process, if not actually the process itself. Having studied ritual dramas in tribes of New Guinea and having done anthropological analysis of contemporary performing companies, Schechner has expanded the arena of ritual and the theatre. Playing with space and time in avant-garde productions, Schechner has attempted to create ritual in performance, notably dramatic rituals. As editor of the Tulane Drama Review, Schechner has stated:

Performance theory . . . combines aspects of the “scientific

method" with some of the traditionally intuitive methods of the arts. This is because we are currently witnessing a convergence marked by increasingly analytic methods in the arts and increasingly intuitive methods in the social sciences.¹⁵

Schechner proclaims that performance theory must play a major part in any discussion of ritual and the theatre:

Performance is a kind of communicative behavior that is part of, or continuous with, more formed ritual ceremonies, public gatherings, and various means of exchanging information, goods, and customs. . . . The shared basic assumption is that people in groups--whether two, three or dozens--in some ways "ritualize" their behaviors; "present" themselves rather than just be. And these patterns of presentations are susceptible to detailed study.¹⁶

In addition to employing his theories on "restored behavior," Schechner's chart, which defines what he views as the elements of efficacy (ritual) and entertainment (theatre), is also employed for theoretical interpretation.

Christopher Innes, a researcher who analyzed ritual elements in the works of Grotowski and other performing groups of the "avant-garde" definition in his book Holy Theatre,¹⁷ and other theorists, including Van Gennep, Freud, Eliade, Gaster, among others, are mentioned because of their contributions to the study of ritual.

Multicultural and Transcendental Implications

Other cultural and anthropological considerations come into play in the examination of Valdez' plays since El Teatro Campesino does not exist in an ethnic vacuum. The group performs its plays to both Spanish and English-speaking audiences. Performing his dramas in a multicultural society, Valdez

¹⁵Richard Schechner, "Performance and the Social Sciences," The Drama Review V. 17 #3 (T-59) September (1973): 4.

¹⁶ Schechner, The Drama Review Sept. (1973). Introduction.

¹⁷Christopher Innes, Holy Theatre: Ritual and the Avant Garde, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

integrates many elements of this multicultural society into his works. How do these mixed audiences react to these ritual dramas if general audiences are not religiously connected to the culture? Are the plays strictly entertainment? How does the performance of these rituals have some religious or “spiritual” significance, as the founder and artistic director of El Teatro Campesino, Valdez, intends? What are the “insider/outsider,” and actor/audience implications?

The dramas being studied have their primary sources in religious beliefs, and the phenomenon of these ritual dramas being performed as entertainment outside their immediate culture, such as the ancient Mayan creation myth as performed in El Baile De Los Gigantes, introduce new questions. Even though some members of the audiences come to view a cultural heritage, others come because they believe in what they are experiencing.¹⁸ Particularly in the performance of the Christian ritual dramas, many of the participants and audience are deeply involved in the practicing of their faith, and this fact moves the performance of La Pastorela or La Virgen beyond mere entertainment into religious experience. Schechner, however, proposes that these dramas are, perhaps, no longer ritual dramas but strictly entertainment:

Religious performances do not have an independent life--they are related to the audience that hears them, the spectators who see them. The force of the performance is in the very specific relationship between performers and those-for-whom-the-performance-exists. When the consumer audience comes in, the “spiritual powers” depart.¹⁹

In Chapter Three, a brief summary of the religious beliefs, or “spirituality,”

¹⁸ Interview with Rosa Marie Escalante, May, 1992, in San Juan Bautista, California.

¹⁹ Richard Schechner, Between Theatre and Anthropology (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985) 5.

and history of the Chicano theatre of El Teatro Campesino is elaborated upon, and historical events that took place in the Mexican-American culture are offered for the purpose of providing background and cultural understanding.

Anthropology, Ritual, and Theatre

A few performance theorists, such as Schechner, have collaborated with anthropologists, i.e., Turner, to explore possibilities about the relationships between theatre and ritual. Schechner suggests that a mutual benefit can be derived from this interdisciplinary approach:

Anthropologists are trained observers; and some anthropologists--not enough, but a growing number--also participate in the cultures they observe. Theater people can help anthropologists identify what to look for in a training or performance situation; and anthropologists can help theater people see performance within the context of specific social systems.²⁰

Is anthropology a solid source from which to draw conclusions regarding the ritual values present in the works of El Teatro Campesino? Anthony Graham White, in his article "Ritual in Contemporary Theatre and Criticism," makes a strong argument for the rationale of using anthropological studies of ritual in performance:

I am not suggesting that literary critics should accept the anthropologists' definition of ritual simply in awe of social science, but rather because anthropologists have paid a great deal more attention than have literary critics to working out a definition that, for example, distinguishes ritual from other patterned forms of social expression, such as parties, and of artistic expression, such as drama.²¹

Schechner strongly believes that the techniques of anthropological fieldwork can be applied to the study of theatre, and ethnography plays a

²⁰Schechner, Between Theatre and Anthropology 6.

²¹Anthony Graham-White, "Ritual in Contemporary Theatre and Criticism," Educational Theatre Journal 28 October (1976): 321.

significant role in this thesis:

A convergence of methods and metaphors between anthropology and theatre is occurring because anthropologists interested in symbolic activities and ritual use theatre as a paradigm. . . . I say that certain theatres, those that function as groups, (proto or pseudo) families, small communities, can be studied the way anthropologists study villages.²²

Eugenio Barba has even written a book entitled Theatre Anthropology²³ in which he discusses what he believes to be the relationship of the performing arts to the social sciences. He states that:

The term anthropology was understood as the study of man's behavior not only on the socio-cultural level, but also on the physiological level. Theatre Anthropology consequently studies the socio-cultural and psychological behavior of man in a performance situation.²⁴

Anthropology has begun to adopt theatrical terminology in describing ritual practices in "pre-literate" or "post-industrial" cultures. Attesting that ritual is a process and not an enduring system, Turner asserts that ritual is basically dramatic. His dramatism depends on perceiving the similarities among dramatic performance on stage, ritualistic enactments, and public crisis. He believes that theatre and ritual share common attributes such as (1) the playing of roles, (2) the use of rhetorical style speech, (3) an audience, (4) knowledge and acceptance of a single set of rules, and (5) a climax.²⁵

Ritual and the theatre are very closely intertwined. Innes particularly notes this connection of ritual and the theatre in his study of the modern avant-

²² Richard Schechner, "Anthropological Analysis: Before and After, Andy Warhol's Last Love," Tulane Drama Review 1/79: 25.

²³Eugenio Barba, A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology: The Secret Art of the Performer (London/NY: Routledge, 1991).

²⁴ Eugenio Barba, "Theatre Anthropology," Drama Review 26.

²⁵Victor Turner, The Ritual Process: Structure and Antistructure (Chicago: Aldine, 1969) 274.

garde theatre groups:

There appears a dominant interest in the irrational and primitive (including) experimentation with ritual and the ritualistic patterning of performance . . . as variations of the same aim: to return to man's 'roots' which is reflected on a stylistic level by the return to 'original' forms of drama, Dionysian ritual and the mysteries at Eleusis, tribal drama from New Guinea and archaic survivals like the Balinese dance. . . . In fact the hallmark of avant garde drama is an aspiration to transcendence, to the spiritual in its widest sense.²⁶

Some distinctions should be made, however, between dramatic ritual and ritual drama. In the avant-garde theatre, dramatic ritual can be defined as ritual that is invented theatrically and may or may not be connected to any belief in mystical powers. Even though the imagery that is used in the enactment of some of the dramatic rituals may have its source in religious symbols, many dramatic rituals are secular dramas and are created with the sole intention of performing ritual. Whereas, in contrast, the content of a ritual drama is a definite part of the religious tradition of that particular group, and in that sense, is not a secular performance because it is ritual (relating to the sacred) before it is drama. With ritual drama, performance of these dramas have a definite foundation in religious practices. Such is the case with the ritual dramas that are performed by El Teatro Campesino.

Ritual and the theatre can be said to be linked together whether in primitive cultures or in modern day theaters. Grimes asserts that a definite relationship exists:

Ritual and drama are dance partners. Whether observed historically, in terms of their origin and development, or phenomenologically, in terms of their structures and dynamics, ritual and drama circle one another in a dialectical two-step

²⁶Innes 3.

characteristic of coinciding opposites.²⁷

Turner has dramatized a ritualized version of the American wedding. Schechner has done an ethnographic study of the participants involved with a theatrical work produced by Andy Warhol in New York. In collaboration with Turner, Schechner has reenacted African rituals from primitive tribes like the Ndembu. Innes has explored the ritual aspects of the avant-garde work of Grotowski (who has been searching for the sources of ritual in a Voodoo community from Haiti and other places) and that of Peter Brook (who worked briefly with El Teatro Campesino), among others. One scholar has placed Valdez and El Teatro Campesino among these avant-garde experimentalists:

El Teatro Campesino has risen from the leadership of a limited and rather unknown group of folk theaters to become one of the leaders of experimental theater arts in the Western world. And today one can truly join the name of Campesino's director and mentor, Luis Valdez, with those of Peter Brook, Jerzy Grotowski, and Richard Schechner.²⁸

By investigating some definitions of ritual and the theatre and how others have approached the interdisciplinary subject matter which falls into the social sciences, humanities, anthropology, drama, and performance studies, some methodologies are determined for their application in the study of the ritual dramas of El Teatro Campesino. These methodologies are discussed in the following chapter.

²⁷Grimes 165.

²⁸ Nicolas Kanellos, Mexican American Theater: Legacy and Reality (Pittsburgh: Latin American Literary Review Press, 1987) 17.

CHAPTER TWO

DEFINITIONS: RITUAL AND THE THEATRE

Ritual Definitions

According to Grimes, ritology is the study of ritual, ritologists are persons who study rituals, and ritualists are people who enact rituals.²⁹ This thesis takes on the study of the ritual dramas of El Teatro Campesino as a ritological analysis as defined principally by Grimes. Grimes proposed that “ritualizing transpires as animated persons enact formative gestures in the face of receptivity during crucial times in founded places.”³⁰ Turner once described ritual as “formal behavior prescribed for occasions not given over to technological routine that have reference to beliefs in mystical beings or powers.”³¹ As Grimes points out, the usual scholarly view of ritual is:

(1) repeated (e.g. every Sabbath); (2) sacred (related to the Holy, of utmost significance); (3) formalized (consisting of prescribed, unchanging movements such as bowing or kneeling); (4) traditional (not being done for the first time, claiming an ancient

²⁹ Grimes 2.

³⁰ Grimes 55.

³¹ Victor Turner, The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual (New York: Cornell University Press, 1967) 19.

history or authorized by myth); (5) intentional (non-random actions, done with awareness of some reason or meaning).³²

These simple definitions can serve as a foundation for a beginning study of the ritual dramas of El Teatro Campesino and are applied to each of the three dramas to see how they operate and function. Definitions alone will not serve to explain ritual function and effect, however. Other elements and performance theories must be applied.

Ritual Elements

According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, not only the sacred (the transcendent) but also the empirical (time, space, and cause and effect) must be taken into account when discussing ritual behavior.³³ Even though some meaning can be found in the literary text of a ritual, the ritual itself can take on significance, in its enactment, disclosing its own structure and semantics. The spoken elements in a ritual setting can reveal some meanings of a ritual, though not all, by reference to the society's belief system or mythology. Ritual action and behavior, for example, must be taken into account as a means of nonverbal communication and meaning. Grimes suggests that ritual study "pays its fullest attention to the performative, non-verbal elements of action."³⁴ Movement, for example, plays an important role in the enactment of many of the ritual dramas of El Teatro Campesino, whether in observing the four directions (as indicated in the stage directions of some of the plays), or circling to the left in the "spiritual" direction. All of these elements are nonverbal in structure and meaning.

Most rituals also mark off a particular time of the day, month, year, stage

³² Grimes 55-6.

³³ "The Concept and Forms of Ritual," The New Encyclopedia Britannica, University of Chicago, 1989.

³⁴ Grimes 2.

in life, or commencement of a new event or vocation. The temporal characteristic of ritual is often called “sacred time.” For example, the ritual dramas of El Teatro Campesino usually take place during the holiday season of Christmas and the New Year as practiced in the United States.

Another special aspect of ritual can be defined as “sacred space.” Again, El Teatro Campesino’s performances always are performed in a mission, cathedral, or, in the case of El Baile De Los Gigantes, in the “open air.” Time and place are essential features of ritual action and both mark a specific orientation or setting for ritual.

A complete analysis of ritual includes its relation to art, architecture, and the specific objects used in ritual such as specific forms of ritual dress. Particular ritual objects, dances, gestures, masks, music, and costumes, when included in the study of ritual, make for an experience that goes beyond the employment of mythology and language. Thus, a study of ritual cannot be limited to a simple investigation of religious belief systems, but the elements of theatrical performance must be applied.³⁵ All of the staging, costumes, props, scenic elements, and lighting effects are included in a description of the ritual dramas, along with an explanation of how they are used ritualistically. When considering Valdez’ theatrical performances as rituals, these categories of observation are utilized:

- 1) ritual space
- 2) ritual objects
- 3) ritual time

³⁵ Some of this general information on ritual was supplied by The New Encyclopedia Britannica.

- 4) ritual sound and language
- 5) ritual identity
- 6) ritual action
- 7) ritual interpretation

All of these categories are taken from Grimes' book, Beginnings In Ritual Study. Other ritual aspects of the ritual dramas that are taken into consideration, by Grimes' definition, are how Valdez' work functions as ritualization, decorum, ceremony, liturgy, and/or magic.³⁶

Transcendence and Transformance

Three characteristics are almost universal in the defining of ritual, according to the Encyclopedia Britannica. The first characteristic is a feeling or emotion of respect, awe, or fear in relation to the sacred. Both Durkheim and Freud held that ritual behavior concerns itself with the sacred in the society and can be a symbolic representation of that society, suggesting that a society's rituals can be traced to its mythologies or sacred beliefs.

El Teatro Campesino's ritual dramas have their roots in Christian mythology and Aztec and Mayan cosmology. Because the ritual dramas of El Teatro Campesino are based on religious beliefs, these performances honor this belief system. Many of the audience members who attend the performances and the actors who perform in them share a common faith or denomination. Others, both actors and audience, do not, for various and diverse reasons which are explored later on in this thesis.

The second characteristic of ritual, according to the Encyclopedia Britannica, involves its dependence upon a belief system that is usually

³⁶ Grimes 36-51.

expressed in the language of myth. Some rituals exist for the sole purpose of reenacting mythologies. All of the ritual dramas of El Teatro Campesino are founded on myths. La Pastorela is based on the visiting of a newly born Jesus by shepherds. El Baile De Los Gigantes is composed completely of supernatural beings who are reenacting the creation myth of the Maya-Quiche. In the story of La Virgen Del Tepeyac, the appearance of the Virgin Mary is based entirely on New World mythology. These mythologies, through their reenactment, can transport an observer to another time and another place to celebrate and honor their sacred beliefs.

Some theorists in performance will go so far to say that both theatre and ritual are natural and instinctive--a primitive urge in every culture. Theatre, it is suggested, is an artistic impulse in every individual, a person wanting to be taken to another time to another place in reality, becoming something and someone else. It is suggested that a transformation can be accomplished and experienced in the theatre, and that ritual can play a major role in that transformation. As anthropologist Mircea Eliade, who believes that ritual can evoke an experience of "time out of time" in ritual practices, says of the participant in a ritual of initiation:

In philosophical terms, initiation is equivalent to a basic change in existential condition; the novice emerges from his ordeal endowed with a totally different being from that which he possessed before his initiation; he has become another³⁷

Some theorists believe that something takes place or happens to a person when he or she views or participates in a theatrical presentation:

Spectators are very aware of the moment when a performance takes off. A "presence" is manifest, something has "happened."

³⁷ Mircea Eliade, Myths, Rites, Symbols (New York: Grove Press, 1976) 164.

The performers have touched or moved the audience, and some kind of collaboration, collective special theatrical life, is born.³⁸

Aristotle suggests that what happens in a theatrical experience is catharsis, Turner explains what happens as *communitas*, and Arnold Van Gennep would say it was the "limen" or threshold. Valdez believes that participating in or observing a theatrical performance can constitute a ritual:

An event is reproduced so that for the space of a few hours an eternal present is reestablished, and Man, the prisoner of calendar time, breaks free and rejoins the living mythic time of his subjectivity. By means of the rite he breaks his solitude, returns to being one with creation, and finds opened the doors of communion with his otherness.³⁹

Eliade also has suggested that rituals have the power to make mythic events present--that a person may actually relive these mythic events through their enactment. What is involved, Eliade says, "is not a commemoration of mythical events but a reiteration of them. The protagonists of the myth are made present, one becomes their contemporary."⁴⁰

Similar to Eliade's conclusions involving the ritual reenactment of myths, Schechner has introduced the term "restored" to the vocabulary of the theatre. In his conclusions, Schechner maintains that "restored behavior" is the main characteristic of performance, that performance behavior is "twice-behaved behavior"--either rehearsed, previously known, or learned by osmosis since early childhood. As Schechner explains:

Restored behavior offers to both individuals and groups the chance to rebecome what they once were--or even, and most often, to rebecome

³⁸ Schechner, Between Theatre and Anthropology 10.

³⁹Mary Denning Boland, "An Analysis of the Theater of Luis Valdez," diss., Saint Louis University: University Microfilms International, 1983, 8.

⁴⁰ Mircea Eliade, Myth and Reality, trans. Willard R. Trask, (New York: Harper and Row, 1962) 19.

what they never were but wish to have been or wish to become.⁴¹

Schechner called performances where performers are changed “transformations” and those where performers are returned to their starting places “transportations.”⁴²

These occurrences are typical of the experiences involved with ritual dramas as performed by Valdez and El Teatro Campesino and have been reported by members of their company as well as some audience members. This phenomenon is explored in the analysis of each of the dramas examined.

Along similar lines, Turner formulates much of his theoretical work around the theories of Van Gennep and his hypothesis of rites of passage. Van Gennep's idea of “limen” or threshold, which is a temporary state of wholeness, a state of being similar to transcendence to another plane of reality, plays an important part in Turner's theories. Turner calls this temporary moment of transition “communitas”: a spontaneously generated relationship between leveled and equal, total and individuated human beings, stripped of structural attributes. In this moment of transition, everything and everyone becomes equal in a homogeneous status-system. In the Aztec mathematical concept of zero and the Mayan view of the world, as practiced by Valdez, the idea of a state of being, similar to “communitas,” already exists. When Valdez produces some of his dramas, his intention is to effect a universal harmony in the cosmos. Valdez' transcendental intentions in his theatre practices are explained in Chapter Three.

⁴¹ Schechner, Between Theater and Anthropology 38.

⁴² Schechner, Between Theatre and Anthropology 18.

Symbolic Anthropology

The third characteristic of ritual action is that it is symbolic in relation to its reference. Grimes states that "the basic unit of ritual is a symbol, but not every symbol is ritualistic."⁴³ According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, even though rituals can be found in all known societies in the world and usually are connected with religious worship, ritual cannot be defined solely by its relationship to myths and its connections to a transcendent entity or entities but must be taken on its symbolic and performative merits and values, along with its societal functions. Although in dispute among scholars, ritual is often described as a symbolic expression of actual societal relations, status, or the role of individuals in a society. In La Virgen Del Tepeyac, for example, the plight of the native Indians is demonstrated. It is only when the Virgin takes their side that they become free from their oppression.

Turner leans towards the semiotic in his analysis but he prefers to call it "comparative symbology" or "symbolic anthropology." Turner believes that the symbol is dominant in ritual and, while not entirely being a Jungian archetypalist (although he does concur with Jung that the collective unconscious is the main formative principle in ritual symbolism), he finds that the symbol has not only reference to the culture being studied but also the symbol has cross-cultural significance. He states that "ritual symbols cannot be analyzed without studying them in a time series to other events."⁴⁴ Symbols, according to Turner, are not static but constantly changing depending on the context--whether in ritualistic, artistic, or political arenas. He asserts that

⁴³ Grimes 61.

⁴⁴ Turner, Forest of Symbols 98.

symbols work more like smells and less like words. Grimes also states that the scholar cannot articulate the meaning of a ritual until the senses have been fully used.

Turner established three classes of data for inferring structure and properties involving ritual symbols: (1) external form and observable characteristics, (2) interpretations offered by specialists and laymen, and (3) significant contexts largely worked out by anthropologists. He also stated that he looked for the dominant symbols in a ritual where the symbols not only served the fulfillment for the purposes of the ritual but also referred to the values inherent in the culture, the symbols having ends in themselves. In this thesis, the symbolic elements of the ritual dramas are examined and interpreted.

Social Dramas

Turner believes that by analyzing the constituents of ritual symbols can be identified, and by looking at a ritual's context, arenas of social conflict, or "social dramas" as he describes them, can be determined. Again, in La Virgen, the appearance of the Spaniards, the resultant conflict with the Aztec culture, and the ultimate conquering of a nation can demonstrate an enormous "social drama." In La Pastorela, a classic battle between good and evil takes place.

Since the purpose of some rituals is to transcend from one identity to another, another purpose, according to some theorists (i.e., Turner), is to transform the relationship of an individual or a group to other individuals in the group or the group at large. Often the ritual performed is religious in nature. In the ritual dramas of El Teatro Campesino, the intentions are, without a doubt, transcendental.

Also, a ritual can be performed in order for that individual or group to

conform to the society's wishes, and to maintain the status quo. Still others (i.e., Turner) believe that ritual goes even further and is an active and creative force for changes in the society and serves as a catalyst for social change. Valdez, despite the obvious transcendental implications in almost all of his works, has political intentions as well. Valdez has stated in program notes of La Virgen Del Tepeyac that he wants to make his audiences aware of social injustices.

Since the ritual dramas of El Teatro Campesino are performed both in Spanish and in English, it is evident that Valdez is trying to make a statement beyond his own Mexican-American culture. In the case of La Virgen Del Tepeyac, the entire performance is done in Spanish, excluding an English-speaking audience from participating in the understanding of the play's dialogue. Yet any audience can still appreciate the beauty and spectacle of the performance without understanding the dialogue. The program notes are in English, however, not in Spanish.

Given Turner's model of "social drama," relationships can be established for showing how theatrical activity can offer an individual, or a group, a controlled means for reevaluating or even restructuring a social order. For instance, the Mexican-American culture in the Southwest has gone through many transformations. Most of the towns and cities in California have Spanish names--like Los Angeles, San Francisco, and San Juan Bautista. Yet the Spanish-speaking people of the state of California are in the minority. Only recently have multilingual programs been adopted into the school system. The "social drama" that exists between Europeans who emigrated from the east and the constant influx of Spanish-speaking peoples from Mexico is ongoing. If current trends continue, it is estimated that by the year 2000 a much larger

percentage of the population of the state of California will be of Spanish-American origin. And the society will be, if it is not already, bilingual in Spanish and English.

In the unfolding of a “social drama,” according to Turner, the conflict can bring about fundamental changes in society when the basic structure of an affected society is laid open, and possible transformations of that society can take place. When Valdez performs his plays bilingually, his audience expands to a larger base of operation and influence, where transformation of that audience can take place, if that is his intention. The aspect of “social dramas” operating in the ritual dramas of Valdez is examined in the concluding chapter.

Liminal and Liminoid

Following Durkheim, Turner is tempted by the notion that the domain of the sacred ritual had “contracted” in modern secular society, and that it had become a matter of individual choice for leisure in play-time, rather than an obligatory matter of religious and cultural involvement. By Turner’s definition, pre-industrial cultures experience the “liminal” state of existence in ritual practices while in post-industrial cultures the experience is known as “liminoid” and happens in a leisure state, i.e., the arts. While Van Gennep refers to the initiation process in rites of passage, Turner extends the concept of liminality to include post-industrial, non-ritual activity. Referring to ritual activity in a post-industrial society, he calls it “liminoid” and applies the classification especially to artists. Theatrical performances of ritual dramas can fall into the realm of “liminoid” experiences.

In the works of Valdez and El Teatro Campesino, the ritual dramas live in two worlds--the present and the past. Even though performing in a post-

industrial society, the content of the ritual dramas are “pre-literate” or “liminal.” While the ritual dramas as performed by El Teatro are “liminal” in origin, the company is performing to an audience that is “liminoid.” The culture and audience is sometimes familiar or unfamiliar with the story of the play. This is particularly true in the case of El Baile De Los Gigantes. Most audiences, whether connected with the Mexican-American culture or not, have little or no knowledge of the creation myth in the Popol Vuh.

Turner believes that art plays a distinct, definable “antistructural” role in social evolution--a clearing house of ideas. When structural models fall, a society or individual turns to liminal “anti-structure.” When ordinary, direct discourse is ineffective, an individual or society turns to indirect, symbolic discourse; an individual will turn to signs, innovative meanings, and new orderings. The individual will turn to the realm of art. If you substitute “artistic symbols” for “ritual symbols,” art’s symbolic, ritualistic role allows it to be a center for the establishing of a definable, self-aware social unit. By accepting these concepts, theatre can be an agent for social and political change.

I came to see performances of ritual as distinct phases in the social processes whereby groups became adjusted to internal changes and adapting to their external environment--the ritual symbol becoming a factor in social action, a positive force in an activity field.⁴⁵

There are, Turner recognized, important distinctions between pre-industrial societies, small scale societies, and large scale ones. Liminality is focused on the pre-industrial societies and liminoid in the post-industrial. The liminoid can be sacred to members of a secular society as well. Ritual does not have to be related to the gods but can be a “communitas” provocative of

⁴⁵ Turner, Forest of Symbols 78.

change, and the catalyst for transition and transformation. In the case of El Teatro Campesino, for example, the spiritual, cultural, social, and political significations of each drama can be provocative of change and are discussed with the analysis of each ritual drama.

Efficacy Versus Entertainment

Schechner divides the ritual and the theatre into two separate categories. In order to determine the difference between the two, he makes a distinction between ritual which he calls "Efficacy" and theatre which he refers to as "Entertainment." This chart by Schechner helps describe, determine, and differentiate some of the ritual and theatrical characteristics in each ritual drama of El Teatro Campesino:

<u>EFFICACY</u>	<u>ENTERTAINMENT</u>
(Ritual)	(Theatre)
results	fun
link to an absent Other	only for those here
abolishes time, symbolic time	emphasizes now
brings Other here	audience in the Other
performer possessed, in trance	performer knows what he's doing
audience participates	audience watches
audience believes	audience appreciates
criticism is forbidden	criticism is encouraged
collective creativity	individual creativity ⁴⁶

Even though Schechner is quick to point out that the basic opposition is between efficacy and entertainment, not between ritual and the theatre, some distinctions, no matter how arbitrary, have been drawn. Nonetheless, he goes on to state that the subject is complicated and no performance or ritual is pure efficacy or pure entertainment:

The difference between ritual, theatre, and ordinary life depends

⁴⁶ Richard Schechner and Mady Schuman, eds., "From Ritual To Theatre and Back," Ritual, Play and Performance (New York: Seabury Press, 1976) 207.

on the degree spectators and performers attend to efficacy, pleasure, or routine; and how symbolic meaning and affect are infused and attached to performed events. In all entertainment there is some efficacy and in all ritual there is some theatre.⁴⁷

The ritual dramas of El Teatro Campesino, in addition to having religious roots, fall into the middle ground of Schechner's categories, because not only are the performances "reaffirmations of faith," but they are also highly entertaining as dramatic spectacles which can appeal to general audiences as well.

The transcendental interests and cultural roots of Valdez and El Teatro Campesino are well documented. The Chicano cosmology as performed in the ritual dramas of El Teatro Campesino, as one researcher put it, relates directly to the Mexican-American people and their religious beliefs. For the purpose of clarification and discussion, some of the religious and spiritual beliefs and historical background material of Valdez and El Teatro Campesino are discussed in the next chapter in order to provide a foundation for an introductory understanding of the ritual dramas that are described in detail later on in this thesis.

⁴⁷ Schechner, Ritual, Play and Performance 218.

CHAPTER THREE

EL TEATRO CAMPESINO: BACKGROUND AND SACRED BELIEFS

Mystical Beginnings

El Teatro Campesino, under the guidance of artistic director and resident playwright Valdez, began in 1964 with the farmworkers' union strike in the San Joaquin Valley of California. At that time, the plays were principally sociopolitical and farcical, Valdez calling them "actos." Valdez then ventured out from the brief and satiric "actos" into a new and mystical dramatic form called the "mito" which began with an anti-Vietnam War play titled Dark Root of A Scream. The first he says came "through the eyes of man," and the latter "through the eyes of God."⁴⁸ Comments Valdez:

The two forms (acto and mito) are, in fact, cuates (twins) that complement and balance each other as day goes into night, el sol la sobra, la vida la muerte, el pajarito la serpiente (sun shade, life dead, the bird the serpent) . . . los actos y los mitos; one through

⁴⁸Boland 11.

the eyes of man; the other, through the eyes of God.⁴⁹

The Mayan philosophy that Valdez retains and which still influences him today was with Valdez from the moment he began to write plays for El Teatro Campesino. Says Valdez of his work in retrospect:

The impact of Mayan thought on the the work of El Teatro Campesino began at the very beginning. It was there in the earliest actos in Delano, obscure perhaps, but nonetheless perceptible to anyone who saw what was really going on.⁵⁰

From these beginnings, playwright Valdez broadened his horizons by blending contemporary figures and mythology with historical and religious icons in Bernabe. This ambitious tale relates the story of a village idiot who falls in love with The Earth and wants to marry her. Featured in the story is the appearance of the Aztec Sun God, which is one of the first instances of the use of Mexican-American mythology in Valdez' plays. In one of his next works, Soldado Razo, Valdez expanded his explorations of Mayan philosophy, science, religion, and art.

Valdez went on to write numerous plays that are performed by El Teatro Campesino and reflect a broader Mexican-American experience (El Fin Del Mundo, Zoot Suit, Los Corridos, and his work in film such as La Bamba, for example) than the ritual dramas studied in this thesis. Yet in all his works, a transcendental perspective is evident.

Learning from his humble beginnings, Valdez soon wanted to expand his theatrical base to include more of Indian mythology and develop his own performing philosophy. This necessitated a move to a permanent location for his newly forming theatre group.

⁴⁹Luis Valdez, Actos, (Fresno, California: Cucaracha Press, 1971) 5.

⁵⁰Luis Valdez, ed., El Teatro Campesino: The Evolution of America's First Chicano Theatre Company, 1965-1985, (El Teatro Campesino, publisher, 1985) 1.

Residence at San Juan

In 1971, El Teatro Campesino began its residence in the rural village of San Juan Bautista, California. It was at this permanent site--where one of California's historic missions is located--that El Teatro Campesino began its fullest artistic, cultural, historical, and "spiritual" development. Valdez, when confronted with leaving his peers and the La Raza movement to pursue his own vision of Chicano theatre, wrote:

The question is: after guerrilla or political street theatre, where does Chicano theatre go? This is a question that most teatros are now asking themselves. I think that the type of theatre we must evolve must be scientific and religious. Not one that goes into mysticism and mystification, but instead brings into focus truth and how truth functions. If we continue on the cultural trends that we have followed as Chicanos we will encounter a Mayan system of thought that deals with these truths. The moment we reach out and understand these concepts we will cease to become just Chicanos, we will become human beings.⁵¹

The teatro in San Juan Bautista that Valdez envisioned was one of "ritual, of music, of beauty and spiritual strength. A Teatro of legends and myths. A Teatro of religious strength."⁵²

Jorge Huerta concluded in his book on Mexican-American Theatre that El Teatro Campesino, along with other Chicano Theatres, may use religious beliefs as a foundation in their work:

For Luis Valdez, any study of Chicano theater must include not only the spiritual dramas of the Christian faith but the sacred ritual dramas of the Aztec and Maya as well, thus extending the tradition further back in time. Although the majority of Chicano playwrights and teatros are concerned with secular issues, some have examined the Mechicano's spirituality, continuing a pattern that is firmly rooted in the culture of the barrio and the faith of the people.⁵³

⁵¹ Diamond 12.

⁵² Boland 11.

⁵³Jorge A. Huerta, Chicano Theatre: Themes and Forms (Ypsilanti, Michigan: Bilingual Press,

Religious Roots

El Teatro Campesino performs dramas that enlighten audiences to the basic elements of Chicano tradition and the Mexican-American experience. The use of ritual dramas in their theatrical repertoire year after year which reflect their religious roots are "preserving our cultural heritage," according to Rosa Maria Escalante, educational director of El Teatro Campesino and director of many of the ritual dramas.⁵⁴

The Mexican-American cultural experience in the United States, particularly in the Southwest, incorporates Catholicism, as brought over from Spain after the conquest by the Spaniards, and the religions of the Aztecs and Mayans, the native Indian tribes of Mexico. These religious influences form the basis for El Teatro Campesino's ritual dramas. Valdez believes that by recreating the mythology of the pre-Spaniard Mexican-American and working with the roots of the past, a Chicano can affirm his dignity and identity, both culturally and transcendentally:

Our people are a colonized race, and the root of their uniqueness as Man lies buried in the dust of conquest. In order to regain our corazon, our soul, we must reach deep into our people, into the tenderest memory of their beginning.⁵⁵

Artistic director Valdez, from the very beginnings of El Teatro Campesino contended that theatre was more than just entertainment but a religious experience--for example, the use of mythic god-figures such as Quetzalcoatl in Bernabe and Dark Root of a Scream.

Valdez's dramatic intention is to go back to the very roots of theatre which

1982) 187.

⁵⁴ Interview with Rosa Marie Escalante, May 1992, San Juan Bautista, Ca.

⁵⁵Luis Valdez, ed., Aztlán: An Anthology of Mexican-American Literature (New York: Alfred a. Knopf, 1972) Introduction, xiii-xiv.

lie in the rituals of Pre-Columbian civilizations. As Diamond explains: "The early Greek dithyramb is an example of how ritual dance evolved into theatre; the elements of Valdez's dramas strive for such a communion with its resultant feeling of cosmic unity and harmony."⁵⁶ The Mayan ballet-drama El Rabinal Achi is used by Valdez as an example.⁵⁷

Huerta, Chicano critic and former director of Santa Barbara's Teatro de la Esperanza, believes that the roots of Chicano theatre are to be found not only in the ritual drama of the Mayans and Aztecs, but also in the mystery and morality plays which came to the North American continent by the Spaniards and were disseminated by the Franciscan priests, as well as the secular historical/sociopolitical drama common to the 18th century Mexican north.⁵⁸ But it is easy to ascertain that Valdez' true belief system is deeply rooted in the ancient Mayan and Aztec cultures.

Mayan And Aztec Philosophy

Valdez declares that he follows the religious teaching of a neo-Mayan philosophy.

Basically inspired by ancient American (Mayan) concepts of dynamic form and movement, our approach finds universal application . . . to create stimulating, holistic images of humankind.⁵⁹

Without understanding some of the roots of the Mexican-American experience as Valdez interprets them, analysis of his works would be insubstantial.

Some knowledge of Aztec and Maya philosophy is essential to a study of the indigenous themes addressed by Luis Valdez, for

⁵⁶Diamond 17.

⁵⁷Boland 28.

⁵⁸Huerta 226.

⁵⁹Valdez, El Teatro Campesino 39.

although he manages the myths to suit his literary purposes, Pre-Columbian thought permeates his vision of today's Mechicano.⁶⁰

Stating that Chicanos should preserve their past, Valdez has resurrected and sustained the beliefs of the Pre-Columbian religions. The most predominate example is the ritual dance-drama based on a portion of the Maya-Quiche version of the creation of the world, El Baile De Los Gigantes, which is performed by El Teatro Campesino on and around the time of the summer solstice each year.

According to Diamond, Valdez draws on the dualism basic to Nahuatl and Mayan cultures: two opposite elements coexisting, not melding, to form something larger than the whole by a dialectical process. "Quetzalcoatl," for example, a composite of "Quetzal" (bird) and "coatl" (serpent) unites the heavenly and the earthly in the principal god of the Mayans and the Nahuas. Similarly, the "mito," which emphasizes the metaphysical, is balanced by the "acto," which emphasizes the material.⁶¹

Valdez' dominant symbol is the feathered serpent in the Aztec and Mayan religions. Comparing the evolution of his theatre company to a serpent that is constantly changing, he writes:

The serpent continues to crawl out of its own dead skin, and that--according to the Mayan perception of life--is good. All living things evolve and change. Called Kukulcan by the Mayas and Quetzalcoatl by the Aztecs, the feathered serpent is an ancient American symbol of natural change--unifying the symbolic spirituality of the feathers with the earthy materiality of the serpent. All life is dynamic and in a state of constant motion, constant change, constant evolution. You are a feathered serpent composed of the evolving nature of your own unique being.⁶²

⁶⁰Huerta 215.

⁶¹Diamond 146.

⁶²Valdez, El Teatro Campesino 1.

Valdez believes that Chicanos must return to their roots before they can deal with themselves as part of a larger universe. The philosophy is the basis for action. The bird must be coupled with the serpent, Valdez believes. As Diamond put it:

In the same way that cultural nationalism is a first step toward internationalism, so individuals must be sure of their identity before involving themselves with the world at large, must be sure of what is within before they can effectively deal with what is without.⁶³

Valdez was greatly influenced in his understanding of Indian cultures by Domingo Martinez Paredez, noted Mexican linguist and Professor of Mayan Language and Literature at the National University of Mexico. Valdez hesitates, however, to make the clear division between the Aztec and Mayan cultures that anthropologists tend to make. Valdez believes more in the basic truths that occur in all religions of the world while not espousing one religious view over another, such as Catholicism over Mayan. Valdez prefers to call his work "spiritual" versus "religious."⁶⁴ Even though he principally follows a Mayan philosophy which encompasses universal cosmic forces, he does not limit himself to one religious belief but involves all the religious beliefs of Chicano or Mexican-American heritage:

The renewal of unity of Chicanos may not lie in a return to religion (as we know it), but it most certainly lies in a return to God. . . . We do not feel that this is in any way inconsistent with our Chicanismo. . . . Our people believe in the Creador, hermano, The Great Spirit, Coatlicue, Hunab Ku, Xmucane, Jesucristo, La Virgen de Guadalupe, Quetzalcoatl--they are all manifestations of the same Cosmic Force. . . . What we intellectuals struggle to grasp with our minds, la raza mas humilde has always known through sheer faith alone.⁶⁵

⁶³ Diamond 147.

⁶⁴ Interview with Escalante, May, 1992.

⁶⁵ Diamond 200.

In describing what Valdez hopes to achieve in a Chicano theatre, he has said that Chicanos cannot just "live in the Southwest. At least not spiritually, not mentally, not as we conceive our whole reality."⁶⁶ Valdez goes on to relate that Chicano Theatre must be motivated by spirit: "The spirit that motivates all that action is an international spirit. A world spirit. A universal spirit. A cosmic spirit."⁶⁷

Our teatro is an act of faith--faith in ourselves, in our people, in humanity, in the world, in the universe, in the ultimate connection of all things, in the Creator. Our work still integrates a lot of music and things are in constant motion. . . . We believe it must continue to grow and evolve like the serpent crawling out of its skin. In this way we are trying to create the myth of our people--a myth that gives us eternal life--a myth that gives us the opportunity to love each other--a myth that puts us all around the tree of light and says we're all equally distant from the center. That's our work. It takes belief, action, love and pain, and we put it together and perform.⁶⁸

Myths or "mitos," Valdez believes, are expressions of the archetypal experiences of a group. Campesino's "mitos" represent a search for the archetypal models of the Chicano's reality. In conversation with Diamond, speaking of archetypes to which a Chicano will intuitively respond, Valdez seemed to suggest a belief in some kind of "collective unconscious," although he did not prefer to be that specific. Valdez, according to Diamond, is attempting to search for a transcendent group consciousness in plays that embrace the metaphysical. Peter Brook describes this phenomenon in his book, The Empty Space, as "Holy Theatre" or "Theatre of the Invisible-Made-Visible."⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Valdez, El Teatro Campesino 16.

⁶⁷ Valdez, El Teatro Campesino 16.

⁶⁸ Valdez, El Teatro Campesino 23.

⁶⁹ Peter Brook, The Empty Space (New York: Avon, 1968) 42.

It is a sense of community and brotherhood that also inspires Valdez and El Teatro Campesino to perform their ritual dramas. Without a feeling of unity with the society around them, the ritual dramas would be out of touch with the multicultural world in which they exist.

Family, Ethnic, and Community Identity

Whereas Valdez is the spiritual leader and artistic director of El Teatro Campesino, the Teatro he oversees has an existence that is complemented by his leadership but exists as an entity by itself as well, Valdez being only a part of the whole. El Teatro Campesino could be looked upon as a tribe by anthropological definition. The group interacts as a community or, as Escalante expressed, "We are a family. Our organization is very much connected in family ties. Once a person has performed with us, they become tied to the family of Teatro Campesino"⁷⁰

Two principal factors identify what a Mexican-American or Chicano might have in common. One factor is the language--which is Spanish--and the other factor is religion, which can be Mayan, Aztec, or Christian, the most predominate influence being the connection with the Catholic Church brought over by the Spaniards during their conquest of the New World. To label or call this mixed culture by one specific name is to play semantic games because Spanish-speaking or Spanish-Americans or any one term cannot adequately describe the Chicano experience or orientation.

The composition and ethnic diversity of El Teatro Campesino easily defies a single definition of cultural identity. Many of the actors come from a cultural mixture of Mexican and Indian derivation. Others are mulatto or of

⁷⁰ Interview with Escalante, May, 1992.

mixed cultural identities. One actor related that she was half Appalachian and half Mestizo (Californian Indian) and was born in Los Angeles, and another actor was a sixth generation Texan whose family originated in Mexico yet he studies Buddhist teachings. Another identified himself as being of Spanish and Incan origin, and born in Argentina. Another described herself as a Puerto Rican--Spanish and Negro--who shares spiritual roots with the continent of Africa. As Escalante expressed it, "People do not have to share in the Aztec or Mayan beliefs to share a spiritual foundation with Teatro. We share the common goal of performing. We are a family unit."⁷¹

Valdez stresses that the Indian was present in the Americas before the white men came and the Indians had their own philosophy and religious beliefs. Believing that a lot of the beauty and poetry of the Mayan and Aztec philosophy has been overshadowed by conquering forces, Valdez fights for his own identity in an Anglo-American world. He wrote in Aztlan:

Neither a pelado nor a Mexican American, the Chicano can no longer totally accept as reality the white, western European concept of the the universe. Reason and logic are not enough to explain the modern world: why should it suffice to explain the ancient world of our ancestors? The sciences of archeology and anthropology may unearth the buried ruins of American Indigena, but they will never comprehend, through logic alone, its most basic truth: that man is a flower.⁷²

The community around San Juan Bautista participates in many of the ritual dramas as actors, singers, dancers, technicians, and participant-observers (audience). "People come from all over the Monterey Bay area--Watsonville, Santa Cruz, Salinas, Hollister, and beyond, to be involved," said Escalante. "People would come out in mobs to perform and participate in our rituals. In

⁷¹ Interview with Escalante, May, 1992.

⁷²Valdez, Aztlan xxxi.

one instance, I have four generations of one family participating in our yearly productions.”

Even members of the theatrical families of El Teatro Campesino—brothers, sisters, cousins, nieces and nephews, among others—perform and participate in the ritual dramas. This fact makes the ritual performances as much of a community and cultural activity as dramas performed for entertainment purposes. Cohen makes this observation about the necessity of ritual performances having a commonality of beliefs and a sense of community.

Performances are unlikely to be ritual if those present have nothing in common and are coming together only for that moment with no interaction before and after. A group must share something more than being in the same place at the same time for a ritual performance to take place. Community formation is a way of establishing an ongoing rather than one time relationship between the members of a theater group and some of its audience. Whether or not this is done consciously to help create ritual, the efforts to establish community help to move those assembled from the audience end of the spectrum towards the congregation end, at least making a ritual performance more possible. Community formation does not necessarily lead to ritual, but ritual would be unlikely to be created by theater groups without it.⁷³

Even though this collection of people from the community might believe in the religions that the dramas represent, the actors and performers are cautioned not to make the experience one of religious fervor or ecstasy as Valdez and the theatre people are very aware and conscious of the fact that they are doing theatre and not performing a religious experience per se. “We don’t want people to lose themselves in this experience but be aware of what they are doing,” said Escalante.⁷⁴

Valdez explains the purpose of his theatre group in the historical

⁷³ Cohen 174.

⁷⁴ Interview with Escalante, May, 1992.

overview, El Teatro Campesino, which acknowledged 20 years of performance and was published in 1985:

El Teatro Campesino is a professional multi-disciplinary theatre dedicated to the growth of popular theatre, by reaching beyond the confines of traditional drama to include the images and audiences of communities normally ignored by the theatrical mainstream: notably, the indo-hispanic people of America. Our work springs from its own aesthetic approach, which we call "Theatre of the Sphere," a belief in the cyclical nature of history, the unity of the universe, the oneness of actors and audience in performance.⁷⁵

The performances of the ritual dramas of El Teatro Campesino involve the immediate residents of San Juan Bautista and surrounding communities in the Monterey Bay area, and the relatives and family of Teatro members. This fact gives a ritual foundation to performances of La Pastorela, La Virgen Del Tepeyac, and El Baile De Los Gigantes. The reason why these groups choose to participate in the ritual dramas, has a basis in faith in their religious beliefs and the renewal and celebration of those beliefs in the cultural reenactment of these dramas.

In La Pastorela, which is discussed and analyzed in the following chapter, some of the elements of the community involvement, and the transcendental beliefs of El Teatro Campesino are expanded upon. The ritual properties of La Pastorela are described in detail, applying the knowledge and assumptions of the ritual theorists that were elaborated upon in Chapter Two. How all these elements come together in a symbolic ritual drama begins to explain some of the functions and beliefs, both theatrical and sacred, of Valdez and El Teatro Campesino.

⁷⁵ Valdez, El Teatro Campesino 39.

CHAPTER FOUR

LA PASTORELA

Background

“Pastorelas,” or shepherd’s plays, have been performed in Spain and England since the early days of Christianity. La Pastorela, a traditional Nativity drama dating to 16th century Mexico when Spanish missionaries incorporated indigenous language, costumes, and dance into their religious plays, is performed biannually at Christmas time by El Teatro Campesino to audiences of many different backgrounds.⁷⁶ Performing for both Spanish-speaking and English-speaking audiences, El Teatro Campesino serves the bilingual community in which it resides.

After the Spanish conquered Mexico, the “Pastorelas” were used by the Spanish Catholic friars for converting the Aztec and Mayan peasants to Christianity. Because most of the native Indian peoples of Mexico already had ritual dance-dramas in their respective religions, the introduction of these religious dramas was greeted with enthusiasm. Many of the plays of the time

⁷⁶Joanne Pottlitzer, Hispanic Theater in the United States and Puerto Rico (New York: Ford Foundation, 1988) 18.

were actually translated into the native language of the area. The natives of the area even converted some of the Christian icons into their own native icons when performing the plays. But describing the way El Teatro Campesino performs the play, Escalante calls La Pastorela not “a native American ritual but a Mestizo ritual.”⁷⁷

According to an El Teatro Campesino press release, La Pastorela is considered to be one of the masterpieces of the folk theatre tradition. As a medieval “morality play,” the journey of the Shepherds to the holy manger theatrically represents all humanity through the ages in their continued odyssey for “spiritual” redemption.

El Teatro Campesino first performed La Pastorela in 1974 as a puppet show. It evolved into a stage play through the efforts of a woman named Montoya in Hollister, California, a town close to Teatro Campesino in San Juan Bautista. She and a group of religious patrons had been performing the story of the shepherds in the small community of Hollister for many years. Ms. Montoya told the story of La Pastorela and sang some songs to Valdez and the troupe, El Teatro Campesino, who adapted it into a performance piece.⁷⁸

The play later transformed into an outdoor drama on the historic streets of the small mission pueblo of San Juan Bautista and ultimately was staged inside the Mission of San Juan Bautista. La Pastorela was made into a television film for PBS in 1991 and featured actors not only from the community of San Juan Bautista but also professional Chicano actors from Hollywood including singer Linda Rondstadt.

⁷⁷ Interview with Rosa Marie Escalante May, 1992.

⁷⁸ Interview with Rosa Marie Escalante May, 1992.

Valdez commented about his drama:

The trek is the symbolic spine of a simple and ageless play but what truly captivates is the thoroughly human and earthy characterization of the shepherds. Beset by Lucifer and his hordes, they emerge as frail but resilient examples of our most basic humanity.⁷⁹

Even though the performances usually take place in the Mission of San Juan Bautista,⁸⁰ the performance of La Pastorela observed for this study took place in St. Joseph's Cathedral at San Jose, California, in December of 1991. The film version was used as a reference for this study, but will not be analyzed for the purposes of this thesis except to note that many family members of El Teatro Campesino and community members from around San Juan Bautista were included in the film.

The performance of La Pastorela is sometimes preceded by a traditional Christmas procession which is widely performed in Spain, Mexico, and some United States communities. This ritualistic procession, called Posadas, which means in Spanish--home, dwelling or inn--reenacts Joseph and Mary's search for a place to stay during their journey to Bethlehem before the birth of Jesus. This procession has been enacted in San Juan Bautista in the past.

Sacred Time and Place

The first evidence of La Pastorela being a ritual is that the production is performed biannually in a "sacred place" during a "sacred time" using Christian mythology for its context. La Pastorela is performed every other Christmas in San Juan Bautista and other locations, in missions and cathedrals, because

⁷⁹ Andres Gutteriez, "Teatro Campesino Press Release," November 20, 1991.

⁸⁰ A descriptive narrative concerning the Mission in San Juan will be elaborated upon in a discussion of La Virgen which was viewed in December of 1992. Because Teatro Campesino chooses different locations in which to perform, St. Joseph's Cathedral in San Jose was chosen as the site for this analysis of La Pastorela.

Christmas is a holy time for believers in the Christian faith--in this case, specifically Catholic. Christmas is the time set aside by Christian communities as the "sacred time" for celebrating the birth of Christ.

Taking place in a mission of Franciscan origin (the play coming originally from Spain to California via Mexico), the performance--inside a church designated as a place of worship--occurs in a special place. Anything that is performed in a cathedral could be considered holy and sacred. In the Cathedral of St. Joseph's, the usual activities performed there are Catholic Masses.

The cathedral space is open and high, as if to suggest some lofty purpose; in this case, the practice of Catholicism. A large and round altar sits stage center to command attention to the cathedral being a place of worship. With the altar in the center, aisles on three sides stretch out like the three directions of the compass. The audience sits on pews with runners on the bottom where believers may kneel to pray. A large raised area on one end designates a place where religious ceremonies or rituals (Catholic Mass by priests of the Catholic Church) are performed. The Cathedral is not a place where one would expect to see theatrical performances but rather where one would expect to see more religious activities taking place.

The performance of La Pastorela took place at 8:00 p.m. which is a traditional time for theatrical performances that take place in the evening. This element alone suggests a repetition in itself, as most theatrical performances in the modern United States make a ritual performance time of 8:00 p.m. in the evening. The most important element has to be the season when La Pastorela is performed, that is, Christmas time. The fact that it happens the same time

(biannually) every other year reflects the performance's ritual nature. The timing of the performance coincides with the commemoration of the historical event of Jesus' birth. Again, the play is based on Christian mythology and originates in 16th century Spain.

The program notes provide the plot of the story to any audience member who might read it. Also in the program, the audience is reminded that the cathedral is a place of worship, and that it is customary as a form of respect that men not wear hats while inside the cathedral.

Though the play is performed bilingually both in English and Spanish, the program is all in English. Most of the audience is at least familiar with the celebration of the birth of Christ, since Christmas is a national holiday in the United States. The story of Wise Men and Shepherds visiting a manger in Bethlehem is quite well known to most of the Western World. The script of La Pastorela, as adapted by Valdez, could be described as a liturgical work since the plots and characters have their basis in Christian mythology. As Grimes would describe liturgy:

I do not restrict "liturgy" to Christian rites. Rather, I call "liturgical" any ritual action with an ultimate frame of reference and the doing of which is felt to be of cosmic necessity.⁶¹

The play, having been performed numerous times, has become a traditional work, and this contributes to the performance of the play's becoming a ritual occurrence. By definition, the traditional part of the play has its basis in mythology (Christian, taking place in the first year A.D.) and can also claim an ancient history ("Pastorelas" are recorded to have been performed since Christianity began and in Spanish Catholicism as far back as the 1600's).

⁶¹ Grimes 43.

All the characters are Spanish surnamed. But the setting of the play in Bethlehem and the surrounding countryside reflects a diversity of cultures-- Arabic and Mexican-American being among the many cultural influences. The archetypal angels and devils occupy locations in the Cathedral that suggest the performers are coming from a heavenly source or a fiery Hell. The fact that the symbolic elements reflect a diversity in locations resemble the multicultural society within which El Teatro Campesino performs.

The Performance

The production begins with a procession where the Pastores (shepherds) enter, presumably driving their flocks before them. The actors sing both in Spanish and English. The way they walk and carry themselves relates a simplicity in the characters of the shepherds. They are a simple and uncomplicated people who tend sheep. Carrying staffs which are decorated with brilliant ribbons and feathers, the shepherds are dressed in colorful and traditional Mexican peasant costumes--sombrosos, serapes, ponchos, juaraches, and other garb that designate them as being of Mexican-American origin.

The chorus sings an invocation to the universality of God, that all creation is beholden to Him, the Creator. The song, uplifting in mood, signifies that the occasion will be a joyous one. The instruments are of mixed origins--concha shells, guitars, drums and violins--reflecting a multicultural influence of Aztec and Mayan, Spanish, Mexican, and Western derivation. The concha shells when played or blown through create a deep and resonant tone, suggesting a connection with the Pre-Columbian past, an ancient and sacred sound of mystical times long ago.

The actors use the altar in the center as a focal point and then disperse themselves throughout the audience on three sides. By mingling with the audience, they achieve the concept of the audience becoming one with the performers. The feeling is one of being surrounded and being a part of the celebration and ritual. Spread out in the aisles on each side, the actors are close enough for the audience to reach out and touch them. The performers are of all ages, sizes and types. They come mostly from the community of San Juan Bautista and the surrounding Mexican-American communities. The fact that the performers come from a single region suggests a community celebration, honoring their belief system in the birth of Jesus Christ.

The shepherds with their simple peasant garb even reflect and symbolically represent the community of farmers, ranchers and other small town workers in San Juan Bautista and represent a village setting enjoyed by the inhabitants of this rural town whose centerpiece is an historic mission of religious significance and importance.

Dressed in rags, heavy furs, and wearing a long beard, a hermit who has been doing penance in a cave for twenty years in preparation for the coming of the Messiah, bends down and prays to his god to keep him pure and protect him from the temptations of the Devil. Because of his protestations and his garb, it is suggested that the Hermit is a comic character. In the Mission at San Juan Bautista, a raised area above the audience is used as the hermit's cave. In the Cathedral of St. Joseph in San Jose, the hermit appears on the floor level, however, not separated from the other actors. The hermit carries a small wooden cross with a symbol of Christ crucified upon it which confirms and symbolically represents his religious beliefs in Christianity and establishes him

as a Christian hermit. After he addresses the audience in both Spanish and English, the hermit retires out of sight and goes to sleep.

At the entrance to the Cathedral, a large red devil's head appears, symbolic of the entrance to Hell. Luzbel (Lucifer) rides out of the mouth of the large head, which is open to resemble a yelling or screaming expression, on a tall red horse carrying a sword. With his devils surrounding him, Luzbel appears in a black and formal Spanish-looking tuxedo. He speaks in a serious and deep tone of voice that suggests the familiar and obvious image of a lord of darkness. The troupe of devils wear animal skins and have red-painted skin and horns on their heads. The devils yell and scream in seemingly uncontrollable madness, jumping up and down, and running here and there, even throughout the audience, suggesting that the audience should be afraid of such activity. The devils act in this fashion to represent insanity and chaos, and enable the audience to imagine Hell as a place without morals or laws, a place where anarchy is the form of worship.

Lucifer announces to the devils that Christ, the Messiah, has been born on earth to Mary and Joseph, and Lucifer is filled with rage and fear. He orders Satanas (Satan) to search the earth and find the Child. Luzbel's movements are dramatic and forceful, signifying and symbolically presenting a sense of power and control. Satan can be seen cowering in Luzbel's presence, suggesting obedience and subservience. Satan's frenzied movements, inane actions and frantic speech, imply that he is a comic character, while Luzbel's formality and seriousness communicates that he is a very serious dramatic character. Lucifer emphasizes through his speech the gravity of the Christ Child being born: Christ's presence will challenge Lucifer's reign on earth and

his dominion over the people of the earth.

From the very beginning of this performance, the classic battle of good versus evil is set in motion. Like a comic opera, this spectacle presumes to teach a moral lesson, much as the Old English morality plays professed spiritual values in their themes. This setting in St. Joseph's Cathedral lends credence to the theory of how the morality plays began by speaking and repeating "Quem Queritas Trope" in medieval cathedrals of Europe. There is a similarity to commedia dell'arte (a self-acclaimed influence on the acting styles involved with El Teatro Campesino) and the notion of stock characters--comic shepherds, a hermit who is a very old man with an old age-looking mask, and the devil, attractive with a tuxedo, on a large red horse.

St. Michael the Archangel (San Miguel) appears to the shepherds with his retinue of angels. The angels are the forces of good and are dressed in costumes decorated with wings of white feathers. They are also clad in gold armor plate. The white feathers suggest purity and sanctity and the gold armor symbolizes a richness and goodness. St. Michael is solemn and forthright in his actions, demonstrating the profundity and solemnity of the situation. The angels appear to the Pastores, singing and announcing the birth of Christ and encourage them to journey and pay homage to the Son of God.

Do not fear, Shepherds, On this Mountain range
Listen to my voices, Hear what I proclaim!
Christ the Savior's Born, Bringing souls to light
Fountain of creation, Wellspring of all life!⁸²

As the plot progresses, Satan returns to Luzbel and announces he has found the Christ Child. Luzbel, to the delight of his entourage who demonstrate

⁸² All of the songs are sung in Spanish and in this ritual description were translated from the subtitles of the film version of La Pastorela, produced by PBS and El Teatro Campesino in 1991.

becoming the leader of shepherds. But Satan is thwarted again by the blowing of divine and magical notes on the concha by the Archangel. The shepherds are returned to normal and they strike out once more on the road to Bethlehem.

Romantic intrigues are introduced as Gila and Vato, two of the younger shepherds find themselves holding hands. But no sooner do they become engaged than the romance takes a bad turn. At this juncture, Satan appears again. This time, he presents himself as a yogi from the Orient, his devils disguised as dancing harem girls. Other musical instruments become involved. Near-Eastern flutes and pipes and the beating of drums can be heard, suggesting Arabian nights. This Arabian influence is plausible as the Christ child was born in Bethlehem in the Near East. It becomes apparent that the play does not take place in Mexico, even though these are Mexican shepherds. The play takes place in Bethlehem since the dancers wear Arabic costumes. The Sultan pretends to fly on a magic carpet, for instance.

There is a mixture of styles in this spectacle. Striving for a universal appeal, Valdez has often mixed metaphors and symbols in many of his plays. Concha trumpets sound the arrival of angels who save the shepherds; they also complement set and scene changes with the concha or sea shell trumpets denoting the Aztec and Mayan influence of this all-Hispanic cast. All of the character names are Spanish but the characters could come from Christian mythology whether Mexican or European or any other culture or, as in this production, Arabia. Among the props used, in another example of multiculturalism, are lanterns and candles which reflect a blending of the old and the new or modern. The dialogue is spoken both in English and Spanish, punctuated with a sprinkling of modern dialogue and references thrown in (such

as when the boy lover speaks to the girl lover, he exclaims, "What a trip!").

There are references to modern times and locations in the comic conversations such as mentioning Highway #280, which is a highway close to San Jose, California. This mentioning of local places and locations gives a feeling of community to the audience. This mixture of places, things, and times, both ancient and modern, achieves an effect of bonding the past with the present (Schechner and "restored behavior"),⁶³ the old with the new, the Near East with Mexico, and the Spanish audience in concert with the English-speaking audience. This culturally diverse presentation symbolically represents a collective community of various nationalities and ethnicities, the multicultural society in which El Teatro Campesino's performances are given.

Escaping once more with the help of St. Miguel's echoing concha, the Pastores escape the temptations of the sultan and his harem. During this interval, the hermit has attacked the young lady and has tried to seduce her while the other shepherds were beguiled by the harem girls. As the shepherds continue on their path, Luzbel himself decides to confront them since he has decided that Satan was not capable enough to dissuade the shepherds from their journey.

In an extremely ironic moment, one of the most powerful scenes in the play in the use of symbolic images, Luzbel puts himself on the cross and depicts Christ's torture. The Devil carries Christ's cross to Calvary, singing of how Christ will suffer a terrible fate should he be allowed to enter the world. The moment is almost sacrilegious, the juxtaposition of Lucifer playing out the role of Christ and his suffering of the Crucifixion. Putting a crown of thorns on his head,

⁶³This is a ritual effect that is explored more thoroughly in the concluding chapter.

Lucifer (Luzbel) sings of Christ's torment in a sorrowful and pitying tone, his voice crying out deeply, frankly, and profoundly:

A crown of thorns pierced his temples, His blood was flowing
bright red.

Three Marys followed him weeping, With every step that he tread.
But ay, Jesus! Only Jesus! Wanted to die on the cross!
What Mournful Passion And death, O my Lord!
Nailed to his bloody cross!

This is one of the more powerful and moving moments in La Pastorela.

This moment captures one of the foundations and dominant symbols of the Christian faith--the suffering, persecution, and death of Jesus Christ on the Cross at Calvary. The idea of Lucifer communicating this message to an audience undoubtedly already familiar with this most well-known of all Christian icons makes this moment in the play strikingly incongruous. Jesus nailed to the cross is sanctified in several statues throughout the Cathedral. To have this icon dramatized in front of an audience by the very symbol of evil Jesus sought to defeat is nothing short of the strongest image of dramatic irony.

This is Valdez playing with the Mayan concept of double imagery, of two opposite elements coexisting. Two symbols--that of the ultimate good and that of absolute evil--come together to form an image that is greater than the sum of its parts. The two images do not meld to form one image but form something larger than the whole by a dialectical process. This playing with opposites forms a basis for the Mayan and Aztec religious beliefs. Thus, in the middle of a play primarily dealing with Christian images, a Pre-Columbian philosophy is juxtaposed for maximum effect in creating a powerful dramatic moment.

At the end of his song, Lucifer cries out as Christ from the cross: "Oh, Father, why have you forsaken me?" It is the Devil taking on an actor's role, of

pretending to be someone other than who he is in order to dramatize his point of view. Yelling at the Pastores, Lucifer repeats his position regarding Christ coming into the world, "The Messiah offers nothing to you but the suffering of his own life."

Lucifer throws coins and jewels to the shepherds, offering them all kinds of material wealth if they will simply forsake their journey. But again, amid the chorus of concha sound, the angel St. Miguel appears and the Pastores are saved from their own earthly greediness.

San Miguel arrives on a symbolic white horse for the battle of good versus evil. The orchestra accentuates the battle with guitars, drums, violin and synthesizer music. The angelic forces descend out of the heavens from the direction of the main altar and confront Lucifer and his troupe of demons in the center around the altar. San Miguel warns Luzbel that he will defend the Pastores and take them safely to Bethlehem. Luzbel tells San Miguel that he will battle for the kingdom of earth and the reign of evil in the souls of all men.

In the ensuing battle San Miguel brings Satan to his knees. In San Miguel's battle with Luzbel, Lucifer calls on all the supernatural forces of Hell to do away with his opponent. But San Miguel relies on the Divine Light of Heaven to defeat the Prince of Evil. The Devil is finally defeated in a sword battle with the Archangel. Aided by the shepherds, the angels defeat the army of demons.

The battle of good versus evil couldn't take place in a more sacred place than in a large and impressive cathedral for the worship of a Christian god. There is a special feeling when the battle is taking place that is very powerful, suggesting that in a sacred temple for the worship of Christianity, the battle of

good versus evil is always taking place.

After the battle there is happiness and rejoicing, as the shepherds continue their journey. Upon arrival at the manger which is symbolically positioned at the large altar, accompanied by accordion and maracas, the birth of Jesus is celebrated. El Hermitano, with no worldly goods of his own, offers a happy little dance of joy to the newly born Messiah, whom he calls the "little chiquito." And the humble shepherds sing a song of gift-giving:

Shall we cover you with blankets of our love?
Or, shall we lift you up and hug you, too?
Or, shall we just sing by your cradle?
Our Lord was born in winter between the ice and the hay.
Shivering for all the sinners to give us all a new day!

In the end, Luzbel and Satan appear, not as enemies but in celebration of the birth of the Christ Child. Yet this development takes on an even bigger symbolic significance as Lucifer and his disciples expose themselves to be only actors who have been performing a role in a play called La Pastorela. This turn of events in the play affords the audience a return to the reality of the situation, making them aware of themselves as participants in a drama. The audience is a part of the drama, as much as the actors who have participated in the pretense. At the end of the play, the actors even acknowledge their affirmation of their faith in God.

The actors take their bows exiting the Cathedral to the rear. Actors, dancers, singers, and musicians wait for the audience to depart the recently formed theatrical space by forming a double line, one on each side of the exit, making it almost impossible to leave the performance area without encountering them. This makes for a dramatic and ritualistic statement in itself. The actors sing "Feliz Navidad" and the audience is encouraged to join in. The

actors are no longer bigger than life nor are they participants in a drama but merely flesh-and-blood people who are performing a ritual act, not necessarily for profit, but out of religious belief and reaffirmation.

Interpretation

The audience of La Pastorela witnessed the celebration of a Christian god in a Christian cathedral. At first it seemed a strange environment--a place of reverence allowing the performance of a seriocomic play about good versus evil--and some adjustment to the setting was required. St. Joseph's Cathedral is a sacred place which is not normally a theatrical space but, as a ritualist who defines ritual, Grimes, might express it: "a founded place," in this case, a cathedral, "where animated persons," namely actors, "enact formative gestures," i.e., performing a ritual drama, "in the face of receptivity," that is, a drama dealing with the birth of Jesus Christ, by people who, for the most part, are Christian in belief, "during crucial times" (Christmas).⁶⁴

According to Turner's definition of ritual, the participants are not "given over to technological routine." The members of El Teatro Campesino are "referring to their beliefs in mystical beings or powers." La Pastorela is traditional, sacred, intentional, and repeated biannually, accomplishing the interpretation of Grimes' scholarly view of ritual. The ritual drama connotes a feeling of respect for the powers of good and evil in Christian mythology, expressed in the language of myth.

Symbolically, the ritual has many dominant images that give reference to the society in which it is performed. The concha shell is blown to designate the changing of scenes or acting as the interfering instrument of the gods (in this

⁶⁴ Grimes 55.

case, San Miguel); in cases where the shepherds are struggling with the devil, it indicates the Mayan/Aztec influence of being the divine device for saving the shepherds' souls from damning influences. Another dominant symbol is the cross which the Devil carries, symbolizing the suffering of Jesus Christ. The mixture of costumes and the slight confusion of locales (Bethlehem or Mexico?) in the play only symbolize the variety of ethnic groups that predominate in a multicultural society. The use of both Spanish and English, and of contemporary language, suggests the bilingual and cross-cultural aspects of the society within which La Pastorela is performed.

Applying Schechner's distinctions of efficacy and entertainment, La Pastorela can be said to have some common attributes of both theatre and ritual in its performance. First of all, as entertainment, the participants can be easily observed enjoying themselves in the performance, as the enthusiasm and spirit of their actions and emotions carry over into the excitement of the audience. The audiences of La Pastorela are asked to watch the performance but, in the end, they are asked to participate. The unifying elements of singing along and passing through the actors upon exiting give the audience a feeling of communal participation. Some members of the audience believe and have faith in what they are seeing and also appreciate what they are experiencing. Members of the audience who have religious beliefs that are intertwined with what they are viewing gives the performance of La Pastorela efficacy. The mythology present in the production links the audience to another time and another place, a mythological time of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. Another testament to its efficacy is that the performance is a collective activity where a community comes together to celebrate a communally-shared belief system.



They come together in order to creatively express their beliefs. The one area, as was discussed previously, where efficacy is discouraged is that the performers are asked to not become “trance-like,” that is be caught up in the reverie of the play-acting. As Escalante stated, “We want the performers to know what they are doing.”⁸⁵

The performance of La Pastorela is ritualistic as the production is repeated at a “sacred place” every other year and takes place during a “sacred time” dealing with a traditional myth of the Mexican-American culture. Ceremony is involved but also the use of “magic.” As Grimes describes the use of magic: “Insofar as it is a deed having transcendent reference and accomplishing some desired empirical result, a rite is magical.”⁸⁶ The desired result in the case of La Pastorela is the reaffirmation and renewal of faith in the birth of Jesus who is a transcendent entity. But the performance of La Pastorela can also be defined as a celebration in that the participants are also giving power to and honoring a deity.

Whereas La Pastorela is a ritual drama celebrating and confirming the belief system of a people, El Baile De Los Gigantes as a performance piece is the most ritualistically performed of any of the theatrical presentations performed by El Teatro Campesino. This theatrical ritual drama is the subject of the next chapter. Based on the creation myth of the Maya-Quiche, Gigantes reflects the basic philosophy of artistic director and spiritual leader Valdez.

⁸⁵ Interview with Escalante, May 1992.

⁸⁶ Grimes 45.

CHAPTER FIVE

EL BAILE DE LOS GIGANTES

Background and History

In the performance schedule of El Teatro Campesino, a ritual drama named El Baile De Los Gigantes, based on the religious beliefs of the Mayans and Aztecs, is presented every year. This ritualistic dance-drama is a dramatic representation of the Maya-Quiche creation myth based on the Popol Vuh. Valdez and El Teatro Campesino recreate this myth in honor of the summer solstice, and the musical ritual dance-drama is performed outdoors on a 50 acre piece of property owned by Teatro Campesino and also at various outdoor locations at schools and other sites throughout the state of California. By performing this drama annually, Valdez asserts he is not only resurrecting the spiritual identity of the Mexican-American culture but also participating in an effort to bring about universal harmony and understanding between all peoples of the world.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Interview with Escalante, Santa Barbara, California, May, 1992.

Rituals, both religious and dramatic, were a part of the daily routine for both the Aztecs and the Mayans of the Pre-Columbian Americas. Not only were these practices simply ritual but they also expressed the religious and sacred beliefs interacting in the lives of these peoples. As an example, in the Aztec culture, every day began with a ceremony in front of their great temples where priests let loose hundreds of quail to make the sun rise.⁸⁸ In the Mayan culture, ritual theatre persisted where dancers and actors wore masks and chanted, danced, yelled, and clapped hands to rhythmic drumming. As Maxine Klein expresses it:

The ancient Indians responded to the vitality, vividness, and power of their ritual theatre. They needed, and thus responded to the hallucinatory state which their theatre inspired them to enter. All were part of the art-magic ambience that united this ancient community of men one with the other and elevated them to a state of super awareness of themselves, their world, and their gods.⁸⁹

El Teatro Campesino has adopted many of the practices and beliefs of the Mayan and Aztec civilizations and incorporated them into their theatre practices and performance style. The plays of Valdez are filled with references to these Pre-Columbian deities and ritual acts. The pyramids of Meso-American history and culture are a constant symbol and central image in the theatre settings for their plays.

El Baile De Los Gigantes, as performed by El Teatro Campesino, was adapted by Valdez from the version of the creation myth as recorded in the Popol Vuh, the sacred book of the ancient Maya-Quiche. This dance-drama is traditionally performed as a seasonal ritual to honor the passage of the year

⁸⁸Willard C. Booth, "Dramatic Aspects of Aztec Rituals," Educational Theatre Journal Vol. XVIII #4, December 1966: 421.

⁸⁹Maxine Klein, "Theatre of the Ancient Maya," Educational Theatre Journal Vol. XXIII #3, December 1971: 271-72.

from spring to summer. According to one source, this yearly performance provides participants in the theatre group an opportunity for spiritual renewal and purification and enables them to become one with their creator.⁹⁰ Valdez describes his interpretation of the performing of Gigantes:

It is a purification for the performers and for the whole tribe as well. It shows the good forces fighting against the bad forces and by concentrating on the action, the people go through the struggle in a sense, and it liberates them from their bad feelings. It is cathartic, but it is also in direct relationship with mathematical knowledge of reality.⁹¹

Time and Place

El Baile De Los Gigantes, beyond signifying the passing of a season, also bonds the group with Pre-Columbian beliefs that center around the connections man makes with nature or, as Escalante of El Teatro Campesino states, "the natural habits of native Americans."⁹² The drama is performed close to June 24th when the sun is at its highest peak in the sky and which is also St. John the Baptist's day in the Catholic religion. According to Escalante, El Teatro Campesino recognizes the seasonal aspect of life and reflects the natural order of things: "not to change things, but as a celebration by native Indians of the noticing of such things and events that occur in nature."⁹³

The drama is always performed outside in the open air because of, as El Teatro Campesino believes, the sacred nature of performing El Baile De Los Gigantes. This performing outside is consistent with the performance of Mayan dance-dramas:

⁹⁰ Diamond 188.

⁹¹ Diamond 189. It should also perhaps be explained that the reference to mathematical reality is related to the Mayan beliefs of measuring the universe.

⁹² Interview with Escalante May, 1992.

⁹³ Interview with Escalante May, 1992.

The "complete plays," like the other genres of Mayan theatre, were performed in the open air, in the atria or plazas of temples; they had as their permanent setting the surrounding jungle and they pulsed with sound, both natural and man-made.⁹⁴

The performances which this researcher observed and participated in took place in "open areas" in the community of Santa Barbara where local students, musicians and other interested parties were invited to join in and perform.

Community Involvement and Workshops

The performances that this researcher observed, as well as participated in, took place at various locations in the city of Santa Barbara, California, outside, mostly in school play yards with schoolchildren attending. Being an active participant (performer-dancer) in the dance-drama is not unusual. In all performances of El Baile De Los Gigantes, members from the community where the drama is performed are invited to participate. The roles taken on by local actors or community people are roles that require little speaking of lines but mostly chanting, singing, and dancing. Local musicians are also invited to participate with guitars, drums, and other musical instruments and abilities. This community involvement is an integral part of El Teatro Campesino's policies and sacred belief system. Most of the major roles in the ritual dance-drama are performed by professional actors in the company. This is consistent with the Mayan and Aztec dramas of Pre-Columbian times. The rituals that were performed in ancient times were enacted by actors, dancers, and singers who were "professionals."⁹⁵

The productions in Santa Barbara were preceded by a workshop to

⁹⁴ Klein 272.

⁹⁵Victor W. Von Hagen, World of the Maya (New York and Scarborough, Ontario: New American Library, 1960) 98.

which local actors and musicians, mostly drama students, were invited. In this workshop, many of the Mayan and Aztec principals and transcendental beliefs were articulated. Instruction included insights into some of the sacred beliefs which are demonstrated in the dance-drama but not always explained to the general audiences. For example, in the dances, the participants are instructed to always move to the left when honoring the gods because that is the correct “spiritual” direction. The shuffling of the feet in a rhythmic movement during the dances suggests being grounded to the earth.

The warmups began with a circle which reflects the Aztec concept of zero and the participants are told that the circle has sacred properties. The circle in Aztec thought is not a concept of nothing but intuits everything and anything. The circle, to the Aztecs and Mayans, and to El Teatro Campesino, is a symbol not only of energy, but also of continuous energy. The circle is a power symbol where vibrations flow, a never ending circle where everyone is equal. This concept reflects a dynamic of El Teatro Campesino in that the performance of their seasonal rituals is an attempt to create harmony in the universe and the world. This is a similar and comparable goal of other community, ethnic, and spiritual groups such as Sufi dancing that is performed by Far Eastern religions, or the community ritual dances that Anna Halprin creates for the San Francisco Bay region.

This sense of community awareness and the concept that performance of these rituals has an effect on the cosmology of a larger group of people and the universe, is central to the work of Valdez and El Teatro Campesino. The rituals, as performed, serve a function. Van Gennep describes the phenomenon as “liminality,” which is a temporary state of wholeness, a state of being similar to

transcendence to another plane of reality. Turner calls this experience “communitas” where everything and everyone become equal in a homogeneous status system. These concepts are comparable to the Aztec idea of zero, wherein everyone, everything, and anything are equal. This concept is central to the “spiritual” axioms which serve as a foundation for the work of Valdez and El Teatro Campesino. As Escalante says it: “We are trying to create universal harmony.”

More General Background

El Baile De Los Gigantes derives its roots from the Popol Vuh, The Sacred Book of the Ancient Quiche Maya.⁹⁶ The account, as adapted by Valdez, concerns the creation of the world. This dramatized and ritualistic version, which involves dance, drama, music, and song, enacts only a small portion of the creation myth, since the entire book if acted out could take several days or weeks to perform. The play, as performed by El Teatro Campesino, takes close to an hour from beginning to end.

The principal player in the ritual dance-drama is the narrator, also known in Spanish as El Maestro. The narrator relates the story and leads the group of actors, musicians, singers, and dancers in the plotting and pace. In Santa Barbara, the narrator and group leader was Rosa Marie Escalante, resident director for La Virgen and La Pastorela and education director for El Teatro Campesino.

During the workshop period, she had the community players enact

⁹⁶ For a full narrative account of Popol Vuh, an English Translation is available from D. Goetz and S. Morley, from the Spanish of Adrian Recinos, Norman, Oklahoma, University of Oklahoma Press, 1950. Other short versions are available from Aztlan edited by Luis Valdez, New York, NY: Random House, 1972, and from Pre-Columbian Literatures by Abraham Arias-Larreta, 1964.

numerous exercises and improvisations to determine their roles and characters in the forthcoming dance-drama which would be performed later that afternoon. This researcher was chosen to be one of the captains on the evil brother's side. These captains are similar to the Four Horseman of the Apocalypse in the book of Revelations in the Christian Bible or the opening of Pandora's box in Greek mythology where the Furies were released to bring misery and destruction to the human race.

Valdez, in the past, has led the dance-drama and performed the part of narrator (El Maestro). As recorded by Diamond in June, 1975, Valdez introduced the drama as a purification rite to prevent the formation of evil energy. He also stated that, according to Mayan beliefs, when the sun is directly overhead, it emits an energy so strong that it affects people's behavior. According to Valdez, the Mayans used to believe that if a person is not "spiritually" clean, the solar energy absorbed on these days will be released as violence.⁹⁷

Audience and Performance Space

The two performances of El Baile De Los Gigantes that were observed (and participated in) by this researcher took place on two consecutive days in Santa Barbara, California, in May of 1992. The performance locations were two large school yards--one an elementary school and the other, a baseball field at a high school. Again, both the locations were out-of-doors in very large open spaces which made the performance area unusual for audiences accustomed to formal indoor theatre settings. At the high school, the audiences were composed of drama students mostly, but also a few students who were studying

⁹⁷ Diamond 188.

Mexican-American literature were in attendance. At the elementary school, all of the students were in the early grades.

At the Santa Barbara elementary school, the performance space was in a large grassy area behind the main school and the schoolchildren who experienced the performance numbered possibly in the hundreds and represented a variety of ethnic groups--black, white, and brown. It is suspected that both student audiences had had little prior experience with a dramatic presentation, much less a ritualistic Mayan dance-drama. In both cases, the audience was seated in a large circle around the performers which, according to the Aztec concept of zero, placed performers and audience in a circle of energy.

Because of the nature of the performance, the actors were encouraged to mingle with the audience before the show--letting it be known that, despite the masks and costumes the performers were wearing, the actors were still people and not necessarily unavailable or detached such as when an actor is performing on a stage and usually separated from the audience in the world of make-believe, or by a fourth wall representation of reality. The audience is knowingly being asked to accept the "suspension of belief," as the actors have already identified themselves as actors playing a role.

Another effect of this intermingling with the audience before the show begins is to acquaint the audience with the actors so they can relax and feel more comfortable. Because of the actions in the play, the audience is recognized and sometimes asked to actively participate, especially at the end of the dance-drama when a hand-holding circle is formed and everyone is asked to dance and sing in celebration.

In another sense, the audience has also been accepted into the “magic” world of the theatre, and has become one with the performers, making the event a collective experience, a ritual event.

Special Elements

Being a ritual drama, the emphasis in the drama is not so much on the speaking of the words as in a text, but in the movement, rhythm, music, dance, and song of Gigantes. The dancing, for instance, is not Western, European, or even Hispanic in origin, but consists of the actual dance movements believed to have been used by the ancient Aztecs and Mayans of Pre-Columbian times. The instruments used in Gigantes are a blending of cultures, but mostly Mexican-American in origin--drums (of all sorts), conchas, bells and rhythm instruments (such as the tambourine), flutes, and guitars.

The directions within which the performers operate are very important to the effect of the ritual. Every compass direction is given some special designation and specific color. And, for emphasis, the dancers and actors move to the North or South or to the East or to the West, depending on the intention of the ritual act or symbolic meaning.

The dance-drama is performed both in English and in Spanish simultaneously, the narrator often repeating the narration in both languages. All of the songs in the production, however, are sung in Spanish. This mixing of languages in the show, as was stated in the description of La Pastorela, reflects the cultural mixture of California and, in a larger sense, the Southwestern United States, where English-speaking Europeans migrated from the East and those peoples of Spanish and Mexican (Meso-American) descent migrated from the South into lands and territories which were occupied for perhaps

thousands of years by Native American tribal units of various denominations. The predominate languages of the region today, however, are Spanish and English. The fact that El Teatro Campesino performs both in English and Spanish accommodates the predominating ethnic mixture of the audiences in that region.

The costumes used in Gigantes speak to an ancient culture of long ago. While not elaborate, they present a simple and colorful spectacle. The costumes are so simple and universal that many of the actors wore street clothes under their costumes. Different colored bandanas, simple shifts, and jumpsuits were about as ornate as the costumes became. Masks were the most functional of the costumes worn and indicated the differences (and similarities) between each of the characters. The masks were the central operating focus for character identification of some roles.

The Performance

In the beginning of the dance-drama, all actors face each other, standing in specific directions from north to south, and the narrator (El Maestro) stands in the center. An invocation is given by the narrator to the blast of the concha which signals the start of the ritual:

Hear us, O Brave Warrior, give us your blessing in this humble work that we do in honor of your name. Give us the energy we need to complete this celebration.⁹⁸

The beating of the drums begin and the concha sounds with every wave of the arm of the narrator in the four directions of the compass. The symbolism

⁹⁸ All of the dialogue in this ritual description comes from an unpublished manuscript of Luis Valdez' adaptation of the creation myth of the Maya-Quiche which is documented in the Popol Vuh. This script was given to the researcher by Rosa Marie Escalante prior to the performances of the dance-drama, El Baile De Los Gigantes, in Santa Barbara, California, May of 1991.

of the four directions comes from Mayan cosmology which divides the universe into four directions, each with different characteristics, each assigned a specific and symbolic color. In each of these directions dwelt a god who not only occupied his own quadrant of universal space but who, along with the other three, held up the heavens and the world. Color and direction form key elements in Gigantes just as all of the elements in the Mayan calendar are connected with gods, direction and color. As the narrator distinguishes one of the four directions, the actors turn to the left (which is the direction of the spirit) and face the direction being honored and raise their right hand in salute.

The Narrator, accompanied by frenzied drum beats and echoing concha, speaks again (both in English and in Spanish) to the audience, and begins to explain the story of the creation myth of the Maya Quiche:

Antes que hubiera aire - before there was air
Antes que hubiera fuego - before there was fire
Antes que hubiera agua - before there was water
Antes que hubiera tierra - before there was land
Antes que hubiera creacion - before there was creation
There existed nothing, except for the creator, Moyocoyani, he who creates himself. Solo existia el creador, Moyocoyani, invento de si mismo.

The narrator continues to tell the audience, which is seated in a circle around the performers, about the four directions and how the corners of the universe were created by Moyocoyani. Then as the drum accentuates each direction, the narrator explains who represents each direction and what the four directions indicate. At this point, one of the performers comes forward and offers individual scarves to the narrator. The narrator then hands a scarf to each character who comes forward to represent a compass direction and accept that scarf for his or her direction.

In the north (el norte), explains the narrator, exists the grandfather Kinan, who represents solar energy, and whose color is white. The grandfather steps forward from the north and accepts a white colored scarf. The actor wears a mask that has a human face and is painted tan. Though exaggerated and much larger than a human face, the mask expresses an emotion of slight anguish, and is somewhat more comic than dramatic or scary. The face is mostly without character distinction, because later on in this particular dance-drama, the actor portraying the grandfather will take on another role as well.

Then the narrator indicates to the south, where exists the grandmother Xmucane, giver of life through water. Her color is aquamarine. The grandmother, in this case, does not wear a mask but wears several scarves. Then, from the direction of the east, comes the sun (el sol) whose color is yellow. Next the narrator indicates the west, which is the direction in which the sun sleeps and night begins; its color is red. The narrator then repeats herself, and the performers, who are still standing in two lines, salute each of the directions to the accompaniment of a drum beat and a blast from the concha.

The Maestro then states that if there are four points there has to be a center. In this center, she explains, is a ball (la pelota), which is a "symbol of energy, a symbol of life, an egg, a drop of blood, an atom." At the beginning of creation, the narrator goes on, the grandmother and the grandfather came together in the center to dance the dance of creation with the ball.

The ball game was central to the Mayan and Aztec people, not only for its religious significance, but also for the fact it was a competitive sport. Life for the Mayans was bound up in ritual and religion, pervading every aspect of the Mayan civilization--agriculture, birth, death, astronomy, architecture, and

sports.⁹⁹ The ball games that the Mayans and Aztecs played were the same games that the gods played at the beginning of creation.

The ball game is played between the grandmother and grandfather to the beating of drums. They grasp each other by the right hand. Putting one foot on the ball, they circle around the ball, kicking and moving it; then they reverse themselves and go the other direction. Two other characters are introduced as their offspring by the narrator. The actors are both wearing blue masks similar to the grandfather's, with a similar look represented in their facial characteristics. These personages are the characters for which the drama is named--the Giants. There are only two Giants and they are twins, born from the womb of the grandmother Xmucane. The two twin Giants, Hun-Hanapu and Huncame, are then taught the ball game by the grandparents. All four connect right hands and move in quarter turns, until they go full circle several times, then they reverse their direction and go the opposite way. All movements of the ball are complemented by drumbeats and the blowing of the concha.

Also, every time the ball moves in a direction, the chorus of actors move in that direction with them in unison. The ball, which can represent and symbolize any number of things, can also symbolize the universe. So every time the ball is bounced or rolled back and forth, everything else in the universe, in this case the actors, moves with them.

The grandparents, after having taught the two Giants how to play the ball game, leave them to continue the ball dance. Again, as the two Giants move the ball in a certain direction, so also moves the chorus of actors, accompanied by drum beats and concha blasts. Many of the movements are also signaled by

⁹⁹ Von Hagen 101.

the brief and staccato yelling of “Ha” by the narrator.

Suddenly, one of the Giants, Huncame, pushes the other Giant, Hun-Hanapu, and grabs the ball, and is about to throw it at him when a concha blast stops the action and the ball is taken from Huncame. The narrator explains that Huncame has broken the rule of the dance by using his hands when playing the ball game. In the ball games, as played by the Aztecs and Mayans, the participants supposedly used their buttocks and feet in order to place the ball through a metal ring. This is a game similar to a combination of modern-day basketball and soccer, without the use of hands. The ball game was very popular in Pre-Columbian times. For example, the temple at Chichen Itza had seven ball courts. Though no exact description of the ball games is available at present, the game is briefly chronicled in the Popol Vuh:

“Let us play ball,” said the lord of Xibalba.
Then the lords seized the ball and butted directly at the ring of Hunahpu.¹⁰⁰

Because of this breach of the rules of the game, the Giants are given weapons, two large poles, and they begin the first cosmic battle. As the ball game was followed by the chorus of actors, so also is the battle followed. The Giants fight east to west and then south to north--again, the drums and yelling of the narrator and the moving of the actors in accompaniment. By the end of the ritualistic and symbolic battle, Huncame has knocked Hun-Hanapu down in the center. Then, with a symbolic blow accompanied by a drumbeat, Huncame beheads his twin brother. After the taking of his colored scarves by Huncame, Hun-Hanapu's head is then hung in the calabash tree (an actor comes forward to represent the symbolic tree).

¹⁰⁰ Von Hagen 101.

Another actor comes forward and takes away a blue scarf and gives Huncame a black scarf, and Huncame becomes the lord of the underworld, el rey de Xibalba. The captains of the underworld are introduced as his servants-- Captain Blood, Captain Bone Crusher, Captain Blood Clot, Captain Rotten Meat, and Captain Pus Maker. The captains all wear grotesque and supposedly frightening masks that display a resemblance to the characteristic of their name. With the encouragement of Xibalba, the captains dance their victory dance--discordant movements to the beating of a drum. The dance symbolizes the triumph of the forces of bad over good, and the captains are celebrating in a raucous fashion because the underworld will be given dominion over the universe.

A young lady is introduced to the audience as Ixquic, a maiden who lives in the underworld (una doncella llamada Ixquic, gota de sangre--whose name means drop of blood). Upon being introduced, the young actress dances in the center of the space. She is dressed in a simple shift without mask. She represents a little bit of purity in an ugly and misshapen world of demon-captains.

The narrator explains that Huncame, lord of Xibalba, has forbidden anyone to get close to or to even look upon the calabash tree where Hun-Hunapu's head is hung. Despite this prohibition, this was the most desired thing for Ixquic to see. Huncame learned of this desire of Ixquic and sent el Capitan de Sangre (Captain Blood) to dissuade her. At this point as Ixquic dances in the center, the evil captain comes forward from one of the two rows and scares her, commands her, and then pleads with her in a frantic fashion, none of which work.

The narrator goes on to say that the more that Ixquic realized that Huncame didn't want her to go, the more determined she became to see the forbidden tree. Giving up in frustration, Capitan Sangre calls upon the tecolotes (a pair of owls) to follow her. As the narrator describes the plot, the action is performed by several of the actors. It turns out, the narrator explains, that the owls were curious about the forbidden tree as well and, because Ixquic treated them kindly, the owls became her allies.

As Ixquic approaches the tree, magical sounds of concha, guitar, flute, and drums are heard. The actress pretends to be mesmerized by the tree and moves close to it, and the tree and Ixquic, through the words of the narrator, enter into conversation:

Maestro/Arbol (Tree): And the Arbol, the tree, spoke to Ixquic:
What do you want, child?
Maestro/Ixquic: I want to taste your fruit.
Maestro/Arbol: Extend your right hand.
This is my fruit.
This is my seed.
This is my life.
Go up to the earth to give life to my children.

Ixquic and the owls return to the center and admire the ball that has been given to her. The narrator explains that six months have passed and a change is obvious in Ixquic's body. The actress puts the ball under her shift, symbolizing pregnancy. Huncame hears about her pregnancy and sends Capitan de Sangre to help him confront her. The characters again act out the story as the narrator speaks their dialogue.

Maestro/Huncame: What have you done woman?
Maestro/Ixquic: I haven't done anything!
Maestro/Huncame: Liar! You've been with a man!
And for that sin you are going to pay!
Messenger Owls, tear out the heart of the

Maestro/Ixquic: bad woman and don't come back without it!
(As soon as Huncame departs, Ixquic speaks to the owls through the narrator.)
Owl friends, you don't have to take out my heart, I know where there is a rubber tree that you can make something that looks like a heart.

Through this deception, Ixquic gives birth to cuates-twins, Hanapu and Ixbalanque. The action in the drama has Ixquic doing a back bend and the ball is removed. Two actors wearing masks do a front roll from one of the rows, representing two new set of twins. Then the grandmother and grandfather help these new set of twins learn the ball game. The narrator explains that once the twins learn the ball dance, they are taught to play the game from east to west. But the twins mistakenly travel north to south and run into Huncame and Hun-Hanapu who have been listening and watching from Xibalba. Kinan protests to Huncame, through the narrator:

Maestro/Kinan: What are you doing here? This is my grandson's direction, territory and colors! Get away from here and don't come back!

Maestro/Huncame: What are you talking about? This is my dominion, my lands, my directions and my colors. And everyone here is my subject and you can't do a thing about it!

Maestro/Kinan: Don't talk that way to your Abuelo Kinan, the one who gave you life! Have you lost all respect for your elders and the old ways? Go away from here!

Maestro/Huncame: Hell no, I'll go when I feel like it and if you don't like it, then it's war!

At this point, to the anxious beating of drums and blowing of conchas, the actors begin running madly about in all directions, making noise and threatening each other. After a brief rampage, they return to their original positions and Hanapu and Huncame take positions in the east and the west. They begin to fight and as they battle with sticks, they move in directions from

east to west, the chorus of actors following them to the sound of drumbeats.

Hanapu defeats Huncame in the battle and the two brothers who are victorious give thanks to the four directions as the chorus joins them with salutes. But when their backs are turned, Huncame rises and strikes down Hanapu from behind. El Maestro yells out: "The brothers have been betrayed! And claiming a false victory, Hanapu and all their captains celebrate by bothering all the people of the world and bring them bad energy!"

At this point, the captains of the underworld run out into the audience and begin to frighten the observers (audience). Since the actors have shown themselves to be real people before the performance began, the audience, in this case, school children or high school students, accept with humor the ugly and distorted representations. The audience appears to be both amused and concerned as the actors with their hideous masks run amongst them, grabbing one person or yelling horribly at another. When the concha is sounded, the captains return to their rows and watch the action in the center.

Hanapu is symbolically brought back to life with the help of his brother and a piece of red cloth. Through the narrator, Hanapu speaks to Huncame: "Huncame, leave the people in peace. I will take on the suffering of the world. Leave the people alone and come fight me like a real man, all by yourself!"

Another battle takes place. Again the two actors battle from east to west and then north to south, followed by the chorus and accompanying drumbeats. Finally, Hanapu gives Huncame the defeating blow, and he strips Huncame of all the colors that Huncame had claimed as lord of the world. Abuelo Kinan commands Hanapu to behead Huncame, but as Hanapu proceeds to carry out the act, a single concha sounds, and the narrator explains, "El Creador--the

Creator is merciful, he stops the beheading and commands that harmony be restored to the universe!”

At this juncture, Huncame rises and puts out his hand to Hanapu asking forgiveness. Hanapu shakes his hand and then hugs him and they return to their original positions. It is explained that Hanapu becomes the sun and his brother, Xblanque, becomes the moon. The narrator then yells out: “But before a perfect harmony can be realized, there has got to be a cleansing of the universe.” The audience is then instructed to form a circle and join hands with the actors. Music starts up. With the narrator in the center with the musicians, a dance and song is introduced, called “Altísimo Corazon” (“Highest Soul”). Singing the song with the audience and dancing in a circle (to the left which is the spiritual direction) brings the actors and audience together in a final chorus.

Interpretations

Because of the Mayan philosophy and religious beliefs that form the foundation of many of El Teatro Campesino’s theatrical practices, El Baile De Los Gigantes connects the present world with a vision of the past, the Mayan creation myth being presented to a modern, post-industrial world of television, movies, and computers. This ancient ritual as performed by El Teatro Campesino has obvious ritual intentions and is an attempt by Valdez, making use of the spiritual beliefs of El Teatro Campesino, to effect a collective and positive energy in the world as we know it.

The ritual drama of El Baile De Los Gigantes has numerous ritual properties in that it is performed in a “sacred place,” that is the open air, and is performed annually during the summer solstice at a “sacred time.” The dramatic enactment of the Maya-Quiche creation myth is certainly related to sacred and

ancient beliefs and performed with awareness of some reason and meaning. Gigantes is performed by actors enacting the roles of deities and the production is highly formalized because all of the movements in the dance-drama have sacred intentions in the sense of honoring directions. It could be stated that Valdez and El Teatro Campesino are honoring and celebrating “mystical beings or powers” in representing the ancient Aztec and Mayan gods and goddesses and also they are using liturgy and magic in this theatrical presentation.

Schechner’s categories distinguishing between ritual and entertainment identify El Baile De Los Gigantes as more ritual than entertainment. The ritual is definitely linked to an absent Other, and in the intentions of Valdez, results are expected. The performance takes place in a symbolic time and place. There is a collective creativity manifested as well as individual creativity. The performers are not possessed or in a trance, however, since the participants are asked to not get caught up in religious ecstasy.

The audiences that experience the performances are not primarily Mayan in origin. The audiences appreciate the performance but it cannot be said that the audiences believe in the particular religious beliefs of the Mayans. Even the actors themselves reflect a variety of religious backgrounds, from a sixth generation Texan who studies Buddhism to an East Los Angeles native who is of North American Indian descent rather than Mesoamerican.

But these factors do not take away from the power and impact of the performance piece itself. The effect is dramatic and moving, entertaining and religious, and because of the almost hypnotic effect of the musical instruments and the movement of the actors, including the use of mythic characters, images and symbols, the theatrical presentation makes for a curious and provocative

experience. As Diamond viewed the performance in 1975:

El Baile De Los Gigantes is to date the most moving piece I have seen El Teatro Campesino do and yet it is the most foreign to me. It works partly because it is self-contained and partly because of its function. Gigantes is a ritual to be experienced. If the spectator leaves with only a vague notion of what went on but emotionally satisfied, the ritual has fulfilled its purpose.¹⁰¹

The intention of El Teatro Campesino in performing El Baile De Los Gigantes is that of creating harmony in the universe. The dance-drama is performed ritualistically with the intentions of ritual effect. Yet the audiences do not particularly share a commonality in religious beliefs. It could even be stated that the Mayan people are not in attendance, so the spirits or gods of the Mayan civilization are not present either, except in a universal spiritual sense as determined by Valdez. But El Teatro Campesino is not concerned with only one set of beliefs but in numerous beliefs that speak to a universal human spirituality. The performance of Gigantes only reflects one part of a much greater whole to which Valdez and El Teatro Campesino are committed. These universal concepts of El Baile De Los Gigantes are explored and examined in greater depth in the final chapter of this thesis.

Bringing together the two philosophies and religious beliefs of the Mayans and Aztecs, and the Christian teachings and beliefs of Spanish Catholicism, is the focus of the ritual dance-drama, La Virgen Del Tepeyac. Two distinctly different cultures and faiths come into conflict in this theatrical presentation. In La Pastorela, the belief system of the Catholic religion is mainly celebrated and in El Baile De Los Gigantes the Mayan and Aztec philosophy is presented. With La Virgen Del Tepeyac, both religious belief systems are

¹⁰¹ Diamond 223-224.

represented and brought together in this dance-drama, which is presented in detail in the following chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

LA VIRGEN DEL TEPEYAC

History and Background

According to legend, in December of 1531, in Mexico on the hill of Tepeyac, La Virgen de Guadalupe appeared to an Aztec Indian named Juan Diego on four different occasions. Valdez and El Teatro Campesino present a dramatized version of this historical and mythological incident every other Christmas in commemoration of this event. La Virgen Del Tepeyac is described as a miracle play which is a traditional piece in the popular theatre of the Mexican-American. The play is adapted from a dramatization reportedly written by a Catholic priest in Mexico sometime in the 18th century. El Teatro Campesino has been performing this production for over twenty years, the first production in December of 1971. Valdez explains in the program notes of a production in 1992:

The reenactment of that glorious encounter centuries ago, between the humble indio Juan Diego and his beautiful vision of the Mother of Christ, never fails to inspire all of us with deep

feelings of joy and brotherhood . . . a gesture of divine love and faith that served as the foundation for Christianity among the indigenous people of Mexico and the Americas. The appearance of the Virgen de Guadalupe stands as a beacon, a shining ray of light and hope, across the centuries of darkness and injustice, for the indios of the Americas¹⁰²

According to historical accounts, the four appearances of the Virgin, between December 9th and 12th in 1531, marked the first time in the history of the world that the Mother of Christ made herself miraculously visible to anyone. This appearance had special significance to the Catholic priests who came from Spain as it marked the acceptance of Christianity on Mexican soil. But it is believed that since the hill of Tepeyac was also the special place where the Aztec goddess, Tonantzin, appeared to the Aztecs, the native Indians only incorporated the Virgin of Guadalupe's appearance as a monument to their own faith as well. The Virgin was not a replacement for their worship but, since the Aztecs believed in numerous gods, merely another god from which to draw religious strength.¹⁰³ It also signifies an attempt to create a Mexican Catholic identity separate from Spain. La Virgen de Guadalupe that appeared on the Hill that day was not white-skinned but dark-skinned, a patron of the Indian.¹⁰⁴ As Hernando Cortez, conqueror of the Aztecs, stated:

The religion of the Indians was adapted to Catholicism, but Catholicism was also adapted to the religion of the Indians. We took your Virgin Mary and made her our Virgen of Guadalupe. It meant more than making a white statue brown. It meant making her Mexican. And Indio!¹⁰⁵

The performance of La Virgen Del Tepeyac by El Teatro Campesino commemorates the anniversary of the four apparitions of the Virgin Mary by

¹⁰² Valdez, Introduction to La Virgen Del Tepeyac, program notes, December 1992.

¹⁰³ Valdez, Aztlan xvi.

¹⁰⁴ Diamond 199.

¹⁰⁵ Valdez, Aztlan 379.

performing the show biannually every Christmas in the Mission San Juan Bautista at San Juan Bautista, California. In 1992, the production was also performed in San Francisco at the Cowell Theatre at Fort Mason, bringing the ritual drama outside its usual operating arena and to a larger audience. Even though most of the performers in La Virgen are non-professional actors, singers, and dancers from the San Juan area and local communities surrounding San Juan, the performing of the show beyond the community in which the celebration takes place brings the ritual properties of the ritual drama to another level of interpretation. Yet becoming an entertainment event in San Francisco doesn't necessarily affect the ritual aspects of the drama because some of San Francisco's population is Hispanic and the show is presented exclusively in Spanish. There is no English spoken in the production, other than a plot outline in English in the program. Although the performance of the drama in San Francisco does not exclude the performance of La Virgen from being a cultural and community ritual drama, it does bring other cultural and ritual aspects into play.

Community Involvement

As in the performance of La Pastorela, most of the performers in La Virgen are from the community of San Juan Bautista. Rosa Marie Escalante, director of La Virgen, comments on this phenomenon:

The singers, dancers, musicians, and actors who return year after year with their strength and dedication are the foundation upon which we build. They are truly "El Pueblo." Their ability to be open and flexible to changes is also commendable. The new participants and the new generation of young people, who are drawn into the circle of La Virgen, bring with them a new interpretation of our traditional offering which is centuries old to our people.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Escalante, program notes of the December 1992 production of La Virgen Del Tepeyac.

The performers of La Virgen, as in the performing of La Pastorela, are different ages and genders--old and young, male and female. Many of the performers have been in the production for many years, year after year. Most of the performers contribute their time and energy because of their religious faith, and others participate from a sense of community.¹⁰⁷ Few of the performers could be called professional actors and actresses. Many of them are family members of El Teatro Campesino--nieces, nephews, sons, daughters, brothers and sisters. Again, as in La Pastorela, the community involvement makes this production more than an entertainment event. The fact that this production is repeated every other Christmas--a "sacred time"--and is performed in the Mission at San Juan--a "sacred place"--contributes to the many ritual dimensions of this theatrical piece. The dance-drama is formalized and scripted, and performed traditionally.

Two Different Performing Spaces

The two performances attended by this researcher took place at San Juan Bautista in the Mission (Dec. 5, 1992) and in the Cowell Theatre at Fort Mason in San Francisco (Jan. 3, 1993). Each of the performances was unique in its directorial approaches and concepts. The Mission performances were held in a sacred place, while the San Francisco performances occurred in a more traditional theatre. The two approaches were dramatically and scenically different. In the Mission, the performances were in a theatre-in-the-round setting while the performances in the Cowell Theatre were mostly proscenium-based with some forays by the actors into the audience. The perspective in the staging of each production made the effect decidedly different in each, even

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Escalante, November 1992.

though the content of the performances--the music, dancing, dialogue, and songs--was almost identical. Most of the performers in both shows were also the same. When performed both in a church and a theatre, La Virgen creates some interesting theoretical speculations as to the relationship that exists between ritual and the theatre.

The two performances are compared together in the descriptive narrative and ritual analysis of this thesis, rather than separately. The plot, music, dialogue, and songs were not changed in the two shows, but the staging, blocking, presentational style, sets, directorial choices, and setting were decidedly different in each. The differences and the similarities of the two distinct performances are articulated in the narrative description.

The Mission at San Juan

The Mission at San Juan Bautista was founded in 1797 by Franciscan friars of the Catholic church. One of the largest of the mission chain in California, the Mission brought the worship of Christianity to the Mexican residents as well as converting the local native Indian tribes. Until El Teatro Campesino brought theatrical presentations to the Mission in 1971, the purpose of the Mission was primarily that of an historical site and a house of worship. The edifice is composed mostly of adobe and wood, and is a California State Historical Monument. It has been restored to most of its original condition and is visited by tourists almost daily. The surrounding community of gentle hillsides has agriculture as its main economy. This is a peaceful valley which Valdez has described as a place where a "human being can change according to natural rhythms."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Valdez, El Teatro Campesino 38.

The Mission itself is relatively small with a seating capacity of around 200 people. Inside, the Christian icons and paintings of saints make the Mission immediately recognizable as a place of worship for the Christian faith. On one end is a large pulpit area where Masses and worship services are led. The four seating areas are wooden pews which face toward the altar. There are four aisles coming from four directions that make up the shape of a cross. The high ceiling suggests a reaching up to the heavens. The floor has a polished adobe surface, almost like cobblestones.

Surrounded by adobe walls and paintings and statuary of Christian origin, the Mission is instantly recognizable as a sacred arena for religious worship. It is a beautiful and reverent location for the presentation of a ritual drama of the Christian-Indio-Aztec-Catholic faiths. Even though El Teatro Campesino has a medium-sized theatre several streets away, which was converted from a packing shed, the primary performances of La Virgen and La Pastorela take place in this historic Mission.

El Teatro Campesino's relationship with the Mission and the people who administrate the Mission, which is primarily a place of worship, can sometimes be sensitive because of El Teatro's political practices and beliefs. Some of Valdez' plays deal with the plight of native American Indians, and because of the suggestion of persecution, oppression, and enslavement of native American Indians by the Catholic Church upon its arrival in native American California, the performance of La Virgen can take on political connotations as well as religious. La Virgen, as adapted by Valdez, speaks to the political and cultural situation of the native Indians under Spanish rule. In the dialogue, it is suggested that the Virgin of Guadalupe has come to save the Indians from the

injustices committed in the name of Christ, and she asks to have a temple built to symbolize the fact that Indians are also the children of God. In the program of La Virgen, Valdez points out the fact that Indians are still suffering in Latin America and that situations have not necessarily changed over the years. Valdez, in his introduction of La Virgen, speaks to this condition:

Present-day atrocities committed against the indios of Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua and other parts of Central and South America only underscore the severity of their historical condition. Only when the native inhabitants of this continent are treated as human beings will the love of the Virgen del Tepeyac be realized in the brotherhood we all share in the spirit of Christ.¹⁰⁹

Escalante, director of La Virgen Del Tepeyac, echoes this theme in her introduction to the performances:

In the midst of 500 years of continued resistance by the indigenous peoples of the American continents to maintain their cultures, traditions, and languages, Tonantzin-La Virgen Maria miraculously appeared in the New World. She said that she came for the indios, to end the injustices that were being committed in the name of her son, the crucified Christ, and to teach all of us to learn to live together in a mutually respectful peace and harmony.¹¹⁰

Because of the political stances that Valdez has articulated in La Virgen, some members of the Catholic Church, with respect to using the Mission as a performing space, have not always felt comfortable with El Teatro Campesino's performances of religious dramas (which can also be political) in the Mission San Juan. It should also be stated that not everyone in the community of San Juan Bautista actively participates in these yearly and seasonal rituals.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Valdez, introduction in the program notes to the production of La Virgen, December, 1992.

¹¹⁰ Escalante, introduction in the program notes to the production of La Virgen, December, 1992.

¹¹¹ Interview with Rosa Marie Escalante, director of La Virgen, November of 1992 in San Juan Bautista.

The Theatre and The Mission

In the performance space in San Francisco, the political and religious atmosphere is considerably different. Cowell Theatre at Fort Mason, located on a wharf on the north side of San Francisco, is a traditional theatre with lobby, proscenium stage, and comfortable cushion seats. The setting is a theatre with all the lighting, scenic, and theatrical capabilities. This space is comfortable, with reserved and numbered seats, and when one enters it, one expects to see a theatrical presentation. To call it a sacred place is a subject for the following chapter, dealing with ritual conclusions and considerations.

The entrance to the Mission has two large wooden and ornate doors and lends a special atmosphere to viewing a performance that is of religious, cultural, and historical importance. The audience in the Mission for the performance of La Virgen is seated in the four areas in wooden pews. There is a large wooden raised platform in the center of the four rows, in the middle of the "cross," where some of the performance is staged. Other scenic elements can be observed in the area of the altar. For the performance in San Francisco, the audience is greeted by a closed curtain.

The audience in the Mission, for the particular performance on December 5, 1992, was composed of all kinds of ethnic groups--Anglo, Hispanic, and other ethnic mixes. Even though the performance piece is performed all in Spanish, this fact has not dissuaded many people who do not speak Spanish from attending. The audiences for the performance in San Francisco, viewed January 3rd, 1993, could be said to be of all racial and ethnic mixes as well. Many of the people attending were observed to be Mexican-American and presumably spoke Spanish and/or were bilingual. Again, the program notes, in

a chronological scene-by-scene synopsis, were in English.

The Ritual Performance

The ritual drama in the Mission begins with the cast of performers gathering in a circle (again, the zero concept of the Aztecs). They ask, in song, for permission to offer a “good day” in homage to the “Paloma Blanca,” the White Dove, the symbol of the Virgin. They perform a circle dance, moving to their left (the direction of the spirit), arm in arm, symbolizing a harmonious feeling of unity. The mood for the show is immediately festive. The feathered Indian headresses, the brilliantly colored and authentic Aztec costumes, and the use of conchas give a religious, ancient, and historical feeling to the performance. Incense is waved in all the four directions of the compass. This ritualistic opening lends credence to the fact that this performance has religious connections. The program explains that this opening celebration is a preparation, a spiritual cleansing, as the performers embark on a journey in the retelling of this traditional Miracle play.

Entering from where the audience walked into the Mission, the dancers and singers dominate in the center of the Mission. In San Francisco, the performers entered down the aisles, coming through the audience, and walk or dance onto the stage by means of ramps.

In the Mission, there is an immediate and striking feeling of contrasts, as the Aztec performers, in their yellow, green, red, and blue costumes with an abundance of feathers, seem somewhat out of place in this Catholic Church--pagans celebrating in a Christian place of worship. But the celebratory mood and dramatic power of their dancing soon dispels the sacrilegious feelings. In contrast, in the theatre in San Francisco, the feeling is one of spectacle and not

of any particular religious significance other than what is expressed on the stage.

The actors in the Mission performance open up their circle to include the audience and offer a song and salute in prayer. They proclaim the reason for the gathering--to celebrate the apparition of Our Lady Of Guadalupe. The song is entitled "Here I Come To Salute You." The participants salute the four directions--El Oriente, El Norte, El Poniente, and El Sur. The Chorus sings to one of the directions:

Oriente es el primer viento / The East is the first wind
que debemos conquistar / which we should conquer
es la anima de San Juan / that is the soul of San Juan
que in el evangelio esta / which is in the gospel.¹¹²

Then the Aztecs go in the direction of the altar singing of the "Estrella Del Oriente" (The Star of the East) and position themselves for the next scene. Once at the altar, they perform another dance--the Dance of the Aztecs.

The dancers are composed of people from San Juan Bautista and other communities close to San Juan. The performers are young and old, male and female. Most of the participants have performed this spectacle many times,¹¹³ and can be seen enjoying this participation as they dance powerfully and skillfully. The younger members, who could be as young as ten or twelve years old, dance, perhaps, beside an uncle, father or brother, or mother or sister. The performance is a collective, community, and family event in a theatrical experience that could be expressed as "fun," by Schechner's definition.

¹¹² The translations used in this analysis are taken from an unpublished manuscript of La Virgen Del Tepeyac, dated 1976, which was given to this researcher prior to the performance in December, 1992.

¹¹³ Interview with Escalante, November, 1992, San Juan Bautista, California.

The instruments, as used in other Teatro performances, are conchas, drums, maracas, guitar, violins, and a variety of rhythm instruments. The pounding of the drums, whistles, and the blowing of the conchas signify the changing of scenes. In Scene Five of La Virgen, for example, the Spanish conquerors arrive to the threatening and militaristic pounding of drums.

With the Aztecs on the altar, the Spanish contingent enters through the large wooden doors in the rear of the Mission. In the San Francisco version they arrived, as the Aztecs did, through the audience. The Aztecs in San Francisco, however, are not on an altar but positioned on the proscenium stage. The stage in San Francisco, in contrast to the Mission environs has an Aztec pyramid centerstage with a large Aztec calendar on the highest level. Where in the Mission the lighting is limited, the Cowell Theatre offers dramatic lighting capabilities. While the interior of the Mission is decorated with ornate religious sculptures, paintings and icons, the proscenium stage is bordered with Aztec colors and designs. Whereas the Mission in San Juan is considered "sacred ground," the theatre in San Francisco could be said to be converted to a "sacred place" by the introduction of religious symbols.

In the Mission spectacle, the sight of the Conquistadors with the Catholic Franciscan Priests behind them entering from one part of the Mission and the Aztecs poised on the altar makes for the effect of an immediate cultural schism. The dramatic effect is the same in the comfortable theatre in San Francisco. The Aztecs are colorful in their bright costumes, and the soldiers in their helmets and armor and the priests in their dull browns and blacks create a sharp and contrasting picture of cultures in conflict. The scene impacts a symbolic representation of the conquest of Mexico by the Spaniards. The program notes

that the year is 1519.

After a symbolic battle takes place, the leaders of the Aztecs come forward. The Spanish want to convert the Indians to Catholicism. The leaders complain about the disruption of their culture and want to retain their own society, government, cultural, and ancient spiritual beliefs. But the Spanish overrule the leaders' protestations, and some of the Indians become converted to Catholicism through the act of baptism. Among the converts is Juan Diego, to whom the Virgen will appear. His uncle, who will play a significant role in the dramatic unfolding of events, is converted also. They are ceremoniously divested of their rich and colorful Aztec costumes and dressed in simple peasant clothes.

The audience is told in the program that the next scene takes place many years later in 1531. Juan Diego awakes in his humble dwelling and decides to go to market. He complains about the treatment of his people by the Spanish, reflecting on the hardships of his people and asking if the Aztec indios are also the children of God.

It should be stated at this point that Juan Diego is not only a dramatic character but also a comic figure. This element has been introduced by Valdez, who often injects humor into many of his dramatic works, to give some comic relief to this powerful and moving story. The comedy introduced is not slapstick or farcical as in *commedia*, but composed more of verbal jokes and humor. Because of the fact that all of the dialogue is in Spanish, almost all of the humor in the play is lost on the English-only-speaking part of the audience. Occasional and collective laughing by members of the Spanish-speaking members of the audience to comic dialogue gives the non-Spanish-speaking

portion of the audience both a feeling of curiosity and alienation--as if they have missed something important.

Further on in the play, as Juan Diego laments his plight and the persecution of his people, music sounds and Juan discovers himself on the Hill of Tepeyac. With heavenly music in the background--soft, melodic, and quiet in its tone--the Virgen of Guadalupe appears for the first time to Juan Diego.

In the Mission, the Virgin appears on a ledge off to the side of the church, elevated, and posed in a classic Madonna portrait. Her hands folded and her head tilted to one side, the actress symbolizes a heavenly position above the audience. In San Francisco, the Virgin appears on the top of the Aztec pyramid in front of the Aztec calendar with heavenly lights radiating out from behind her on a screen. Because of the intimacy in the Mission, the Virgin sings in a natural voice. In San Francisco, she uses a microphone which projects her voice. This amplification suggests that her voice is coming from all around or up above, creating the effect of her voice originating from a supernatural source.

The Virgen speaks to Juan Diego:

Hijo Mio / My son
queridísimo Cuauhlatoczin / dearest Cuauhlatoczin
quiero que sepas que yo soy / I want you to know that I am
la Virgen Maria / The Virgin Mary
Madre de Dios / Mother of God
Autor de la vida / Giver of life
Creador de todas las cosas / Creator of all things
presente en todo lugar / present in all places.

The Virgin, through dialogue and song, asks Juan Diego to take a message to the Bishop, El Obispo, requesting that a church be built where she has appeared. This is the same location as a temple of the Aztec deity, Tonantzin, the Mother of the Earth. Juan Diego, overwhelmed that he has been

chosen to carry the message, agrees, in a reverent pose, to speak to the Bishop in the Virgin's behalf.

At this point, to the accompaniment of conchas, guitars, and drums, the setting is changed. In the Mission, wooden tables are placed on the altar, representing the Bishop's residence. In the theatre, the Aztec calendar is removed and wooden pillars are erected on top of the pyramid. This changing of sets symbolizes, especially in the Cowell Theatre, of the taking over of the Spaniards, and the replacement of the Aztec symbols of worship with Catholic symbols.

At the Bishop's residence, Juan Diego's report of the appearance of the Virgin is scoffed at by the Bishop's friars, and Juan is driven away. Upon learning about Juan's visit, however, the Bishop is intrigued and orders that Juan be brought back.

A comic song is sung in Spanish by Juan Diego and some of the peasants at this point in the play. Many of the audience members laugh, again reflecting that many of the audience members are Spanish-speaking. Obviously, the audience members who comprehend only English or other languages, cannot understand the humor since most of it is verbal. But the comic moments are understood, in a universal sense, as such because of the attitude, tone, and postures of the actors performing the comedy.

In the next scene, the Virgin appears to Juan Diego for the second time. Both in the Mission and the theatre, the Virgin is carried by women, some of whom are carrying candles. The Virgin, being carried, appears to be hovering, floating, above the ground. The scene is sparsely lit. Most of the illumination comes from the candles. In the theatre, she appears on the steps of the

pyramid. In the Mission, she stands in the center of the aisles, in the "cross." As the Virgin sings, many of the women sit around her in reverent obedience.

Her hands beginning in a prayer position, the Virgin gradually opens them up, reaching out with her palms, communicating her wishes to Juan Diego. Juan Diego expresses his failure to meet with the Bishop, but the Virgin inspires him with renewed confidence and asks him to convey her message of love.

The director of La Virgen Del Tepeyac, Escalante, confided in an interview that she wanted to make this production more representative of a woman's viewpoint. She also expressed that she wanted to reflect not only the four corners of the universe, but the changing of the seasons with each apparition. The director chose different colors to reflect each season and used other symbols to achieve this effect, such as the appearance of the moon in the third apparition to symbolize the season of winter.¹¹⁴

Continuing with the story, Juan Diego again returns to the Bishop, and finally is able to see him. But, again, he is rebuffed by the skepticism of the friars who believe his tale to be a conspiracy plotted by the Indians. The Bishop, while reluctant, is impressed by Juan Diego's sincerity. Yet Juan Diego is turned away nonetheless.

The scene changes and an Aztec dance is again performed. The movements of the dancers are powerful and strong as the beat is pounded out by thundering drums. The enthusiasm of the people performing these dances is unmistakable. The performers dance with joy which is shared by the audience who get caught up in the enthusiasm of these ancient dances. Again, this is the

¹¹⁴ Interview with Escalante, November, 1992.

“fun” part of Schechner’s criteria for entertainment. The dedication of the people who perform in El Teatro Campesino’s seasonal spectacles cannot be denied. Many of them believe deeply in what they are performing and this carries over into their performance. This aspect doesn’t imply that the performers are caught up in a trance or possessed. Yet the effect could be compared to what Artaud experienced upon seeing the Balinese dancers in Paris which prompted him to write his treatise, The Theatre and its Double,¹¹⁵ which advocates the bringing of more passion into theatrical performances.

The people who perform in La Virgen come from all walks of life, and since the play is a community event, most of the actors are unpaid. The performance schedule can be demanding as well, for the casts perform many times for many weeks, sometimes twice a day. One performance is given at sunrise on a Sunday, which can eliminate it from being described as merely entertainment and establish it as a religious or “spiritual” ritual, performed by people who believe that what they are performing is not only a cultural experience but, for the faithful, a religious one as well.

The Aztec dances are performed in the Mission in the center of the aisles in the “cross” or El Cruzero. In the proscenium setting in San Francisco, the dances are performed not only onstage but also an attempt is made to include the audience by placing some of the dancers in the aisles leading to the stage area, creating a theatre-in-the-round effect.

When the Virgin appears for the third time in the Mission performance, she is found among the Aztecs in El Cruzero, in the center on the wooden

¹¹⁵Antonin Artaud, The Theater and its Double, Mary C. Richards, trans., (New York: Grove Books, 1958).

platforms. The sounds of birds calling and violins and guitars playing, are complemented by a moving blue fabric. A flowing motion to the scene immediately precedes her appearance. One of the actresses carries a symbolic half moon which symbolizes that the appearance is taking place during the winter season. The Virgin is now on the ground level: with each appearance she has come closer to the earth and to the people of the earth. In the San Francisco performance, the same scene is enacted on the stage, on the stairs of the Aztec pyramid, accompanied by dramatic blue lighting effects.

When Juan Diego approaches her, he expresses his doubts and pleads that she should find a new messenger. The Virgin, with a soft and heavenly voice, instructs Juan Diego to continue his mission. She also explains that she has come to end the suffering of the Indians under the rule of the Spanish.

As the scene changes, more props are added to the altar in the Mission where the Bishop's residence is located. Onstage in San Francisco, more scenic changes take place as well. Where the Aztec calendar once stood, at the top of the pyramid, there stands wooden pillars and large wooden doors, thereby making the transition and conquest complete--from the open and natural pagan world of the Aztecs to the closed and formal Spanish world of Catholicism.

Juan Diego encounters the Bishop for a third time, and despite the protestations of his friars, the Bishop asks Juan Diego for proof. The Virgin must send the Bishop a sign. The Bishop requests Juan Diego bring him red Spanish Castillian roses which did not exist on the American continent at that time. After Juan Diego leaves, the Bishop orders one of his servants, a humorous character, to follow Juan. With the help of some of the peasant

children who are playing, dancing, and singing, Juan Diego escapes detection by the servant who becomes comically frustrated. The children dance with the spirit of fun, gaiety, and celebration.

At this point in the play, conflict occurs again as Juan's uncle has become ill, and is dying of smallpox. Set to sad, reflective music, the Indios express their fears that the fever has been brought by the white man and given to them through baptism. Juan Diego explains to them that the Mother of God has appeared and will help them. This time, it is the Aztecs who doubt Juan Diego's claims, and Juan Diego again seeks out the Virgin for help.

During this peasant scene, and other scenes involving the Aztec people, many natural and symbolic elements are used for mood and effect. The use of real fire--from sources like torches and candles--adds a natural light which gives a powerful and religious or "spiritual" glow to the Mission setting. In the San Francisco performance, the same elements are used for dramatic effect.

When the Virgin appears for the fourth and final time, she appears in the Mission on the altar, rising, amidst celebrating Aztecs. The Virgin is dressed in green, symbolic of the season of spring when life is blooming anew out of a winter's sleep, a time of rebirth and renewal. Again the Virgin is elevated, this time on the shoulders of muscular Aztec warriors. The Virgin's hands folded together between her breasts in a prayer position, she tells Juan Diego that the time for the miracle has arrived. She tells him that his uncle has recovered and that the roses can be picked from the hillside of Tepeyac where she has made her four appearances. The miracle has arrived, she explains, that will bring a new age for all in the Americas and all believers in the true brotherhood of man. Juan Diego is given a piece of cloth (known as a tilma) which he is to present

along with the roses.

The Virgin also reveals herself to the uncle as well, who is a leader among the Aztecs. She explains to him that she is both La Virgen de Guadalupe and the Azteca Virgen Te Coatlixopeuh ("She who steps on the Serpent--the earth"). She instructs the uncle to help Juan Diego in the presenting of the roses to the Bishop. The Virgin says to Juan Diego:

Llega, Juan, llega hijo mio / Go, Juan, go, my son
sin recelo ni temor / without fear or mistrust.
no te admiraran esas rosas / The roses will not admire you.
que otro prodigio es mayor / Some other prodigy is greater
que vera el Obispo en tu tilma. / which the Bishop will see in your
tilma.
pues tantas pruebas me pidio / Since so many proofs he has
asked of me,
que si rosas pide las rosas / if he ask for roses of me, roses
le mando yo, que aunque el tiempo / I will send him. Even though
the time
ex contratio las crie con mi / is contrary, I created them with my
gran poder. Y asi vete ya hijo mio / great power. So go, my son,
que ya el tiempo se llevo de / already the time has come
que este nuevo mundo vea / within which this new world should
see
las finezas de me amor. / the perfection of my love.

In the final scene of the play, the roses are unrolled from the cloth in front of the bishop and a painted picture of the Virgin is discovered to be embossed on the cloth. In the end, the Aztec King and the Catholic Bishop stand together in unity, holding the painted figure of the Madonna between them. The symbolic coming together of the two cultures has been completed through the religious intervention of La Virgen del Tepeyac.

In the end, all the characters appear before the altar and sing to uplifting and joyous music. The celebratory mood is continued with all members of the cast bowing by twos to the Virgin tilma. Even the actress who played La Virgen

appears as a member of the celebration. This appearance by the actors as real human beings is a trademark of all the ritual dramas of El Teatro Campesino. The action of the actors appearing out of their character roles at the end of the performances serves to bond the audience with the performers, letting the audience know that they have viewed a play. The effect brings the audience into alignment with their communality, their humanness with the actors. Turner would call this phenomenon “communitas.”

In both productions, the audience claps rhythmically with the performers as the actors join hands, bow to the Virgin tilma, and exit two by two, singing. The audience becomes part of the celebratory mood. Again, as in La Pastorela, the cast waits at the entrance to the Mission for the audience to depart, shaking hands and surrounding the audience as they leave. This is another bonding element of El Teatro Campesino in their ritual drama performances and it functions to create a unifying effect of the actors with the audience.

In the San Francisco performance of La Virgen in Cowell Theatre at Fort Mason, this element of the actors waiting for the audience to exit was lacking. Perhaps this was because of fire codes, or directorial choice. Because of this, the bonding effect in the end was lost; the performers bowed at the conclusion of the performance and remained on the stage preserving a “fourth wall” separation from the audience.

Interpretations

This ritual performance, taking place as it does during the Christmas season, highlights the seasonal aspects of the production. All of the ritual elements are present in La Virgen, such as ritual time and action. The only deviation, by ritual definition, is the idea of performing in a “sacred place.” Even

though the performance location in San Francisco is different, the “sacred place” is a theatre and, perhaps, has become “sacred” merely because of the ritual drama performing there. The locations for the two differently staged productions of La Virgen lead to a debate as to the “sacredness” and efficacy when the drama is performed outside the Mission location, and this is discussed in the following chapter.

La Virgen is performed traditionally and formally, and is related to “mystical beings and powers” and can claim “an ancient history.” The religious symbols, the clash in cultures (which might suggest a “social drama” proposed by Victor Turner), the combined symbolism and mythology of Aztec beliefs and Catholicism, the repetition of movements in the ritual performance, the sacred times of performance (such as performing at sunrise), the recognition of the four “spiritual” directions of the universe in Aztec and Mayan thought, the community involvement by the residents of San Juan Bautista and other local communities, and the universal cosmological intentions by Valdez and the members of El Teatro Campesino, encourage a ritualistic experience when viewing La Virgen Del Tepeyac.

In the performance/ritual categories established by Schechner, La Virgen is definitely “linked to an absent Other.” The audience participates as well as watches in the Mission presentation. In the San Francisco version, however, the audience cannot be said to participate except in a theatre-in-the-round aspect. The time frame in which La Virgen is performed is symbolic time-- historical time yet mythological time as well--that incorporates both Aztec and Christian mythology. The performance does not take place in the “now,” but in another place and another time. La Virgen, for many of the performers, is a

testimony of faith, and involves a collective experience for the participants. Again, some of the audience members have a deep religious commitment, so viewing the performance of La Virgen renews and affirms their faith.

The audiences who attend La Virgen Del Tepeyac, El Baile De Los Gigantes, and La Pastorelas cross over into different categories of various religious faiths, ethnic diversification, and cultural heritage. Yet the performances may serve a ritual function for those who are not of Mexican-American heritage, and are affected by the “universal spirit” of the performances as intended by Valdez. Because Valdez and El Teatro Campesino are expanding their performances outside the San Juan Bautista area, are the ritual dramas losing their “efficacy”? This is a question that members of El Teatro Campesino are asking themselves as well, according to Escalante.¹¹⁶ Some universal considerations and theoretical conclusions about the three ritual dramas are offered in the next chapter.

¹¹⁶ Interview with Escalante, November 1992.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSIONS

General Considerations

El Teatro Campesino's ritual dramas easily fall into the general categories of ritual behavior. In terms of the relationship to sacred beliefs, each drama refers to some characteristic feeling, respect, and awe involving mystical powers. In La Pastorela, the birth of Jesus, the Son of God, is the event that encourages the shepherds to journey to Bethlehem. El Baile De Los Gigantes is composed of actors who portray supernatural beings and are reenacting the creation of the world. The appearance of the Virgin Mary, who is the mother of God (Madre de Dios), in the New World forms the foundation for the performance of La Virgen Del Tepeyac. The rituals, whether Christian (Catholic) or Mayan and Aztec based, depend on a belief system that is expressed in the language of myth.

The ritual dramas are performed at specific times of the year which are designated as "sacred times," not only in the Mexican-American community but

in the general Anglo-American culture as well. The two ritual dramas that especially meet this criteria are La Virgen and La Pastorela. They are both performed during the holiday season of Christmas and New Year's as celebrated in the United States. Regarding Gigantes, the "sacred time" is mostly Mayan in origin. While the ritual has ancient or "liminal" roots, the summer solstice is not generally celebrated in American culture or in the Mexican-American culture. One purpose of the ritual drama, of course, is to expand the cultural awareness of all peoples as to the sacred practices of the Mesoamerican Indian.

All of the dramas are generally performed in "sacred places." El Baile De Los Gigantes can be performed anywhere, in any "open space." Because of the Mayan philosophy, any "space" that is in the "open air" and in a "natural" environment can serve as a proper place for the performance of Mayan ritual dramas. With La Virgen and La Pastorela, the usual performing spaces are in churches, cathedrals and, specifically, the Mission of San Juan Bautista where the community takes part in the performance of the ritual dramas.

El Teatro Campesino has expanded their activities, however, to include these productions in "non-sacred" performing arenas, such as the performance of La Virgen in the Cowell Theatre at Fort Mason in San Francisco. Whether these productions can transfer the ritual dramas to a place that is not normally a "holy space" and still retain their original ritual quality is a matter for speculation that is dealt with later on in this concluding chapter.

The ritual elements of the dramas easily lend themselves to dramatic and ritual interpretation in their enactment. The costumes, lights, scenery, and staging in particular, reflect a mixture of cultures, which is the heritage of the

Mexican-American experience. In La Pastorela, the most “modern” of the plays, a diversity exists with the influence of many cultures--the use of concha that symbolize the ancient cultures of Mesoamerica, the armies of good and evil represented by San Miguel and his Archangels, and the devilish hoards of Lucifer, peasants dressed in Mexican peasant costumes who encounter a Sultan and his dancing harem girls, and the comic reference to locales and “modern” dialogue familiar to audiences of that region. The effect achieved by the many influences speaks to a multicultural experience that can be related to by a person of Mexican-American heritage or of Anglo-American descent. These ritual elements reflect the community within which El Teatro Campesino resides.

With El Baile De Los Gigantes, the associations are not as clear in their ritual function. Reviving the ancient creation myth of the Maya-Quiche for general American audiences, and in some cases, the Mexican-American unfamiliar with his cultural past, makes the efficacious values of the ritual drama difficult to interpret. The symbolic elements, for example, such as the ball game, have little relationship as a ritual action for “modern” audiences unfamiliar with Mayan customs. As a “cultural ritual,” Gigantes can serve a necessary function in acquainting a person of Hispanic origin with his Mayan roots.

Yet, beyond the cultural aspects in the performing of the ritual drama, the performance of Gigantes has also effected a change in the religious or “spiritual” beliefs of Mexican-Americans who have performed or observed the ritual drama and this is testified to by some of the actors who were interviewed in Santa Barbara and by Escalante. Again, as was documented in Chapter Three which detailed the transcendental belief system of El Teatro Campesino,

the troupe does not ascribe to any one religious belief but incorporates a more general approach to the phenomenon of spirituality. Valdez and El Teatro Campesino believe, in the performing of Gigantes, that they are adding to the “harmony of the universe” and “cleansing the world of negative energy.” What the audience chooses to believe or accept as an experience on an efficacious level is a subjective experience that is relative to their background and religious beliefs. It does not serve this thesis to question the religious or transcendental efficacy of a performing company or their audiences whose sacred roots may be buried deep in their “corazon” (soul).

The ritual power of La Virgen has a direct correlation and relationship to the Mexican-American culture and community. The ties with the past are easily apparent. The conflict of cultures in the conquest of Mexico by the Spaniards is an historical event that almost any Mexican-American can identify with as part of his mythology. The ritual elements, such as Aztec and Spanish Franciscan Friar costumes, or the use of the Aztec calendar in the stage version of the play in San Francisco, immediately symbolizes for the person of Hispanic descent his or her cultural heritage and religious beliefs. The appearance of the Virgin Mary in the New World on the hill where the Aztec goddess Tonantzin resided spoke to two conflicting cultures and brought a symbiotic closeness and a relative peace to the clash of two contrasting and opposing religious belief systems.

In all, these ritual dramas are not only entertaining, according to Schechner’s definition, but can also affect a participant (actor/director/musician) or observer (audience member) to consider his or her own religious beginnings and belief system. Other ritual considerations should be mentioned as well.

Modes of Ritual

Based on the definitions offered by Grimes regarding the modes of ritual, the ritual dramas of El Teatro Campesino fall into several categories. The liberal interpretation of liturgy, as defined by Grimes, allows for each of the ritual dramas to be defined as liturgical, because they operate within an “ultimate frame of reference and the doing of which is felt to be of cosmic necessity.”¹¹⁷ In Gigantes, the frame of reference is Mayan and El Teatro Campesino believes that when the drama is performed that they are contributing to the “cosmic spirit” of the universe. La Pastorela reflects a Christian belief system, and La Virgen symbolizes both the Aztec cultural and transcendent beliefs as well as that of Spanish Catholicism. The ritual dramas also employ “magic.” The performances, according to Grimes, are “deeds having transcendent reference and accomplishing some desired empirical result.”¹¹⁸ The desired results of the dramas can be cultural awareness and/or transcendental manifestations.

All of the dramas are principally “celebrations” in that they celebrate the occurrence of an historical or mythical event, whether it is the Birth of Jesus or the creation of the world. The basic mood is one of “formalized feeling.”¹¹⁹ Many of the residents of the community of San Juan Bautista join in with the performing group of El Teatro Campesino to ritually reenact their mythologies. The performances of the plays are festive occasions that lend themselves to symbolic and ritualistic renewal of their faith system. These faith systems are not the only criteria for ritual examination and explanation, however.

¹¹⁷ Grimes 43.

¹¹⁸ Grimes 45.

¹¹⁹ Grimes 48.

Liminal/Liminoid and Efficacy/Entertainment

The ritual dramas of El Teatro Campesino can be said to fall into both categories of Turner's definitions of "liminal" and "liminoid" ritual activity as easily as they do with Schechner's categories of "Efficacy" and "Entertainment." Turner relates "liminal" with pre-industrial cultures whose belief systems are linked to mystical powers which can have efficacy, "efficacy" according to Schechner's determinations. The "liminoid" ritual activities in post-industrial societies, according to Turner, happen in a leisure state, such as the arts, and can be related to Schechner's "entertainment" category.

Because the participants (actors) and observers (audience) can be connected to sacred beliefs, their experience can be said to be "liminal" and "efficacious." To the participants and audience who are not religiously connected to the ritual dramas, the effect can be said to be "liminoid" and "entertaining."

All of the performances of the ritual dramas of El Teatro Campesino reenact ancient mythologies and sacred beliefs that are "liminal" yet they are performed to audiences in a "liminoid" or "post-industrial" environment. In the creation myth based on the Popol Vuh, for example, the supernatural beings who are portrayed reflect the sacred beliefs of a "pre-literate" culture. Few of the audience members are familiar with the sacred myths of the Mayans, however. Yet the performance of El Baile De Los Gigantes can have a "liminoid" effect in that the ritual activity happens in a "leisure state." Because of the fact that Turner applies ritual effects to the arts in "post-industrial" cultures, the performance of the ritual dramas can effect the enjoyment of a "liminoid" experience. Yet the performance of Gigantes has ritual properties that speak to

a larger existence and can transform the audience and the participants to a different “state of consciousness.” With Valdez believing that the performance has “purification” effects, “liminal” properties are even more readily apparent and applicable.

According to Turner’s definitions, many of the participants and audiences of Mexican-American heritage are ritually celebrating their religious roots (particularly in La Pastorela and La Virgen) and this indicates that the people who have faith in what they are observing are experiencing a “liminal” phenomenon as they are renewing their faith in ancient beliefs, whether in Christianity or Mesoamerican Indian cosmology. Since many of the audience members are non-Spanish speaking, however, and not Mexican-American in ethnicity, the “liminoid” application bears credence, as these audience members who are not part of the culture come to appreciate the rituals as a “liminoid” experience and entertainment.

As the ritual dramas are observed as entertainment and ritual, Schechner’s chart easily comes into play. For the audience with a faith system which relates to the performing to these dramas, efficacy is the predominate influence. For the audiences who are not connected to the culture, or who don’t identify with the belief system even though of Hispanic origin, entertainment (theatre) is the motivating factor. For Valdez, the driving force behind the presentation of these drama is “results.” El Teatro Campesino believes that by performing the ritual dramas some aspect of religious renewal is forthcoming. For audiences who are not believers, the effect is that of “fun.” For the audience member or actor who “believes,” the experience is one of “reaffirmation of faith.” For the participant or observer who doesn’t “believe,” the effect is one of

“appreciation.” Yet, as Schechner has pointed out, because of the nature of the ritual dramas as performed by El Teatro Campesino, the audience is expected to participate in the ritual, whether a belief system is present for them or not--if only in the holding of hands in a circle at the end of the presentation, or passing through and greeting the performers at the conclusion of the play. Because the participants usually perform in a “theatre-in-the-round” setting, audience inclusion and involvement is unavoidable. Since the dramas take place in “symbolic time,” the audience is transported to another time and place, which can be said in these dramas to be “mythic time.” The actors are also cautioned however to not allow themselves to become “possessed, as in a trance” in performance and to “know what they are doing,” which can take away from the efficacy of the performance, according to Schechner.

The ritual dramas of El Teatro Campesino fall into both of Schechner’s and Turner’s categories because of the fact that they are performed not only for themselves and the members of their culture who have sacred beliefs related to that culture but also to general American audiences. This phenomenon speaks to the fact that the dramas appeal to a spectrum of meanings and differing degrees of efficacy. The individual experience, both by performer and audience, is relative, personal, and subjective, and can vary according to the individual’s ethnic background, religious and educational training, and cultural influences.

But the ritual dramas have been expanding outside their normal “sacred” performing spaces. The community casts of San Juan Bautista have recently been asked to perform outside the church environs and perform in theatres, such as in San Francisco. The local Mission environment is replaced with a

theatre that facilitates full stage lighting effects, proscenium concerns, and auditorium seating. The full power of these spectacles may not be lost but some of its efficacy may suffer.

Sacred Space versus Theatre Space

Since El Teatro Campesino has expanded its operations and is performing outside the "sacred space" of the missions and cathedrals they traditionally perform in, it is only appropriate to consider what ritual elements they may gain and what elements they may lose. Certainly El Teatro Campesino is reaching a larger audience, and the theatrical power of the spectacle is not lost. But performing in a theatre brings a different ritual element into play. The performances of La Virgen Del Tepeyac were observed in both the Mission at San Juan and in the Cowell Theatre in San Francisco. To this researcher, the feelings of sacredness were substantially different between the two experiences. Someone who had not seen both performances might not have noticed the difference but since this researcher is interested in the ritual properties and behaviors of the ritual dramas that El Teatro Campesino performs, the difference was distinctive enough to be noticeable.

Substantially, the ritual properties were almost identical in both performances except for the characteristic of "ritual space." All of the other elements were in place--ritual time, ritual action, ritual objects, ritual sound, and ritual language. Some of the settings and lighting effects were changed but the performance in the theatre was not significantly or externally different from the performance in the Mission.

But something seemed lacking, in this researcher's judgment, in the performance in the theatre. Some of the awe and reverence was missing. In

the Mission performance, as in the performance of La Pastorela in St. Joseph's Cathedral in San Jose, the religious setting gave a feeling of special sacredness, as if you were watching a performance of long ago that had some historical and mystical connections. In the theatre, besides all the stage properties and elaborate sets, this feeling of awe and wonder of the worship of mystical beings was somehow missing in the theatre performance. This strange effect may be because this researcher experienced both productions. Certainly, the performances in the theatre didn't lack any efficacy or theatrical power, any more than the church performances did.

Perhaps, considering the Mayan concept of universal harmony and natural performing areas for El Baile De Los Gigantes, any performing space will suffice for El Teatro Campesino as long as the mythology is present and most of the ritual properties are evident. For all practical purposes, it appeared that the audiences for the two performances of La Virgen were equally entertained and moved by the experience. And it was evident that many of the audience members were of Spanish-American heritage because of the laughter that was manifested in both of the Spanish dialogue productions. Both performances reflected efficacy and entertainment characteristics.

Because of both the efficacious nature and entertainment quality of these ritual dramas, the effects of these multicultural performances can also have social implications on the people who observe and participate in them.

Valdez' Ritual Dramas as "Social Dramas"

Turner suggests that in the unfolding of a "social drama," the conflict can bring about fundamental changes in society. Valdez' ritual dramas can be said to have these conflicts. Some are relatively obvious. In La Virgen Del Tepeyac,

for example, it is stated in the program that the Indios of Latin and Central America are still being persecuted and the plight of the Indians should be recognized. The appearance of the Virgin Mary plays a significant role in the relieving of the suffering of the Aztec people. An enormous "social drama" occurred with the invasion of Mexico by the Spanish which had the effect of overwhelming the Aztec and Mayan civilization and culture; this "social drama" is also portrayed and dramatized in La Virgen.

In the case of El Baile De Los Gigantes, the effect and intention of the drama is not only to make Mexican-Americans aware of their cultural roots but also to add to a "harmony in the universe," according to Mayan cosmology. The conflicts that arise in this dance-drama are the struggle between the forces of good and evil in the creation of the cosmos. La Pastorela reaffirms the belief in a Christian god through reenacting his celebrated birth, and demonstrates a powerful conflict between the forces of good and the forces of evil.

Other effects of a "social drama" in Valdez' work are not so obvious. As was stated earlier in the thesis, the Mexican-American culture has gone through many transformations. The towns and cities of California, for example, have Spanish names. The towns became inhabited by Anglo-Americans after they won the Mexican-American war. Valdez expresses some of his misgivings, anger, and his underlying intentions in some of his dramatic endeavors in the book, Aztlan:

Man has been in the Americas for more than 38,000 years. White men have been around for less than five hundred. It is presumptuous, even dangerous, for anyone to pretend that the Chicano, the "Mexican-American," is only one more in the long line of hyphenated-immigrants to the New World. We are the New World.¹²⁰

¹²⁰ Valdez, Aztlan xiv.

Today, much of the population of the Southwestern United States is Hispanic and the ratio of Spanish-speaking and bilingual peoples to English-only-speaking persons is expanding proportionately every year. Many of the schools in California are becoming bilingual in English and Spanish out of necessity. Valdez appeals to this phenomenon:

Anglo America, no doubt, will resent the bilingualism of the Chicano. The average educated gabacho will probably interpret bilingual Chicano literature as reflecting the temporary bicultural confusion of the "Mexican American." If the Anglo cannot accept the coming reality of America, que se lo lleve la jodida. Otherwise, he can learn Spanish, which is the language of most of the people in America.¹²¹

La Pastorela and El Baile De Los Gigantes, as performed by El Teatro Campesino, are performed in English and in Spanish. La Virgen Del Tepeyac is performed entirely in Spanish. Plot outlines are provided in the programs of the productions which are in English but not in Spanish. By using the Spanish language and ancient and sacred ideas of the Mesoamerican experience as a catalyst for transition, Valdez is creating a "social drama." And by performing his plays bilingually, the ritual dramas are expanding to a larger base of operation.

Turner expressed that he believes that art plays an distinct, definable "antistructural" role in social evolution--a clearing house of ideas. Theatre, Turner also believed, can be an agent for social and political change. Valdez can be said to confront the American audience through the use of language and religion to bring about social change, a transformation in the structure of the American society. Thus, El Teatro Campesino is performing "social dramas" as well as ritual dramas.

¹²¹ Valdez, Aztlan xxxi.

But effecting the American culture through “social transcendence” or secular transformation is not the sole intention for performing these ritual dramas. Without the sacred basis and religious foundations for these dramas, the original purpose for performing them would be lost.

“Restored Behavior” and Transcendence

“Something happens”¹²² to a person when they observe, or participate, in a theatrical presentation. When the theatrical presentation is a ritual drama, something occurs which can be said to be of a transcendental nature. Many of the members of the audience and participants in the performances who experience the ritual dramas of El Teatro Campesino report a phenomenon that could be described as “religious awakenings.”¹²³

Several people of Mexican-American descent who have worked on the productions suddenly became aware of their religious roots and have renewed their sacred beliefs since working with El Teatro Campesino. As one actor, who was born in San Jose, California, expressed it, “Thanks to Teatro, I have reaffirmed my belief in my Indian roots. I used to put down my mother’s medicinal Indian remedies as she practiced them in the home.” Another actor exclaimed, “I used to be strictly Christian in my beliefs but now I’m more open-minded about universal energies.” An actress expressed that she “shares a spiritual consciousness when performing the rituals but was unfamiliar with her Aztec origins until performing with Teatro.”¹²⁴

Van Gennep suggests that a person has passed through the “limen” or threshold when participating in a ritual. Turner would describe the

¹²² Schechner, Between Theatre and Anthropology 10.

¹²³ Interview with Escalante, May, 1992.

¹²⁴ Interviews with the performing company, Santa Barbara, California, May, 1992.

phenomenon as “communitas.” Eliade explains that by means of ritual, a person may actually relive these myths through their reenactment. Schechner calls the experience one of “restored behavior.” All of these theoretical characteristics are similar in their interpretation and explanations with minor deviations. The differences are mostly semantic while attempting to explain the transformation or transcendental states in ritual terms.

In the ritual dramas of El Teatro Campesino, the theory that best fits the experience of participating or observing a ritual performance is Schechner’s idea of “restored behavior.” In each of the dramas, the participants are asked to become someone other than who they are, although that someone they become can have some connection with their own sacred beliefs. Because the actor is performing an act that comes from his own culture and religious background, the action is of “rebecoming” a part of his culture. In this case, the individuals (actors) and the groups (audience) have a chance to rebecome what they once were. Eliade would state that the myths are actually being relived. By reenacting the myths, the past can be made the present. Schechner would also explain the phenomenon as returning to their “starting places.” In the performance of El Baile De Los Gigantes, for example, when a person of Chicano heritage actually sees a performance of a myth that is part of his culture but he has never experienced it first hand, as he would in a theatrical presentation reenacting a Mayan myth, he would react by being restimulated to his transcendental past. Van Gennep would say he had passed through the threshold, and encountered a rite of passage. These phenomena are common occurrences with performers who become involved with El Teatro Campesino and their ritual dramas. This certainly doesn’t happen for every participant and

observer but it can happen for some of the actors and members of the audiences who observe and participate in the ritual dramas. Valdez and El Teatro Campesino believe that they create, for many of the participants and observers, a transcendental experience where, "by means of the rite, (a person) breaks his solitude, returns to being one with creation, and finds opened the doors of communion with his otherness."¹²⁵

The community participation by the residents of San Juan Bautista is a determining factor in the efficacy of these ritual dramas. The inhabitants, through the resident performing group of El Teatro Campesino, are given an opportunity to reenact their past, their sacred beliefs, their culture, and their transcendental roots and beginnings. The groups of families that participate alongside Valdez and his compatriots in the theatre troupe are able to "rejoin the living mythic time of (their) subjectivity."¹²⁶ The spiritual beliefs of the surrounding community of San Juan Bautista, or members of the theatrical troupe, whether Mayan or Aztec, Catholic or Christian, are being relived, renewed, and reaffirmed in a ritualistic mode, year after year, through the reenactment of these mythological dramas.

¹²⁵ Boland 8.

¹²⁶ Boland 8.

THE RITUAL DRAMAS OF EL TEATRO CAMPESINO

Bibliography

- Amankolor, J. Ndukaku. "The Condition of Ritual in Theatre: An Intercultural Perspective." Performing Arts Journal. Paj 33, Vol. xi, No. 3, 1989.
- Ashley, Kathleen M., ed. Victor Turner and the Construction of Cultural Criticism: Between Literature and Anthropology. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990.
- Aristotle. Poetics. Theodore Buckley, trans. London: Bohn, 1914.
- Artaud, Antonin. The Theater and Its Double. Trans. Mary C. Richards. New York: Grove, 1958.
- Barba, Eugenio. "Theatre Anthropology." Drama Review. #26, 1982.
- _____. A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology: The Secret Art of the Performer. London/New York: Routledge, 1991.
- Boland, Mary Denning. "An Analysis of the Theater of Luis Valdez." Diss. Saint Louis University: University Microfilms International, 1983.
- Booth, Willard C.. "Dramatic Aspects of Aztec Rituals." Educational Theatre Journal. Vol. XVIII #4, December, 1966.
- Brook, Peter. The Empty Space. New York: Avon, 1968.
- Campbell, Joseph. The Power of Myth. New York: Doubleday, 1988.
- Clifford, James and George E. Marcus, eds. Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography. Los Angeles/Berkeley/London: University of California Press, 1986.
- Cohen, Hilary Ursula. "Ritual and Theater: An Examination of Performance Forms in the Contemporary American Theater." Diss. University of Michigan, 1980.
- Diamond, Betty. "Brown-Eyed Children of the Sun: Cultural Politics of El Teatro Campesino." Diss. University of California at Irvine, 1977.
- Durkheim, Emile. The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life. Trans. Joseph W. Swain. New York: Free Press, 1965.
- Eliade, Mircea. Myth and Reality. Trans. Willard Trask. New York: Harper and Row, 1963.

- _____. Myths, Rites, Symbols. New York: Grove Press, 1976.
- Frazer, James George. The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1940.
- Freud, Sigmund. Totem and Taboo. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1962.
- Gaster, Theodor H. Thespis: Ritual, Myth and Drama in the Ancient Near East. New York: Gordian Press, 1975.
- Graham-White, Anthony. "Ritual in Contemporary Theatre and Criticism." Educational Theatre Journal, 28, October, 1976.
- Geertz, Clifford. "Blurred Genres: The Refiguration of Social Thought." The American Scholar, Spring, 1980.
- Grimes, Ronald I. Beginnings In Ritual Studies. Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1982.
- Grotowski, Jerzy. Towards a Poor Theatre. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968.
- Huerta, Jorge A. Chicano Theatre: Themes and Forms. Ypsilanti, Michigan: Bilingual Press, 1982.
- Innes, Christopher. Holy Theatre: Ritual and the Avant Garde. London: Cambridge University Press, 1981.
- James, William. The Varieties of Religious Experiences. New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1958.
- Jung, Carl G. Man and his Symbols. New York: Doubleday, 1964.
- Kanellos, Nicolas. Mexican American Theater: Legacy and Reality. Pittsburgh: Latin American Literary Review Press, 1987.
- Klein, Maxine. "Theatre of the Ancient Maya." Educational Theatre Journal. Vol. xxiii #3, December, 1971.
- Leon-Portilla, Miguel. Aztec Thought and Culture: A Study of the Ancient Nahuatl Mind. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963..
- McGuire, Thomas R. "Ritual, Theater, and the Persistence of the Ethnic Group: Interpreting Yaqui Semana Santa." Journal of the Southwest. Vol. 31 #2.

- Mendenhall, Christian Dean. "American Musical Comedy from 1943 to 1964: A Theoretical Investigation of Its Ritual Function." Diss. Northwestern University, 1989.
- Moore, Sally F. and Barbara G. Meyerhoff, eds. Secular Ritual. Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1977.
- Pottlitzer, Joanne. Hispanic Theater in the United States and Puerto Rico. New York: Ford Foundation, 1988.
- Richardson, Herbert W. and Donald R. Cutler, eds. Transcendence. Boston: Beacon Press, 1969.
- Schechner, Richard and Mady Schuman, eds. Ritual, Play, and Performance: Readings in the Social Sciences/Theatre. New York: The Seabury Press, 1976.
- Schechner, Richard and Willa Appel, eds. By Means of Performance: Intercultural Studies of Theatre and Ritual. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Schechner, Richard. Between Theatre and Anthropology. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985.
- _____. Essays on Performance Theory. New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1977.
- _____. Performance Theory. New York and London: Routledge, 1988.
- _____. "Performance and the Social Sciences." The Drama Review, V. 17 #3, September, 1973.
- _____. "Anthropological Analysis: Before and After, Andy Warhol's Last Love." The Drama Review. #22, 1978.
- The New Encyclopedia Britannica. "The Concept and Forms of Ritual." University of Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1989.
- Turner, Victor and Edward M. Bruner, eds. The Anthropology of Experience. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986.
- Turner, Victor and Edith. "Performing Ethnography." The Drama Review. Vol. 26, #2, Summer, 1982.

- Turner, Victor. From Ritual to Theatre. New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982.
- _____. The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1967.
- _____. The Anthropology of Performance. New York: Paj Publications, 1986.
- _____. Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974.
- _____. The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure. Chicago: Aldine, 1969.
- Valdez, Luis. Luis Valdez--Early Works: Actos, Bernabe and Pensamiento Serpentino. Houston, Texas: Arte Publico Press, 1990.
- _____. Actos: El Teatro Campesino. Fresno, Ca: Cucaracha Press, 1971.
- _____. Zoot Suit and Other Plays. Houston, Texas/University of Houston: Arte Publico Press, 1992.
- _____. La Virgen Del Tepeyac. Unpublished manuscript, 1976.
- _____. El Baile De Los Gigantes. Unpublished manuscript, 1991.
- _____. La Pastorela. Video available from El Teatro Campesino, San Juan Bautista, California, PBS, December, 1991.
- _____. "Notes on Chicano Theatre." Chicano Theatre I. Spring, 1973.
- Valdez, Luis, ed. El Teatro Campesino: The Evolution of American First Chicano Theatre Company, 1965-1985. El Teatro Campesino, publisher, 1985.
- _____, ed. Aztlan: An Anthology of Mexican-American Literature. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972.
- Van Gennep, Arnold. The Rites of Passage. Trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960.
- Von Hagen, Victor W. World of the Maya. New York/Scarborough, Ontario: New American Library, 1960.