AZTEC ELEMENTS IN 20TH CENTURY MEXICAN DRAMA

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Until recent years, colonial history inspired considerably more Mexican plays than did pre-Hispanic and Conquest history. Emphasis on the European aspects of Mexico's development relegated the latter themes to the background, where they were rarely noticed. Since the middle of the 20th century, however, that neglected area of history has become much more prominent in the theatre. This phenomenon reflects a preoccupation with indigenous origins shared by virtually all Mexican letters and by Latin American letters in general.

Foremost among the writers who attempt to analyze the historical and spiritual past of the modern Mexican character is Octavio Paz. In El laberinto de la soledad (1950), he endeavors to define the bases of the Mexican temperament by an examination of Mexico's history from Cortés to the present. He explains in Hegelian terms the duality which he considers to represent a fundamental dichotomy in that character. There are also anthropologists and archaeologists, like Miguel León-Portilla, who specialize in bringing to light additional data on the pre-Hispanic way of life and in presenting a coordinated and realistic picture of that life in order to understand

both the events of the Conquest and today's Mexican. Even researchers outside Mexico are fascinated by the Meso-American cultures and add their interpretations to those of Mexico's own writers.

In The Aztec Image in Western Thought, Benjamin Keen states that:

> the paradoxes of the brilliant, tragic Aztec culture continue to intrigue Western man . . . . Perhaps one reason is that their culture mirrors our own contradictions and dilemmas, for the Aztec mixture of humanism and barbarism, and the introspective Aztec personality, haunted by doubts and fears, are not unfamiliar to us who live in the last third of the twentieth century.[1]

This observation, true of Western civilization as a whole, especially describes the contemporary Mexican. After rejecting first his Indian forebears and later his Spanish inheritance, he now finds that he must accept both traditions simultaneously in order to understand himself and his complex character today. Because the Spanish culture has long been the basis of his daily life, it is an important element in his sense of identity. But until recently his understanding of the other side of his cultural

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[1]Benjamin Keen, The Aztec Image in Western Thought (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1971), p. 567.

inheritance was based largely on either positive or negative idealization rather than on factual reality. The scholarly studies of the last two or three decades have helped the modern Mexican to achieve a broader comprehension of what that previously idealized part actually was. He is now trying to understand his total identity as an integration of both parts. Contemporary theatre's interest in the Conquest is only one manifestation of that concern.

The basic works of reference on the Aztec civilization were compiled in the 16th century. Although the Spaniards as a whole tried to destroy all traces of the pagan Aztec civilization, there was an interest among the mendicant religious orders in preserving in writing something of that civilization. These works were generally done either at the direction of the Spanish Crown or of the religious orders and were compilations of history, legend, myth, and customs gathered by talking with the Indians themselves.[2] The latter eagerly helped both because of pride in the achievements of their late civilization and as a means of proving their adherence to Christianity by

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[2]See Keen, The Aztec Image, for an excellent study of Mexican and European historians and anthropologists until the present. Among the chroniclers to whose works both scholars and dramatists most often refer are Gonzálo Fernández de Oviedo (Historia general y natural de las Indias, 1535 and 1537), Bartolomé de las Casas (Apologética histórica, 1527-1550, published in 1909), Bernardino de Sahagún (Historia de las cosas de la Nueva España, 1576), and Diego Durán (Historia de las Indias de la Nueva España e islas de tierra firme, 1581).

denouncing the "evil" aspects of their culture. Fernando Alvarado Tezozómoc, a pure Indian, even wrote his own Crónica mexicana at the end of the century (not published until 1876) in an effort to explain the customs and beliefs of his people and to relate them with those of Christianity. In the 17th century, another valuable work (Historia chichimeca, published in 1891), which traced the development of the Aztec civilization from its origins, was produced by a mestizo, Fernando de Alva Ixtlixóchitl.

The dramas of the 16th century were autos composed and presented by the Franciscan friars to educate the Indian in Christianity. In these (e.g., Las Cortes de la Muerte, 1557), the Aztec or elements of his civilization often appeared as an example of the type of living to be rejected. In the drama of the 17th century, only Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz gave the Indians any attention. She also used the subject for the purpose of instructing in the right way to Christian living. In the prologue to El divino Narciso (1689), the allegorical figures of Occident, America, Religion, and Zeal carry on a discussion which points out analogies between Christian and Aztec communion rites. Sor Juana suggests that the Aztec ritual consumption of their idol, made from a paste of corn meal and human blood, was a forerunner of the Eucharist, and with these arguments, America is "converted" to Christianity.

By the 18th century, the creole began to show a keen interest in indigenous Mexico. He tried to awaken a new sense of pride in American themes to combat his position of social inferiority to the Peninsular Spaniards. The discovery in 1790 of both the statue of the earth goddess Coatlicue and the Calendar Stone stimulated a new anthropological interest, especially in Europe, in unearthing and evaluating the Mexican past. But it did not awaken a similar interest in literature. In the War of Independence (1810-1821), nationalist fervor was fanned by revolutionary leaders who wished to establish an identification between revolutionary Mexico and ancient Mexico which would justify wresting Mexico's independence from Spain. Carlos María Bustamante was especially active in this effort, publishing several sketches of ancient Mexican life and editing a number of important manuscripts from the 16th century.

At this time, European and North American historians and writers, influenced by Romanticism, were interested in anything far enough removed from the present to be considered exotic. Thus they too became immensely interested in Mexico's past. The foremost among those writers was William H. Prescott, whose monumental The History of the Conquest of Mexico (1843) has been influential in the layman's view of the Conquest since that time. Although Prescott did exhaustive research on the subject, his presentation of the Aztecs and their conflict with the Spaniards followed the conventional romantic ideas of the period. While he

extolled the notable political and scientific achievements of the Aztecs and praised their economic and educational systems, he condemned their religious practices and judged them to be an inferior race, morally unfit for the modern world. Keen presents the following evaluation of Prescott's work:

> For the modern critic, the major weakness of Prescott's account of Aztec civilization is not the excusable factual error but its gross historical and psychological distortions, the absence of any serious effort to enter into the Aztec mind and society, the shallowness of its interpretation.[3]

Prescott's romantic evaluations found their way into the drama of the late 19th century.

Although conservatism held sway for a short period after independence was achieved, interest in ancient Mexico reappeared with the Reform in 1855. The Emperor Maximilian established several scientific commissions to study aspects of Aztec civilization, such as the pyramids of Teotihuacan. Benito Juárez saw to it that the Museo Nacional received government support. Later, Porfirio Díaz also encouraged archaeological research on the Aztecs, increased support for the Museo Nacional, and had a statue of Cuauhtémoc erected on the Paseo de la Reforma. During the Díaz

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[3]Keen, The Aztec Image, p. 363.

regime, mostly pro-Indian works were published,[4] including several plays inspired in ancient Mexico. Alfredo Chavero wrote two indigenous tragedies in the romantic style (Xóchitl, 1877, and Quetzalcóatl, 1878), while José Rosas Moreno produced El bardo de Acolhuacán (1876), a romantic treatise about Netzahualcóyotl. In spite of these few examples, dramatic interest continued to focus on colonial history rather than on Conquest times. However, the Mexican Revolution effected some changes in perspective, although most of them did not show up in the drama until later in the century.

The Mexican Revolution brought with it a resurgence of nationalism and indigenismo. Manuel Gamio in Forjando patria (1916) offered a new perspective on the study of ancient Mexico which typified the thought of Revolutionary days. For him,

> only the redemption of the Indian, his incorporation in the modern world, could forge a true nation, a united people; this process required a thorough understanding of the Indian's past and of his present conditions of life.[5]

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[4]These included Manuel Orozco y Berra's Historia antigua y de la conquista de México (1880 and 1881) and Alfredo Chavero's Historia antigua y de la conquista (1886), which was even more pro-Indian and unfortunately subject to the same flights of romantic fancy as Prescott's History.

[5]Keen, The Aztec Image, p. 471.

Lázaro Cárdenas (president from 1934-1940) later encouraged the study of Indian culture by establishing the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia and even named his son Cuauhtémoc to illustrate his own indigenismo.

During the first decades of the 20th century, Cuauhtémoc became the supreme symbol of the Mexican's struggle against oppression. Three plays during those years dealt with Cuauhtémoc: Tomás Domínguez Illanes' Cuauhtémoc (1906), Efraín Rebolledo's El águila que cae (1916), and Joaquín Méndez Rivas' five-act poetic tragedy Cuauhtémoc (1925). While the plays did admit Cuauhtémoc's status as a cultural martyr, they nonetheless continued to favor the Spaniard over the Indian, which reflected the ideological conflict which gave rise to the Revolution.

Méndez Rivas combines romantic idealism with a desire to absolve both sides from guilt. He depicts a strong sense of patriotism in Cuauhtémoc's insistence that the Indians themselves were the real value of the Aztec civilization, rather than the gold sought by the Spaniards--and the former had already been ruthlessly destroyed. On the other hand, both Alvarado and Cortés are presented as essentially good, well-intentioned men whom circumstances have made to appear villains. Although a parallel is drawn between Aztec human sacrifice and the sacrifice of Indians to Christianity, the play judges the introduction of Christianity to the New World to more than compensate for the bloodshed. A romantic addition to the play is the love

story of Flor de Aztlán, an Aztec maiden, and Juan de España, a Spanish soldier. The two are finally united in Christian matrimony, bringing Aztec and Spanish blood together. In the last moments of the play, her unborn child becomes a symbol of the union of the two races, reflecting the concern of the Revolution with the mestizo as the future race of Mexico.

After the Revolution, a distinct rift was apparent among Mexican writers between the indigenistas, who considered the ancient Mexican civilization to be an integral part of their national cultural heritage, and the hispanistas, who insisted that Spain provided all the values and continuity necessary in the Mexican culture. The hispanistas (led by José Vasconcelos) focused on the negative features of the Indian civilization. On the other hand, a number of attempts were made by the indigenistas to rehabilitate Moctezuma and to rid him of the stigma of cowardice that had remained with him during the four centuries since his defeat.

Cuauhtémoc continued to be the favorite dramatic topic, but by 1934 the Tragedia de Cuauhtémoc by Alfonso Teja Zabre reflected an ideological shift from the previous conciliatory attitude toward the Spaniards. As a dramatic character, Cortés began to evolve from a victim of historical circumstances to a cruel, egotistical tyrant. In 1948 Alfonso Ortiz Palma's verse dramas Netzahualcóyotl and Tenoxtitlán en llamas dealt respectively with the

establishment of Netzahualcóyotl's kingdom and Cuauhtémoc's defense of Tenochtitlan. Unfortunately, the author allowed himself to be carried away by his own rhetorical passages and carried indigenista idealism to such an extreme that his plays were more like the romantic tragedies of pre-Revolutionary days than patriotic inspirations for a new Mexican nation.

After the heat of the Revolution, pre-colonial themes took strong hold in the teatro de masas, which was sponsored by the federal government as a means of educating the common people in their national history and customs and of instilling in them a sense of patriotism. These dramatic productions were outdoor spectacles composed of narrated historical and mythological episodes. They dealt with Aztec mythology and with Mexico's history from the founding of Tenochtitlan to the triumph of the Revolution. Efrén Orozco Rosales wrote most of the productions for the teatro de masas, among which were: Creación del Quinto Sol (1935), Sacrificio gladiatorio (1935), El mensajero del sol (1941), and Cuauhtémoc (1950).

Jesús Sotelo Inclán also published two ambitious plays meant for the teatro de masas: Los hombres de maíz (1949) and Malintzin (1957). The latter is a three-act play in verse and prose, which deals with the separation of Cortés and Marina. Her intended vengeance of killing her own child (which her strong maternal instincts prevent her from accomplishing) is likened to that of Medea against Jason.

Sotelo Inclán accords both the Spanish and Aztec sides equal responsibility in the creation of the mestizo. Neither is completely blamed for the injustices which occurred nor completely exonerated from guilt for allowing them to be committed. The play's emphasis, as with most of the teatro de masas, is on the positive contributions of both cultures to the modern Mexican character.

By far the majority of post-Revolutionary anthropologists were indigenistas, who generally employed a realistic approach to the study of the pre-Conquest civilizations and did not fall prey to the excesses of criticism or eulogy characteristic of their predecessors. These writers have provided the impetus and most of the source material for the dramas written during the second half of the 20th century. Alfonso Caso established himself as the principal expert on pre-Cortesian history and codices by his outstanding archaeological work and publications. In La religión de los aztecas, 1936 (revised and amplified in 1953 as El pueblo del sol), he identified the Aztec culture as a military theocracy in which the priest was superior to the warrior. According to Caso, the Aztecs believed that the gods had made a pact with man for their mutual benefit: the gods would help man to conquer his physical world only if he would provide them with life itself in the form of human sacrifice. Religion thus literally took the place of technology, until finally progress was so impeded that the civilization found itself at a dead end, with no way out of

the stagnant ritual which had become its way of life. Caso defined the fundamental contradiction of the Aztec civilization as a cleavage between two conflicting beliefs. On the one hand, as the Aztecs believed that they had been chosen to see that the pact was observed, a sense of manifest destiny was central to their religion and was expressed in an energetic drive to power. But on the other, a belief that mankind's destruction was inevitable and could only be postponed by continual ritual human sacrifice caused a profound pessimism.

Laurette Sejourné, while not nearly as scientific as Caso, nevertheless made worthwhile contributions to the field. From a perspective of philosophical idealism, she wrote a number of books and articles on Indian thought, including Pensamiento y religión en el México antiguo (1957). Like Prescott, she believed that the ancient Toltec civilization of Teotihuacan was the seat of civilization in the ancient Meso-American world and was degraded by the Aztec warrior cult. She defined the rift noted by Caso as one between the dominant military theocracy, which followed Huitzilopochtli, and the humanistic and peaceful ideas espoused by the followers of Quetzalcóatl, descendants of the enlightened culture of Teotihuacan. This idea, more than that of Caso, can be seen reflected in the majority of plays dealing with the Aztecs.

Father Angel María Garibay led the way in the scholarly study of Aztec literature with his Historia de la

literatura náhuatl (1953-1954). Both he and Sejourné influenced the thought of the most prolific and prominent Aztec scholar of the 1960's, Miguel León-Portilla. The latter's Visión de los vencidos (1959) is a collection of translations of Indian and mestizo accounts of the Conquest, rather than those of the Conquerors and their historians. This entirely new perspective on the Conquest has been a major impetus in the renewed interest of Mexican literature in the Aztec era. León-Portilla's most monumental work to date is La filosofía náhuatl (2nd ed., 1959), in which he constructs an image of the Aztec culture and its values from the philosophic content of its literature.

Following the lead of modern anthropologists, the plays of the 1950's, 1960's, and 1970's reflect a concern with the psychological and social as well as the historical and heroic aspects of the Conquest. These more recent plays tend to be character studies of Conquest figures. They go behind the scenes to study the cultural forces whose interplay--not merely that of the protagonists--determined the outcome of the Conquest. They also attempt to focus on the fundamental paradox of Mexican character as described by Jon M. White in Cortés and the Downfall of the Aztec Empire: "Mexicans tend to suffer from a form of cultural schizophrenia: one day it suits

them to think and act like Spaniards, the next day like their Mexican ancestors."[6]

Celestino Gorostiza reconciles both *hispanista* and *indigenista* views in *La Malinche* (*La leña está verde*) of 1958. In the ill-fated love story of Marina and Cortés, he presents the injustices of the Conquest as equally attributable to the Aztecs and the Spaniards, with Marina caught in the middle, an instrument of destiny. At the end of his play, Gorostiza underscores the importance of trusting in the *mestizo*, the result of that conflict, for the future of Mexico.

Rodolfo Usigli's *Corona de fuego* (1960) presents Cuauhtémoc as the father of the Mexican nation, who by his own sacrifice created unity among his people. Unfortunately, he is not a flesh-and-blood hero, but rather an abstraction of the ideal of Cuauhtémoc, a symbol of inspiration for the Mexican people. Usigli attempts to give his play the imposing atmosphere of a Greek tragedy by employing a large chorus, pantomime, and long monologues by Cuauhtémoc. However, because of its ideological abstraction, the work is dry and boring and can be more properly considered a dramatic poem than a poetic drama. To its credit, the play is a very artistic creation in its colorful blend of intellectual, visual and musical images.

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[6] Jon Manchip White, *Cortés and the Downfall of the Aztec Empire* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1971), p. 328.

Two plays by Roberto Bravo Garzón illustrate the cultural conflict pointed out by Sejourné between the two equally strong beliefs of war and peace. The one-act play Netzahualcóyotl (1962) deals with that emperor's struggle to re-establish his kingdom and to instill his pacifist teachings in his subjects. Similarly, Viento sobre las aguas (1962) tells the story of an emperor, Topilzin, who tries unsuccessfully to substitute the peaceful cult of Quetzalcóatl for the warlike one of Tezcatlipoca. The myth of Quetzalcóatl is woven into the historical account of Topilzin's struggle so that they are one and the same.

Salvador Novo departs from the usual tragic perspective on pre-Conquest and Conquest topics, saying in his introduction to In Pipiltzintzin o La guerra de las gordas:

> Si Quetzalcóatl y Cuauhtémoc son el alfa y omega del mundo indígena, de uno al otro, y a través de los numerosos personajes que viven entre ellos, ocurren episodios y situaciones de una gracia y de una picardía que no hemos valiosamente advertido, o aprovechado, o utilizado en la tarea de dotar a nuestros ejercicios teatrales de un contenido anecdótico propio que no desmerece en valor universal--y actual, por ende--si lo comparamos con el de otras literaturas importantes.[7]

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[7]Antonio Magaña Esquivel, Salvador Novo (México: Empresas Editoriales, 1971), p. 174.

He suggests that the dramatic possibilities of the Aztec heritage as source material for comedy as well as tragedy have so far barely been touched.

Three of Novo's plays explore those possibilities. Cuauhtémoc (1962), a one-act play, presents Cuauhtémoc in an heroic attempt to overcome both Moctezuma's fatalism and his subjects' resentment and ill will. As in Corona de fuego, Cuauhtémoc's desire is to achieve unity of the Indian peoples. Even though he shows that attempt as futile, Novo does manage to impart a sense of heroism to the protagonist, whom he identifies with today's Indian, who suffers the same problem of continual oppression. A two-act comedy, In Pipiltzintzin o La guerra de las gordas (1963), is based primarily on a documented incident from pre-Cortesian history. Novo combines details from several versions of the incident as well as details from a few unrelated events which add interest and variety to the story. With this play, Novo illustrates that the Aztec people were capable of the whole range of human feelings and not just tragedy, as so many plays seem to indicate. The two-act opera, In Ticitezcatl o El espejo encantado (1966), revives the Quetzalcóatl myth used by Bravo Garzón. The protagonist Tezcatlipoca insists that "la historia se repite. Mudan las circunstancias, pero no las pasiones ni las humanas ansias."[8] Novo uses the play to comment

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[8]Salvador Novo, In Ticitezcatl o El espejo encantado (Xalapa, México: Universidad Veracruzana, 1966), p. 17.

on the modern political scene, especially that of the United States and Russia.

Like Bravo Garzón, Raúl Moncada Galán deals with the schism between Aztec schools of thought in El sitio de Tenoxtitlán (1963). In this three-act play with an epilogue, Cuauhtémoc is the central figure who dreams of a united Mexican nation. Moncada Galán emphasizes the stoicism of the Aztec people and states in the play that fighting against destiny, not winning or losing in the battle, is what makes men gods. The large cast, complex chorus, and the surrealistic presentation of Cortés' advance on Tenochtitlan are reminiscent of Usigli's Corona de fuego.

After dramatizing the Mayan creation myth in Popol Vuh (1966), Luisa Josefina Hernández turned the following year to pre-Aztec mythology in a two-part allegorical play, Quetzalcóatl. The first part deals with Quetzalcóatl's creation of man and his discovery that man's body and spirit are inseparable. The second part reveals the author's belief that the Aztecs' sanguinary behavior debased Quetzalcóatl's creation, the perfect Toltec civilization. In the play, she makes extensive use of passages from the Codices and from several well-known works on the Aztecs, as well as of projections of illustrations from those works.

Sergio Magaña also has written two plays on the Conquest, separated by more than a decade. In the first, Moctezuma II (1954), he adds his voice to those who wish

to re-evaluate Moctezuma and to rid him of the stigma of cowardice which has so long been associated with him. The drama deals with the question of Moctezuma's relative freedom to act independently of his social and cultural milieu. The play more nearly approaches the concept of classical tragedy than any other play treated in this dissertation. But Magaña's second play, Los argonautas (1967), is a satire, which encompasses the Conquest from Cortés' landing in the New World to the Noche Triste. Moctezuma and Marina serve principally as a means of developing Cortés' character and of communicating the primary intent of the play--that man is never free from his social and cultural environment and must act within its bounds.

In 1970 Carlos Fuentes proposed, with Todos los gatos son pardos, to treat the Conquest as a dramatic encounter between a man with everything (Moctezuma) and a man with nothing (Cortés), which through Doña Marina (the bridge between them) resulted in the mestizo, the gato who is the offspring of the lion of Spain. Fuentes shares this dialectic concept of Mexico with Octavio Paz.[9] As in Corona de fuego, the characters are ideological symbols. But instead of being a hero, Moctezuma is a victim of his own insuperable fatalism. However, the incorporation of multiple levels of meaning and multiple roles for each

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[9]Gary Brower, "Fuentes de Fuentes: Paz y las raíces de Todos los gatos son pardos," Latin American Theatre Review, 5, No. 1 (Fall 1971), 59-68.

character make the play overly complex. Fuentes undertakes to present too much (as he does in his novels), resulting in a chaos of images and events.

I have examined these and other contemporary Conquest and pre-Conquest plays, which range in style from traditional tragedy to documentary theatre and in length from one to five acts. The scope of this dissertation necessitates limiting my consideration to a workable segment of that material. As it would be impossible to do justice to the entire field of Conquest and pre-Conquest drama discussed above, I have chosen to consider only those plays which deal with the Conquest of the Aztecs--the five years from the time of Cortés' debarkation in Mexico (1519) to the execution of Cuauhtémoc, the last Aztec emperor (1524). In this period of time, the Aztec empire was essentially destroyed and Spanish, Catholic dominance established.

Three considerations prompted me to select this alternative. First, the Conquest is a clearly discernible period in history, which can be assigned both a starting point and a termination point. The pre-Conquest era includes not only the period of Aztec domination in the valley of Mexico, but also the entire pre-Colombian period (including the Toltecs and Olmecs), and embraces religious myth as well.[10] Second, I noted in the first pages of

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[10]A study of plays dealing with the latter topic would be an interesting and worthwhile undertaking at a future date.

this preliminary study that Mexican letters are deeply concerned today with comprehending the Mexican character and are re-examining both its Spanish and Indian components (but more especially the latter). The Conquest period, when the two elements first experienced direct and cataclysmic contact, is clearly the crucial point in forming that character, the point at which we can see the dialectic principle at work. From the clash of two opposing cultures, both of which had a tendency to assimilate other cultures, arose the mestizo, a separate entity from his creators, yet perpetually linked to them. The mestizo represents the essence of the Mexican character today. Furthermore, within the cultural circumstances of his genesis lies the perhaps undefinable solution to what I term his "identity crisis"--a painful search for self-comprehension and acceptance.

Third, in attempting to resolve an "identity crisis," a characteristic first step is to search for some element outside oneself with which to identify, to admire and perhaps emulate. This measure is often necessary to stabilize one's values and serves as a point of departure for more profound interior revelations. Precisely this phenomenon has occurred in the situation considered here. As mentioned earlier, there was a distinct polarization of views (especially during and immediately following the Revolution) manifested in the rivalry between the hispanistas and the indigenistas. Each camp rallied behind

its respective cultural hero: Cortés or Cuauhtémoc. Because until recently the indigenistas have maintained the upper hand in the dispute, the popular images of Cortés as cruel and cunning, the symbol of oppression, and of Cuauhtémoc as a hero and martyr, the symbol of the Mexican people's struggle against oppression, have been firmly established. Two other figures also have achieved prominence due to their crucial role in the events of the Conquest. Moctezuma II has been characterized as a weak coward and Doña Marina as a traitor to her race. All of the Conquest plays that I have examined deal with one or more of these four protagonists and their interrelationships. However, the plays of the last two decades show a more flexible attitude toward them. The plays address themselves to a broader range of considerations and are in the realm of psychological and social realism. As a result, these four characters are evolving from types or symbols to complex human characters who operated within and were influenced by their own cultural and social environment and circumstances. I am especially interested in how these characters are developed through the structure of the plays with which I will deal in this dissertation. Thus, some discussion of dramatic structure is necessary before commencing with such a structural analysis.

There are several standard concepts of dramatic structure, which include the Aristotelian, rational, imitative, plot-centered approach, Heilman's image

patterns based on thematic relationships and Frye's archetypal patterns. Form or structure is essentially the organic relationship among the elements of a play, which include plot, characterization, language, imagery, and enactment. Thomas F. Van Laan (The Idiom of Drama, New York: Cornell University, 1970) considers form to be a process of accumulation, in which all the dramatic elements build upon one another to give a perceivable shape to the author's idea or image. Structure can be likened to the girders of a skyscraper before it is "filled in" with the walls, floors, mechanical workings, and other construction devices which give it its total character. (In drama, those walls and floors would be, for example, individual actions and words, imagery, and sub-plots.) Like the frame of a skyscraper, dramatic structure must be stable, strong, and well-balanced, or the whole creation will lean badly out of shape and eventually collapse.

Jackson G. Barry, in Dramatic Structure, the Shaping of Experience (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970), sees drama as a temporal image of man's interaction in the world. He considers dramatic structure per se to be the "basic pattern of events" of a given dramatic experience, thus distinguishing it from other types of literary structure. But several types of structure can exist simultaneously in a play. Barry points out that each play borrows various elements from the other arts--painting, sculpture, dance, music, poetry,

and the novel--and combines them in a unique pattern for communicating the author's central idea. But in every play there is a basic core relationship upon which all other relationships are built. These other relationships (e.g., character grouping or scene construction and sequence) focus, amplify, or universalize the basic structure and support it by repetition or contrast. Parallel and contrast, and repetition and change are the most basic of structural devices and are used in all aspects of the structure. But they are particularly relevant to the relation of subplots to each other and to the main plot and to the ordering and relation of scenes to each other and to the central image. Robert B. Heilman sums up dramatic structure as 1) a system of characterization, 2) the arrangements of characters, and 3) the dynamics of the action and psychology of the characters--all of which are held together by the dramatist's perspective.[11] In referring to dramatic structure in this dissertation, I am concerned with how the play is constructed in its entirety--in all elements, both spatial and temporal, which give it its final form.

Two basic concepts of dramatic form, often overlapping in the same play, are represented in the five plays to be

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[11]Robert B. Heilman, "Tragedy and Melodrama," in Perspectives on Drama, ed. James L. Calderwood and Harold E. Toliver (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 159.

examined. These concepts are variously referred to as naturalism and expressionism, illusionism and anti-illusionism, dramatic and epic form, or traditional and episodic form. As these pairs represent the two extremes of a continuum, the structure of most plays exists somewhere between those extremes.

Raymond Williams (Drama from Ibsen to Brecht, New York: Oxford University Press, 1969) considers all modern theatre to be naturalistic in intent, as its purpose is always to achieve a true representation of life. However, naturalism and expressionism can be considered distinct dramatic forms. In naturalism, a unique personal history usually is representative of general truth, while in expressionism it is more often human isolation in society. But whether a play deals with the personal level or with the social level, it is nevertheless representative of human life. In illusionism, an effort is made to create an "illusion of reality," to make the spectator feel that he is watching (and emotionally participating in) a segment of real life. Techniques are employed which are aimed at "capturing" the spectator within that world and involving him in its action and development. Conversely, anti-illusionism is the destruction of such an illusion, the removal of the "fourth wall" which encouraged the spectator's personal involvement. The techniques used force the spectator to remain outside the flow of events as a critical observer. He views the play, rather than as an

experience of reality in itself, as a presentation or demonstration of an idea or point of view.

Both of these considerations form the philosophical basis for the distinction between dramatic (Aristotelian) and epic theatre examined by Williams and by Julian H. Wulbern (Brecht and Ionesco, Commitment in Context, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1971). Williams observes that Brecht, in proposing an epic theatre, reacted against the traditional concept, techniques, and structure of illusionist theatre.

> Essentially, what Brecht created . . . was a dramatic form . . . to show men in the process of producing themselves and their situations as opposed to discovering themselves in a given situation . . . . What happens on the stage is not so much lived as shown, and both the consciousness of an audience and the distance between that audience and the deliberately played action, are made central to the style.[12]

In order to contrast the perspective and techniques of dramatic and epic theatre, Wulbern presents a detailed list of the characteristics of each. Dramatic theatre is an experience in which the spectator is involved emotionally and whose linear structure leads directly to the outcome, on which our attention is focused. Man is seen

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[12]Williams, Drama from Ibsen to Brecht, p. 279.

as a given quantity whose mode of existence is determined by his manner of thinking. Epic theatre, on the other hand, uses a narrative format to present a particular world view which the spectator can observe and criticize intellectually rather than emotionally. Epic structure develops arbitrarily, progresses in leaps rather than smoothly, and focuses our attention on the process of that development, rather than on the outcome. Man creates his own identity in the drama, but since his actions depend on circumstances, his identity and manner of thinking are a function of his social environment.

I prefer to use the terms "traditional" and "episodic," since they encompass the philosophic concepts already mentioned and can be used to refer more specifically to the actual construction of the play. They include specific techniques which are designed to communicate the ideas, images, and perspectives of the author but which are not in themselves part of the content. Van Laan refers to traditional dramatic structure as formal realism, which is a formalized spatial and temporal relationship among the elements of a play. It is associated with the "well-made" play, first definitively established by the French neo-classicists, who claimed (somewhat incorrectly) merely to be following the directives of Aristotle. In the "well-made" play, the dramatist's first task is the construction of the plot and the creation of suspense. His primary concern in keeping the attention of the audience is thus

"unity of action," which simply means that a single line of action should predominate throughout the play, develop logically in a linear progression from one scene to the next, and terminate in a specific outcome. Although this central action should not be diverted by irrelevant subplots, subplots which enhance the main action by means of similarity or contrast are permissible.

Because the "well-made" play reflects a conception of drama as an imitation of life, the dramatist attempts to convey an appearance of reality. The conventions of unity of time and of place were originally conceived in the interests of realism. To the neo-classicists, unity of time meant that the action had to take place within a period of twenty-four hours, while unity of place dictated that there be only one scene for all of the action. These limitations have since been deemed too stringent and are now used more as rough guidelines than as rigid precepts. It is considered realistic to present an extended period of time or several locations, so long as they contribute to the logical linear development of the plot.

The traditional "well-made" play most commonly has three acts of approximately equal length, which correspond roughly to the exposition, complication, and crisis-denouement of the action. The first act introduces the characters and the problem, which becomes more complicated as the characters interact in the second act. By the third act, the problem becomes a crisis for the protagonist,

who, at the point of climax, must make a decision or take an action to resolve it. The consequences of his decision or action are then briefly shown as a moral concerning the action of the play before the spectator's attention is released. J. L. Styan (The Dramatic Experience, London: Cambridge University Press, 1965) uses a graph to represent the shape of a "well-made" play as a relationship between the progression of its three acts and three degrees of spectator interest. During the exposition, which encompasses the first act, interest gradually rises to the first level and then exceeds the second level during the complication of the second act. The crisis of Act III rapidly brings interest to a point of climax, at which point interest drops sharply back to the level it had attained at the beginning of the act.

In any discussion of dramatic structure, the term "tragedy" is almost sure to come up as a standard example of the traditional "well-made" play. Each of the plays dealt with here adheres, in one degree or another, to the concept of tragedy, although not necessarily to the traditional tragic form. What is called "tragic form" is essentially the "well-made" play. But the fundamental concept of tragedy focuses on the protagonist and has little to do with form in the strict sense. That concept can be used in examining the development of the protagonist's character, the actions he takes, and the social or universal truths which he faces. The following elements, which

I consider important to a view of tragedy, are based on concepts expressed by Oscar Mandel (A Definition of Tragedy, Rensslaer: New York University Press, 1961), Robert B. Heilman (Tragedy and Melodrama, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968), and Vera M. Roberts (The Nature of Theatre, New York: Harper and Row, 1971).

A tragedy is a universal, archetypal observation about human character. The essential tragic reality is that failure is implicit in all human endeavor. In its construction, a tragedy must have a protagonist of some stature and of good character, who feels a deep sense of commitment to a certain value system at odds with that of his society, the rules of the universe, or his own sense of identity. He must come to a decision or choose an action which is due to an error in judgment or to a moral weakness and which inevitably results in his spiritual or physical suffering or death. But the manner in which he makes that decision should elucidate the question of free will versus psychological or social determinism. He will normally express his inner dilemma by hesitating, by debating on whether or not to carry out his purpose. The protagonist must achieve self-awareness and a greater understanding of his role in the universe at some point in the play and must admit responsibility for, and accept the consequences of, his actions. In the development of the action, the spectator should feel an identification with the protagonist at the same time as an intellectual detachment from him.

Since man is today preoccupied with the existential concern of freedom of choice in his society and in the universe, tragedy is a medium ideally suited to the expression of that dilemma. In its complex characters and archetypal situations, man can both explore his own nature and attempt to comprehend the meaning of his own existence.

In contrast to the traditional structure of the "well-made" play, episodic structure has no formalized rules of development. Episodic structure is comprehensive spatially and temporally and does not recognize limitations such as the unities of time, space and action. It is essentially the presentation of a series of episodes (usually, but not always, chronological) which, taken as a whole, present a selected panorama of the protagonists reacting and interacting in their environment. The purpose of this type of structure is to help the spectator avoid emotional involvement in the action. Whereas traditional structure purposely creates tension concerning the outcome, the episodic structure used seeks to avoid that tension and to focus attention instead on the process of interaction. Certain presentational and alienating techniques are used especially for destroying the effect of dramatic illusion and for encouraging critical observation by the spectator, who should feel that he is witnessing the moral conflict at a distance, as if it were past history. Some of these techniques are the use of a chorus, the inclusion of a prologue or of an epilogue with a moral, the use of masks, soliloquies, and

deus ex machina, interruptions of the action by a narrator or by devices such as placards, and the use of lighting and sound to create special effects. These techniques are by no means new, as many of them were used in classical and medieval drama. Any drama--not just episodic drama-- can assume a degree of critical objective detachment by employing such techniques of production and by giving them importance in the development of its structure.

As was pointed out earlier, the structure of most plays is a delicate combination of elements from both traditional and episodic structural design. Every play's structure is a unique pattern for organizing the experience of the play, a singular relationship between the various parts of the whole experience, which communicates the author's central idea. Van Laan states that

> the import of a play is . . . the precise texture of its internal organization as it relates to external experience, and therefore every play provides a unique, original and complex experience that can be adequately represented only through extensive detailed analysis.[13]

To examine the plays dealt with in this dissertation, I will therefore use a structural analysis, i.e., a working analysis of the way in which all individual elements are

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[13]Van Laan, The Idiom of Drama, p. 325.

combined in spatial and temporal dimensions to create the whole experience of the play.

I have selected five plays which I feel to be the most representative Conquest plays of the last twenty-five years and which, taken as a whole, present a panorama of the Conquest from Cortés' arrival on Mexican shores to Cuauhtémoc's death. These five plays, in order of their date of publication, are: Moctezuma II (1954) by Sergio Magaña, La Malinche (1958) by Celestino Gorostiza, Corona de fuego (1960) by Rodolfo Usigli, Cuauhtémoc (1962) by Salvador Novo, and Los argonautas (1967) also by Sergio Magaña. In the following five chapters, I intend to present a structural analysis of those five plays, in chronological order, with special attention to our perception of the four main Conquest characters--Moctezuma II, Cortés, Doña Marina, and Cuauhtémoc. I hope that such an analysis may yield some understanding of the modern Mexican character.

CHAPTER II

MOCTEZUMA II: FREEDOM OF CHOICE

Moctezuma II (1954) is the first of two plays in which Sergio Magaña uses the Conquest to examine the question of man's freedom of choice and his place in the universe. The play's impact was such that one critic commented that the play would serve as a reference point for future drama dealing with the Conquest.[1] Although the historical circumstances of Moctezuma's demise adapt themselves naturally to a tragic structure (which the play approximates), the purpose of the play is not merely to present the historical confrontation between Moctezuma and Cortés. Magaña instead departs both from historical fact and romantic fantasy to concentrate on the individual as a product of his society. His play illustrates the fundamental dissension between Moctezuma and his own culture at the time of Cortés' arrival. Moctezuma's commitment to a value system opposed to that of his fellow men necessarily results in his personal destruction. His predicament represents man's struggle to shape his own destiny.

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[1]Miguel Guardia, "El teatro en México: Moctezuma II," México en la cultura, No 260 (Mar. 14, 1954), p. 4.

The distinctive prologue is important in unifying the action of the play. It introduces Moctezuma's tragic story on a supernatural plane and presents in allegorical form the essential elements of his internal crisis and his sense of aloneness in the world. It demonstrates the existence of a supernatural power, indicates the certainty of the tragic outcome, and suggests the universal nature of the conflict.

The principal character in the prologue is a chorus of three old hags, whom Magaña describes as "petrificadas en el tiempo" (p. 73),[2] i.e., eternal and unchanging, like the gods or principles they represent. Their respective voices--mezzosoprano, contralto, and soprano--together create the musical motif of the play, which periodically reminds us of Moctezuma's inescapable fate. The appearance of the chorus at once reminds us of the three witches who predict Macbeth's defeat in Shakespeare's play. The ritual incantations of Moctezuma II's chorus, however, are for the purpose of soliciting the favor of the gods for their sons and husbands in the guerra florida.[3] At first, the three

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[2]Sergio Magaña, Moctezuma II, in Cuadernos de Bellas Artes, 4, No. 9, pp. 69-108; 4, No. 10, pp. 73-112; 4, No. 11, pp. 57-104 (1963). All subsequent references to the play will refer to this source.

[3]The guerra florida was an artificial war carried on between the Aztecs and the Tlaxcaltecans for the purpose of obtaining sacrificial victims. See Miguel León-Portilla, Los antiguos mexicanos (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1970), pp. 94-95.

old hags represent the mothers and wives left behind. But there are allusions to their supernatural powers and, by the time the three introduce the third act, they clearly represent the gods or forces which affect man and his actions.

After the initial appearance of the chorus of hags, Moctezuma appears with two dwarfs and kneels in the center of the stage as if defeated. Although Moctezuma is silent, the chorus mocks his search for Huémac (which we soon learn is death). When he stabs himself with his knife, he feels no pain. (The chorus refers to the knife as a maguey needle used for self-torture in Aztec religious practice). However, the chorus claims to have brought about his action, although we see Moctezuma himself perform the movement. In this manner, Magaña implies that the hags are supernaturally manipulating him. Moctezuma appears to be out of normal reality, in a world of whose existence he was previously unaware.

At this point, the beat of the huéhuetl accelerates rapidly, then ceases abruptly. This technique, plus the chorus' reaction of fear, creates a feeling of apprehension in the audience. The abrupt arrival of Quetzalcóatl (in Aztec religion, a god of peace and restraint rather than violence) breaks the tension. He chides Moctezuma for behaving in a cowardly manner not befitting an Aztec emperor. While Moctezuma hides his eyes in shame, the two dwarfs (who in Act III represent Moctezuma's "children,"

the Aztec people) divest Quetzalcóatl of his insignia, so that when Moctezuma opens his eyes, he sees only a young lad (Tetlepanquétzal in the play). Without the emblems of his office, Quetzalcóatl too is merely a man ("Yo no soy nadie, señor"--p. 77). (In Todos los gatos son pardos by Carlos Fuentes, Quetzalcóatl also appears to Moctezuma, but as one of three augurs who expect to frighten Moctezuma by their bizarre and dire predictions.) Magaña's unpretentious scene conveys the idea that all men are equally insignificant and that artificial outward symbols decide how they relate to each other and view one another's worth. It also points out that when a man holds an office of power, he can no longer afford the weaknesses of being human and must act according to the expectations his fellow men have of the symbol he represents.

Magaña then proceeds to demonstrate that one set of gods is the same as another when the second old hag moans: "Nosotras sabemos que hemos de morir y que otros dioses más fuertes vendrán a ocuparse de estos lugares . . ." (p. 78). This is also the first clear allusion to the chorus as a representative of the gods. It is significant that when Moctezuma extends his hand in a gesture of sympathy and aid, the chorus rejects him. Although they are aware that his inevitable defeat is bound together with theirs, they refuse to consider an alternative. They offer him the brilliant feather cape they have been weaving (which represents his destiny with Huémac) and insist

that he execute his preordained role and fulfill his destiny. (Magaña insists that the cape be brightly colored and easily recognizable, as its reappearance in the third act initiates the integration of the prologue into the tragedy itself.)

The prologue ends with a grotesque scene, which mixes Aztec and Christian motifs and reiterates the importance of symbols on the larger cultural plane. The chorus advises Moctezuma that it is not the specific form of the conquest (European in this case) which is important, but rather its symbols. These are a cross ("una forma de violencia que tú desconoces"--p. 79) and cherubic masks, behind which hide the same gods or forces as before. Once this idea is communicated, the volume of the music abruptly rises, creating an expectation for the play to begin and for Moctezuma's catastrophe to be realized. A high level of tension is maintained throughout the play by constant reminders of impending disaster by the other characters in the play and by the periodic intrusions of the chorus.

The prologue establishes that, although Moctezuma wishes to die in a manner of his own choosing, it is his destiny to die in a manner befitting an emperor. It also demonstrates that, although symbols and systems change, man himself and the underlying forces affecting him do not. Since modern culture is in a state of flux, there is no unanimous belief in a supernatural power, and one set of guiding principles cannot readily be found. In the

prologue, those principles which the spectator is to accept as invariable truth in viewing the play are identified.

Based on the presentation of the prologue, the fundamental structural pattern of the play itself presents Moctezuma, the man, alone against Moctezuma, the symbol, in a total opposition which is suspended but never resolved. The scenery is simple and allusive, rather than elaborate, and is the same for all three acts. The action takes place on the day before Cortés' arrival in Tenochtitlan, and the plot development is that of a "well-made" play. The first act creates an atmosphere of ambiguity, introduces the central conflict, and identifies the major characters involved in it. It also makes an initial step toward establishing Moctezuma as a tragic hero and brings the prologue into play as an important element in the conflict.

The play proper begins abruptly upon the termination of the prologue. The opening scene establishes the contradictory existence of both permissive attitudes and a sense of the importance of class distinctions. The picture of a woman punishing a child for bad behavior does not at first seem incongruous. But when we learn that the boy is Moctezuma's son and the woman a slave, our perception of the scene changes. While the princess Tecuixpo is indignant about this stepping over of class boundaries, she herself, as the emperor's daughter, ignores those boundaries. Neither transgression, however, is punished.

Tecuixpo continues barefoot, and the slave is allowed to run off to a celebration. Although at first the scene seems unconnected with the main action, it does establish from the outset that incongruent behavior exists in Moctezuma's own house. Thus we have a clear basis for understanding the Minister's simultaneous approval of Moctezuma's ideas and laws and his criticism of the personal conduct of the emperor.

The focus shifts from this contradictory situation to the Minister's character and role when Axayácatl admiringly calls him a "sacrificador de hombres" (p. 83), a choice of words which significantly colors our perception of the Minister. It not only describes his appointed role in Aztec society, but also his role in the play with respect to Moctezuma, whom he will figuratively sacrifice. The ensuing conversation between him and Teizalco (Moctezuma's wife) is aimed primarily at developing the Minister's character at the same time that it provides a glimpse of Moctezuma's character. The Minister appears to be attentive to form (when he examines the manuscripts) and not to human problems (he is unsympathetic to Teizalco's problems). Although Teizalco protests against violence, she expresses concern over Moctezuma's disturbing calm in the face of the Spanish invasion. The Minister vows to make Moctezuma believe in and fear the gods (just as the three old hags in the prologue opened his eyes by causing him to wound himself). The Minister considers violence

and death as the necessary cost of peace and is willing to employ any degree of harshness to awaken in Moctezuma respect for the traditional system. In his opinion, Moctezuma has been carried away by his own power to the neglect of the established system, and the Minister represents the system striking back. His promise is threatening in its intensity and demonstrates the strength of his commitment to the Aztec religion. It complements the Minister's designation as a "sacrificador de hombres" in defining his character and is a reference point for all of his ensuing machinations to bring Moctezuma to his knees (which he accomplishes literally in Act III).

The conversation between Teizalco and the Minister is abruptly terminated by a messenger who enters to report a defeat in battle. Magaña uses the messenger to further illustrate the Minister's character and the incongruent view of class behavior shown in the opening scene. The messenger's two versions of the battle illustrate the emphasis placed by the Minister on appearances, for the former recites a glowing victory to Teizalco and a resounding defeat to the Minister. At this point, we realize that the Minister is actively fabricating bad omens for Moctezuma. In this instance, the messenger brings in a dead eagle, which the Minister will claim to have found in Moctezuma's palace and will interpret as a sign of disapproval from the gods. It is also apparent later that he

has released certain political prisoners with the claim that they miraculously vanished in thin air.

Ixtlixóchitl's unexpected entry introduces the concept of animosity. His violent character is defined from the outset by his rash behavior and lack of respect for Moctezuma. The Minister describes him with the single word of hate. His character and his rivalry with his brother Cacama illustrate the strength of this emotion in the empire. This first encounter between the two brothers Cacama and Ixtlixóchitl creates a certain measure of suspense, since the latter predicts that he will not lose in the dispute. When he leaves, we fully expect to see another clash between the two when Moctezuma is present. This expectation is important in maintaining the tension of the play at a high pitch.

In the next scene, that hate is directed toward Moctezuma by the Aztec nobles. Our picture of Moctezuma's character is expanded by their accusations, which nevertheless hint at this hidden strength. Teizalco and the Minister have described him as unresponsive to ill omens, disrespectful of the clerical and military classes, concerned with pleasure rather than duty, and non-compliant with his traditional role. The nobles reiterate these traits in their complaints against him.

But the real purpose of this scene is to establish the character of the nobility, who simultaneously criticize Moctezuma and define themselves by their own words. The

conversation begins as a discussion of Cortés' victories. It quickly becomes a tirade against Moctezuma's attitudes (on whom they lay the entire blame) and a dismissal of their own responsibility in the matter. They are more concerned with ritual than with action and, like Ixtlixóchitl, are absorbed in their own internal political conflicts. Cuauhtémoc suggests that they are complainers who sit around doing nothing, and Cuitláhuac calls them contemptible turncoats (himself included) who show the very lukewarmness attributed to Moctezuma. In the next scene, the Culuacán noble unwittingly reveals the truth of these accusations when he describes the nobles' reaction to the Cholula destruction: " . . . nosotros nos pusimos a llorar en cuclillas mientras el pueblo gritaba sobre los muertos . . . " (p. 98). The vehement name-calling of the scene, together with this comment, makes the spectator suspect that by their own inaction, the nobles themselves are at least partially responsible for their situation. We also suspect that, although Moctezuma's actions are incongruent with their expectations, he is not so weak as they protest.

When Moctezuma enters for the first time, his physical appearance belies his status as emperor, and his actions substantiate the complaints we have heard. He embraces his brother Cuitláhuac (a show of affection not expected of an emperor) and ridicules the military and clerical castes by making them hold flowers. This simple incident

is more than sufficient for the spectator to comprehend both Moctezuma's attitude and the nobles' resentment. The tension between him and the nobles is only thinly veiled by Moctezuma's actions and words. His apparent lack of concern over the fate of Cholula (which we learn later is not true) and his refusal to sacrifice prisoners personally brings the central conflict abruptly to the surface. His ultimate defeat is a direct result of this original decision (as shown here) not to resign himself to fate by complying with the traditional role of emperor. This scene is the departure point for the major clashes in the remainder of the play.

The next to last scene of Act I is essential in establishing Moctezuma as a tragic hero. In this scene, we have a hint of the self-awareness characteristic of a tragic hero, and we begin to realize that he is not merely a victim of circumstances. Moctezuma is a strong man of good character whose concepts are ahead of his time, but whose behavior is contrary to that generally accepted. His downfall is brought about by an error in character judgment and a lack of concern for the consequences of his actions (pride). Moctezuma believes that he understands clearly the problems of his society and knows their solution. Like Oedipus, his mistake lies in his selective blindness--his failure to recognize that the pursuit of his chosen path of action can only destroy him. He rejects violence and hate and chooses instead personal freedom,

peace, and love--a choice which, given the circumstances, can only be self-destructive. The Minister sums up Moctezuma's situation thus:

> Es el tiempo del odio, hijo. Nadie sabe si habrá otro mejor. ¿De dónde te viene esa necia piedad hacia treinta indignos enemigos? La gloria es de los dioses y está pidiendo sangre. No se pide más. Tampoco es la época de las ternuras porque nadie las comprendería. Serían debilidades . . . . (p. 103)

Moctezuma nevertheless refuses to respond to pressure and insists on his right to make his own choice.

In discussing with the Minister the cowardice of the nobles (of which they have in turn accused him), Moctezuma identifies fear as the fundamental element in revealing one's true character. In the curtain scene, we see that he too is beset by fear, and we expect soon to observe what his own true character is. In describing the nobles' situation, he inadvertently describes his own and predicts its resolution:

> Será que el drama de las cosas es así, ministro; parecen acechar el momento de trastornar . . . . Basta entonces un soplo, una paja, una pequeñez cualquiera . . . ¡Pahf! todo a un tiempo se transforma y se derrumba para manifestarse en su verdadera condición. (pp. 100-101)

The ramifications of this statement are not fully presented until Act III.

At this point, Magaña's transition to the curtain scene is weak. The two statements which he intends as a transition before the chorus enters ("Pero ten firmes los pies, Moctezuma, tal vez las inventan para mover a fe tu corazón y para que vayas preparándote" and "¿Prepararme . . . a qué . . . por qué?"--p. 106) are unnecessary and weaken the effect of the curtain scene. In Moctezuma's fearful answer, Magaña seems to have forgotten the strength of character he has already created in the emperor and which we have come to expect. It would have been more effective had the chorus entered just as the Minister muttered that "tal vez las inventan los dioses . . ." (p. 105), instead of attempting to pre-dispose our perception of the following scene, which should speak for itself.

The curtain scene is significant, for it indicates that there is more to the conflict than appears on the surface. In that scene, the chorus and its musical motif appear and shake Moctezuma's confidence, as the three old hags seem to be out of a recurrent bad dream. Their appearance causes him to waver for the first time in his determination to act contrary to the system and in his conviction of his own supremacy. The cry of the llorona adds a note of impending doom, and the beat of the huehuétl grows to a high pitch. At that point, Moctezuma cries out, falls onto a stool, and becomes absorbed in spiritual

anguish. We realize then that the conflict is not merely one between Moctezuma and the nobility, between change and tradition, but an intense conflict within himself that causes him to suffer. It suggests a serious doubt about his chosen course of action and leaves us anxious to know more in the second act. Even Teizalco, whose first instinct is to comfort him, abandons him at a threatening gesture from the chorus, and he is left to wrestle alone with the dilemma of whether or not the power of the gods exists.

Act II opens by introducing an amorous triangle between Tecuixpo, Tetlepanquétzal, and Cuauhtémoc, which adds unnecessary baggage to the play and dilutes the central action. Magaña uses this subplot to try to induce the spectator to make observations which should come naturally in the development of the conflict and of Moctezuma's character. The opening scene is meant to illustrate the brevity of human life, a concept which Moctezuma himself manages to convey later. Magaña also employs the subplot as a method of bringing Tetlepanquétzal and Cuauhtémoc into opposition with each other in order to counterbalance the opposition already shown between Cacama and Ixtlixóchitl. Both Cuauhtémoc and Tetlepanquétzal have already been given the common denominator of youth. The Minister attributed Cuauhtémoc's abrupt departure to his youthful valor (p. 93); Moctezuma defined youth as strong but innocent (p. 97); and the Minister stated in reference

to Tetlepanquétzal that youth does not resist trials (p. 100). At this point, Magaña restates the basic conflict when he focuses on the opposing attitudes of the two youths. Cuauhtémoc reflects the beliefs held by his elders but is driven to action by the energy of youth. Tetlepanquétzal, on the other hand, more closely reflects Moctezuma's attitudes. He defends Moctezuma and accuses Cuauhtémoc of not considering the consequences of his judgment of Moctezuma. We will later see that this is also true of his elders, the nobility. He observes that Cuauhtémoc should support Moctezuma, instead of criticizing him, since only Moctezuma can save the entire people. (Had everyone supported him instead of opposing him, the Aztecs might very well have won the struggle with Cortés.) As in the previous scene with Ixtlixóchitl, Cuauhtémoc's abrupt and angry departure leaves us expecting a re-encounter between the two youths. This expectation again helps to maintain a high level of tension, which is necessary in a play whose focus is on the psychological.

The second scene would have been a good beginning for Act II, as Moctezuma resumes his seat on the stool while a slave changes his sandals. The blood on his sandals indicates that Moctezuma has attended the ceremony to which he objected in Act I. For the audacity of noticing the blood, Moctezuma punishes his slave unmercifully, since in Aztec society the acts of a master are always just, no matter how atrocious. The ensuing discussion

between Moctezuma and the Minister contrasts behavior based on human feeling and that based on strict and impersonal laws of class relationships. Moctezuma considers the slave as a human being, whom he punished unjustly. But the Minister contends that a slave must support the whims of his master. Between these two extremes there is no middle ground. When the unsympathetic Minister abruptly cuts off Moctezuma's "Quisiera explicarme . . . " (p. 88), our interest is stirred in what is occurring in Moctezuma's mind.

At this point, Moctezuma demonstrates an astounding depth of awareness. He observes that he felt as if he were punishing himself when he struck the slave. With this, Magaña subtly brings in the reference in the prologue to the maguey needles, which were an instrument of self-torture for the purpose of atonement to the gods for transgressions. We also connect this with the curtain scene of Act I and deduce that he is referring to that moment of doubt and anguish. This comprehension of his own motive causes Moctezuma to commit himself more strongly to his chosen path of action against human sacrifice and class distinction. Although he does choose to proceed as if all men were rational and sensible in their conception of the world, he nevertheless is aware of the fallacy of that belief: "Yo lo conozco y presiento a veces con espanto a dónde me conducirá" (p. 89). (We will remember this indication of self-awareness later when he is confronted with the cross.) He knows

instinctively that he will destroy himself, but nevertheless he remains committed to his decision.

After allowing Moctezuma to expose his character, Magaña briefly focuses on the equally strong commitment of the Minister to his view. Having promised the gods Moctezuma's conversion, the Minister hopes that Chan, the Mayan ambassador and an astrologer, can convert Moctezuma for him. While Moctezuma is dressed by two slaves for the state visit, he again is rebellious and rejects certain of the ceremonial adornments. Although aware that tradition places power in the symbols of office, he nevertheless believes that power is really vested in his own person. The Minister identifies pride as Moctezuma's principal failing--the pride of his personal estimation of superiority and of his blindness to his own weaknesses. But Moctezuma replies simply: "¿Si no me esperaban así, por qué me escogieron, por qué pusiste tu entero empeño en elevarme?" (p. 92). Unfortunately, he does not realize that heroes and idols are made to be destroyed.

The short scene with Tecuixpo and Cuitláhuac is superfluous, as Tecuixpo has no place in the action at this point. The visit with Chan follows the prescription of a state visit, with each participant performing on cue. The scene is meant to illustrate Moctezuma's apparent blindness to reality. Moctezuma shows only a brief moment of suspicion when the Minister gives Chan a map of Tenochtitlan. However, we realize immediately that the Minister

has betrayed Moctezuma's confidence and is actively preparing his downfall. Although Chan hints at treason, Moctezuma refuses to admit that possibility. Still confident in the intelligence of the nobles, he is sure that they would not betray him against their own best interests. He does not reckon with the strength of their resentment, which we saw earlier. Moctezuma has left a power vacuum by refusing to perform his symbolic duties, and Chan warns that the new gods will destroy him by filling that vacuum themselves--and taking advantage of the unrest among the nobility.

A scene of delicate diplomatic balance, it ends abruptly when the two brothers Cacama and Ixtlixóchitl violently erupt on the scene, bringing internal disorders to the fore again. Moctezuma does not intervene until the last possible moment, at which point he asks Chan to leave so that he may settle a "family" dispute. Ixtlixóchitl asserts that his father's kingdom is rightfully his and demands that it be taken from Cacama and given to him. But Moctezuma refuses to change his original decision in the case, for he believes that the right to rule should be based on attitude rather than valor. This dispute and his response reflect his own situation, since he believes that his intelligence and humane attitude make him a good ruler, rather than the power and boasting of the military, which supports him.

Act II reaches a high point of tension when Ixtlixóchitl warns Moctezuma of treason in his own house (as did Chan) and resolves to ally himself with Cortés. Throughout the whole scene, Ixtlixóchitl's character is violent and uncontained. But Moctezuma both refrains from punishing him and demonstrates too much trust in those around him. Both attributes were revealed in Act I and also pointed out in the scene with Chan. But Moctezuma is convinced that the Spaniards are mortals and accuses the Minister of using elaborate appearances to convince others that they are gods (which we already know is true). To combat those appearances and escape destruction, he needs time--an unfortunately scarce commodity.

The curtain scene of Act II is powerful, and Moctezuma's confidence contrasts sharply with his profound doubt at the end of Act I. When he steps to the front of the stage to declare that "Ahora conoceremos el destino de un hombre" (p. 112), he announces his belief in himself and his power, With the sarcastic "Dioses" (p. 112) which follows, he challenges the Minister and the "gods" to prove him wrong, thus leaving the action on a high point of expectation.

The elements of the prologue and its implications are well integrated into the third act. In the introduction to the act, the chorus again comes to the fore. The ludicrous scene of the two drunk old hags reminds us anew of the "riddling runes" of Macbeth's witches. The flute

music echoes their gaiety, but the third riddle about tears suggests something indefinably sad below the surface. However, Magaña mars the effect of the bitter-sweet atmosphere he has created by inserting a too-obvious attempt at moralizing in the third old hag's comment on the republic.

In this introductory scene, Magaña focuses on the double identity of the chorus, suggested in the prologue. On the one hand, he likens them to idols to be toppled: "Si nuestra mala suerte quiere que otros dioses vengan y nos atropellen, todo quedará desierto" (p. 61). On the other hand, their avowed impotence to affect their fate makes them representative of the dominant Aztec philosophy which considers man to be helpless without the gods and unable to do anything by himself. A supporting allusion is made to the Aztec belief that the world will end on the day 4 Temblor, the last day of their fifty-two year century. On that night, the entire population kept an anxious vigil to discover whether the Sun would rise the next day and the world would continue for another century.[4] The chorus appears to be fearfully awaiting that disaster. This allusion also figures in Moctezuma's crisis in the middle of the act, for although he does not want to see the day when he must face his destiny, he is reanimated on the realization that the sun has in fact

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[4]Alfonso Caso, El pueblo del sol (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1953), pp. 32-33.

risen and that a new day has come. From this point on, the chorus observes the remaining development of the tragedy from the perimeter. (Although the stage directions do not specifically state as much, I suspect that Magaña intended them to observe the entire play in this manner and not just Act III.)

The transition to the play proper is weak. Like the parallel scene of Act II, this scene is meant to represent the ephemeral character of life, to create a situation which will bring Cuauhtémoc and Tetlepanquétzal together, and to emphasize the impression of approaching doom. The first two elements are unnecessary, and the assertion by the chorus that "nosotras ancianas no podemos hacer nada, no esperamos ya nada. Nos taparemos la cara cuando se apague el fuego de los cúes" (p. 61) quite emphatically conveys an atmosphere of doom by itself. The balance of the chorus' actions are merely a saccharine reiteration which weakens the impact of that statement. The insertion of the love scene is disruptive to the action of the play, as there is really no need to set up Tetlepanquétzal behind the stone monument. His unexpected accord with Cuauhtémoc could just as easily have occurred with both of them in attendance at the conspiracy--perhaps forming a third twosome and naturally finding themselves thrown together.

As in the previous two acts, no time is wasted in repeating the idea of superiority and inferiority among

men. In Act I, the Minister reprimands a messenger for not showing proper respect. In Act II, Moctezuma punishes a slave for daring to criticize his actions. In Act III, the Culuacán noble reminds a peon of his place. Our curiosity is immediately aroused by the bundle he has brought in. When he refers to a woman, we recall the Act II reference to Moctezuma's favorite mixteca and apprehensively suspect foul play, but we do not want to believe that the nobles would stoop so low. This worry experienced by the spectator over Moctezuma's expected reaction begins the conspiracy scene on a higher note of tension than would otherwise have been the case.

Magaña's technique of accumulation of characters in the conspiracy scene is effective in building tension. We first see the courting of the common people (represented by the Xochimilco noble) by the military class (represented by the Coyoacán noble). When Cuauhtémoc and the Jefe Militar arrive, the latter briefly pairs off with the Coyoacán noble to form a military group, while the Culuacán noble appears to apply religious pressure to the Xochimilco noble. Cuauhtémoc is merely an innocent observer of the scene. But when the military representatives take control of the group, both Cuauhtémoc and the Xochimilco noble quickly realize that they are in the midst of a conspiracy to destroy Moctezuma by refusing to defend Tenochtitlan. While the Xochimilco noble is too timid to act, Cuauhtémoc shows himself to be more mature than the

others in separating individual and role: "Criticaba al hombre. Pero en estos momentos no podemos abandonar al que es por derecho el señor de México" (p. 74). Again, as in Act I, Cuauhtémoc accuses them of doing nothing--but this time with the clear intention of treason: "Señores, ¿qué historia es ésta, llena de intrigas y egoísmo? ¿Cómo será nunca grande el pueblo mexicano si llegado el momento todos queremos la ventaja personal?" (p. 77). In this way, he reiterates Moctezuma's desire for unified resistance, while the Culuacán noble demands resignation to fate.

Tetlepanquétzal's entrance is so arranged that there was no need for him to be hiding behind the monumental stone (and thus no need for the love scene at the beginning of the act). He could well have entered the scene a bit earlier, kept to the shadows to listen, and emerged just in the manner Magaña intended without Magaña's having gone to the trouble of fabricating a love story to justify his presence. The subplot of the joining of forces of the two youths in resistance is an extension of the main action: two diametrically opposed forces can put aside their differences and work together toward a common goal. The conflict between Cacama and Ixtlixóchitl depicted the opposite resolution--a declaration of all-out war between the two. These two subplots, taken together, indicate that Moctezuma has two courses of action open to him: either a total rift or a compromise. They prepare the way for the ensuing confrontation between Moctezuma and the four nobles.

In his meeting with those nobles, the successive presentation of three proofs of his inescapable destiny slowly destroys Moctezuma's confidence in himself. The events of the prologue now begin to creep into the play, beginning with the feather cape, which the Minister brings in with him. Death as a concept (which he sees in the mirror) means nothing to Moctezuma. But the cross with its tortured figure of Christ ("una forma de violencia que tú desconoces"--p. 84) disturbs him, for in the prologue Tetlepanquétzal had added: "Es como un crimen. Es como tu muerte" (p. 79). At this point, that premonition is uncomfortably close and has shaken even his own gods: "Sólo de verlo, nuestros dioses han envejecido" (p. 85). Moctezuma's simple plea for time is made even more effective by a surprising reply of sincere concern from the Coyoacán noble. But the third proof is feared not only by Moctezuma but also by the Xochimilco noble, since a logical progression would produce exactly what the Culuacán noble reveals: first, death as a concept; then its depiction on an idol; and lastly, its active progress on a human being. (Magaña, of course, expects that we also will respond to the same logic.) The disfigurement by smallpox of the beautiful young woman whom he loved makes death real to Moctezuma. It is the final proof which literally brings him to his knees (as the Minister had vowed in Act I) and convinces him that there is no escape from his destiny.

Having worked Moctezuma into an attitude of penitence, Magaña follows this scene with one very similar to the prologue. He shows Moctezuma's spirit destroyed and reveals his inner suffering in a monologue in which the latter cries out bitterly against the injustice of fate. His monologue derives directly from the observation he had made in Act I about the times when men reveal their true character. He expresses the following view of the world. Life is a passing, intangible thing, and man is nothing before the power of the gods. They merely lie in wait for his death, which can be read in the unalterable lines of his palm. Although man suffers on realizing that he is impotent and alone before his fate, he is ultimately both defeated and liberated by death. When the two dwarfs enter, Moctezuma receives them as if they were his children and invites them to participate in the end of a party--his death. By offering Moctezuma the worm, they symbolically strip him of significance, as they did to Quetzalcóatl in the prologue. They act out Moctezuma's own fear of death's inescapable power (and specifically of Cortés' arrival). His sense of independence and volition damaged, Moctezuma concludes that man's loneliness is too much to bear and decides to seek death himself.

The rest of the scene is essentially a replaying of the prologue. It is Moctezuma's belief in the power of man's will that makes him a hero--and lack of that belief that makes the nobles cowards. Moctezuma insists that man,

if he has to die, should be able to choose the moment of his death, and he approaches his suicide as just such an assertion in defiance of his fate. Although he is depicted here as still rebellious, the parallel prologue scene lends a hint of impotence to his protest. When he pricks his thigh as directed by the chorus, he perceives the physical pain as slight in comparison to the psychological pain he is undergoing. As he is about to plunge the knife into his breast (and we are at a high level of emotion), Tetlepanquétzal enters like Quetzalcóatl in the prologue to reprimand him for his weakness. Moctezuma reacts with shame, drops the knife, covers his face with his hands, and breaks into tears. As in the prologue, Tetlepanquétzal protests that "Yo no soy nadie" (p. 92), which suggests that he feels unqualified to be the judge of Moctezuma's actions.

Moctezuma explains his attempt at suicide as the realization that man is impotent before supernatural forces and that his fate cannot be changed. That conviction caused him to experience profound desperation and an apparently broken will. But he is stirred by the mention of his adversary, Cortés, and of the treason in his house. As he prepares to meet his destiny, the sunrise symbolically reawakens Moctezuma's volition, for a new day represents a new chance. On realizing that even his brother Cuitláhuac has betrayed him, he is "de nuevo en mis terrenos" (p. 97). This is his moment of awakening, the point at which he

accepts the inevitable, but on his terms: "Ellos acuden al hombre, y aquí los espera el emperador" (p. 98). The nobles expect to find a broken-willed man, but will confront a strong and willful emperor who purposefully and consciously goes to his death wearing the mantle of his destiny. Even the Minister is timid before the new strength and purpose Moctezuma has found.

His sense of purpose is expressed in these words: "Si yo soy el objeto a destruir, que se me destruya, pues. Pero con esto: el poder" (p. 100). He refuses to die a beaten man, but rather still fighting--an attitude which gives his death a sense of fulfillment, a sense of purpose. Even though his last hope of unity is dashed, he yet defies his fate:

> Si han fallado unas armas sabré cómo encontrar otras. Que venga, pues, Cortés. Que entre, se le recibirá. Son Ustedes los que me obligan a dar este paso. Cargo conmigo la responsabilidad ante los demás. (p. 102)

In this affirmation, he shows himself a true tragic hero. While he recognizes and accepts his inevitable defeat as a result of his own actions, he still determines to resist to the end and accepts full responsibility for his actions. As in the prologue, he is deserted by all but Tetlepanquétzal to meet his end alone. The profound silence experienced by a man alone with his destiny weighs upon him (as he had observed in his monologue and even earlier in the prologue).

In the final scene, we have an impressive picture of Moctezuma standing there shaking his fist at the heavens, rebellious to the last moment, as he swears that "la fuerza de mi silencio ha de pasar el ruido de las cosas . . . (p. 104). A tragic hero to the end, he goes down fighting rather than whimpering. The curtain scene, while a bit weak in its dramatic impact, leaves us with the hope that one's life can have meaning despite the inevitability of death--since it is man's actions which ultimately give meaning to his life.

Miguel Guardia observed that Moctezuma II is not a tragedy in the strict sense of the word, for it departs from traditional form.[5] However, it is a tragedy in its intent and significance, for although his fate is never in question, we are uplifted by Moctezuma's strength of will in the face of adversity. My only major criticism of the play is the diffusion of the main action by the inclusion of a love triangle with no relationship to Moctezuma's plight--an observation shared by another critic, Carlos Valdés. But even he concludes that "con todo y sus defectos Moctezuma II se aparta en muchos aspectos de los caminos trillados y de los moldes convencionales del teatro mexicano."[6] Magaña is not carried away by philosophical

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[5]Miguel Guardia, "El teatro en México," p. 4.

[6]Carlos Valdés, in Universidad de México, Vol. IX, No. 8 (Apr. 1955), p. 28. (Review)

concepts of man. Even in Los argonautas, Moctezuma remains an individual with a sense of purpose. Magaña understands man's psychology and treats Moctezuma as an example of man facing the existential question of the meaning of his life and death, which is in essence what the true tragic hero has always been.

CHAPTER III

LA MALINCHE: A QUESTION OF RESPONSIBILITY

While the story of Moctezuma is the first chapter in the Conquest, Malinche's association with Cortés offers a panorama of the entire Conquest. In the strange and tenuous alliance between them, there is an ideal opportunity to compare and contrast the Aztec and Spanish cultures. Through their personal tragedy, an intricate interweaving of individual and cultural factors can be presented and examined. In his 1958 play, La Malinche, Celestino Gorostiza has attempted to present some of these possibilities. In his perspective, Gorostiza aligns himself neither with the indigenistas nor the hispanistas, but rather approaches his tragedy from the premise that both sides were equally responsible.

The plot deals with the question of whether the partnership between Cortés and Malinche will last or is merely one of convenience. The relationship which they establish in the first act reaches its peak of effectiveness in Act II. They struggle against odds and conquer a formidable physical enemy, but in the end are themselves destroyed by psychological and cultural forces which they do not foresee. During the second act, certain political forces in society (represented by Cortés' captains, Alvarado and

Velázquez) work to undermine the apparent strength and stability of their association. Act III depicts the dissolution of the relationship, with Cortés and Malinche again going their separate ways. From the peak of its trajectory, the alliance is brought down by the psychological reality of personal selfishness and greed as well as by the cultural reality of the political system.

The play's structure communicates Gorostiza's ideological concepts at the same time as it presents a believable tragedy of two people attempting to create their own destiny in defiance of the tradition of their society. The basic structural movement from imbalance to a peak of balance and back is reflected in the play's rise-and-fall action. Character development and relationships, scene design, and spatial movement also reinforce that structure. The plot develops in the traditional three-act sequence of a "well-made" play. The play's major characters and the primary conflict are presented within the first half of the first act. The turning point occurs during the second act and the climax near the middle of the third act, with virtually every major conflict or event systematically planted before its occurrence. Gorostiza carefully controls the technical elements of his play so as to focus attention on its ideological aspects. He places great emphasis on achieving symmetry and relies heavily on the technique of repetition to create parallels and contrasts. Each act alternates between confrontations of either Cortés

or Malinche (or both) with forces external to them and dialogues between Malinche and Cortés, Cuauhtémoc, or a minor character. The dialogues explore ideological concepts and provide insight into character motivation and change. At the same time, the alternating physical confrontations develop the social and cultural conflict of the play.

Parallel spatial arrangement, character relationships, and sequences of action are important structural elements in Acts I and II. The physical movement of the main characters visually reflects the tension between them. Throughout Act I, Cortés (right) and Malinche (left) approach one another, attracted like opposite poles of a magnet, and in Act II they work together in unison. Visually equivalent sequences of action in the first two acts focus our attention on contrasts, for several character substitutions in Act II are significant in the development of the conflict. Awareness of these contrasts prepares us to examine the probable causes for the partnership's dissolution in Act III, where a major reversal of physical positions--Malinche (right) and Cortés (left)--is immediately obvious. Each repeatedly attempts to approach the other but is constantly repelled, as are like magnetic poles. At the final curtain, total physical separation is achieved, with Cortés and Malinche at opposite sides of the stage.

The exposition, which includes Cuauhtémoc's first conversation with Malinche, establishes the character of the conflict. In the opening moments of Act I, the

conflicting dramatic forces--two cultures and two main characters--are introduced. Cortés and Malinche are in the center of the stage, while Spanish soldiers form a backdrop and Indians flank each side. The formal visual composition of this scene, as well as that occurring in various other scenes, makes the play appear to be a series of static paintings about the Conquest. The appearance of Malinche, who chooses to help him, solves Cortés' communication difficulties. It is important to recognize that the alliance is contracted between equals of high status, rather than between master and slave. When Cortés comments: "Eres muy inteligente. De hoy en adelante tendrás que estar siempre a mi lado. Vas a serme muy útil," Malinche answers: "Yo soy tu sierva y haré lo que tú me ordenes." But her attitude shows no indication of inferiority. Cortés himself recognizes their equal status by calling her his sister (p. 324).[1]

In this first meeting of Cortés and Malinche, Gorostiza succumbs to the temptation to interpret his own play for the audience by adding unnecessary editorial comments when he has already achieved the same result by his physical arrangement of the scene. "Ambos, inmóviles, se miran largamente con admiración y simpatía" (p. 323) is enough

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[1]Celestino Gorostiza, La Malinche, in Teatro mexicano 1958 (México: Aguilar, 1959), pp. 321-77. All subsequent references to the play will refer to this source.

to indicate to director and actor how to present the encounter. But by the addition of the novelistic comment (which can only be apprehended in a reading of the play), "No es solamente el flechazo de un hombre y una mujer, sino el impacto de dos mundos predestinados el uno para el otro, que se encuentran por primera vez" (p. 323), he reveals a lack of confidence in his ability to communicate this idea through the play itself. Later, when Cortés briefly crosses paths with the young Cuauhtémoc, Gorostiza again unnecessarily points out the larger significance of the exchanged glance and adds: "Ambos se ven y se miden como presintiendo la lucha que habrán que entablar el uno contra el otro" (p. 333).

In their first private encounter, Cortés and Malinche both assess the potential opportunities and the dangers of commitment to one another. Malinche is depicted as innocent and mischievous, while Cortés is impatient and easily disheartened. Both are clever and calculating, which comes across in the game of words they play to assess the potential use of the existing Aztec disunity to conquer Moctezuma:

CORTES: (Calculando.) ¿Son muchos los pueblos
sometidos por los mexicanos?

MALINCHE: Casi todo el mundo: Cempoala . . .
Tlaxcala . . . Chalco . . . Huejotzingo
. . . Coatzacoalcos . . . ¡de allí soy yo!

CORTES: (Igual.) Entonces . . . todos ellos serán enemigos de Moctezuma . . .

MALINCHE: Tal vez . . . Pero son débiles, porque los de México les quitan todo lo que producen. No podrían hacer nada contra él, aunque quisieran.

CORTES: (Capcioso.) ¿Ni siquiera si alguien los uniera y los ayudara . . . ?

MALINCHE: (Enigmática y maliciosa.) Tal vez . . . (p. 326)

By indicating in his stage directions the tone of the word play, Gorostiza raises it from the level of a factual question and answer session and allows the characters to reveal their attitudes to the audience directly in their tone of voice and their posture.

The basis of their misconcption of each other's intentions is found in this dialogue. Malinche aligns herself with the oppressed Indians against Moctezuma. She sees in Cortés the possibility of revenge and freedom from the yoke of Aztec slavery. She chooses to ignore the evidence that beneath his armor, Cortés is mortal and instead claims that he is a divinity. Cortés, on the other hand, calculates the possibilities of using the existing enmity between Moctezuma and his subjects to his own advantage. Both Cortés and Malinche are concerned with their own thoughts and consider an alliance as a means to their own

individual ends. These initial assumptions about the intent of the other person will lead to eventual rupture between them.

A few words exchanged between Velázquez and Alvarado concerning opposing loyalties and desires establish the former as Cortés' principal opponent and the latter as his prime supporter. This revelation is the departure point for the development of the main conflict in the rest of the play. Their discussion even suggests the later appearance of Cortés' wife, Catalina, and of Cortés' hopeless political position. When Malinche alerts Cortés to the unrest among his captains, she sets a precedent for her major decisions in the remainder of the play.

In another formally composed scene which follows, Cortés is flanked by his captains on the right; an Aztec chieftain, Tlilancalqui, and his constituents are on the left; and Malinche stands between the Indians and Cortés in her key role as Cortés' communication bridge. With Fray Bartolomé de Olmedo at his right hand, it is implied that Christian right is also on Cortés' side. At this point, Cortés' position appears to be noticeably stronger than that of his physical enemy, the Indians. The interaction of the characters in this scene is the blueprint for further encounters between the Aztecs and the Spaniards. The scene is loaded with tension, as it illustrates visually and verbally the data and attitudes presented in the previous word game.

The first dialogue between Malinche and Cuauhtémoc occurs at the left of the stage, where Malinche seems to make all of her choices. The scene is expository in tone. It presents Gorostiza's basic ideological concepts, clarifies Malinche's motives, further develops her character, and points to the resolution of the conflict. The dialogue is an excellent portrayal of Malinche's contrasting personal motives of vengeance and love, which outweigh loyalty to her own race. It also establishes a close relationship between predestination and freedom of choice. The superstition she demonstrated earlier in reference to Cortés' divinity is shown again here, for she still expects and fears the terrible punishment of her own gods for her part in the defeat of the Aztecs. Nevertheless, she openly defies those gods by falling in love with Cortés and helping him to fulfill the predictions. She chooses to be punished rather than to forfeit her freedom of choice.

Gorostiza identifies Malinche as a potentially tragic character by having her make her choice while fully aware that the consequences will destroy her. By his accusations, Cuauhtémoc forces her to choose between Cortés and her own culture. He also foretells the gods' vengeance and tries to dissuade her from her choice. Malinche recognizes the irony of the situation: the Aztecs will bring about their own downfall with or without her help. But again she states her unequivocal belief in predestination:

"Nuestro destino está escrito y nada podemos hacer para evitarlo" (p. 333). The statement refers both to the Aztecs and to Cortés and herself. Clearly, she believes that both the punishment and the choice are pre-ordained. The rest of the play is pervaded by a feeling of predestination, for the audience (and the protagonists) know that the outcome inevitably will be tragic. Nevertheless, Malinche continues to act as if she, in fact, believed that she were free to choose. Thus, by listening to the discussions between her and Cuauhtémoc or Cortés and by observing her actions and those of Cortés, we can analyze which of their actions will lead to their defeat.

Gorostiza uses Cuauhtémoc to extend the application of these observations on predestination and freedom of choice to modern Mexico. In his discussion with Malinche of the problem of Aztec unity, Cuauhtémoc's comments on the social implications of the events and circumstances could easily refer to similar problems of disunity in the Mexico of Gorostiza's own era:

> Pero los jóvenes estamos trabajando por cambiar las cosas, por lograr que los mexicanos nos estimemos y nos respetemos unos a otros. Cuando eso se consiga, que no es muy difícil, se establecerá la unidad entre todos, y seremos una gran nación fuerte y feliz. (p. 332)

This dialogue and the previous one between Cortés and Malinche, as well as the awareness by the audience of an

underlying conflict with the captains, combine to create an expectation of a rise in action. The tension will grow until the conflict reaches a peak, at which time a sudden reversal of fortune occurs, which outweighs Malinche's initial advantage.

After these expository scenes, the first direct clash between Cortés and his captains occurs. Through Alvarado and Puertocarrero, we learn that Cortés' desire to rebel against the Cuban governor (a relative of Velázquez) is no different from theirs. Both act out of similar desires for personal gain. In a center-stage confrontation between Cortés and his captains, Malinche's earlier warning tips the scales in his favor and helps to steady his apparently shaky leadership. Cortés, judging his captains' greediness to be greater than their desire to mutiny, challenges them to defy him while, at the same time, he threatens the loss of their gold. But although he appears confident in handling the mutiny, Cortés reveals his insecurity and fear in the act's closing dialogue with Malinche. This contrast between belief and action mirrors that just shown in Malinche. Her role in animating Cortés to continue the Conquest is crucial in his success. He reveals his true lack of confidence and his awareness of the extent of the problem when he admits:

> No, no lo resuelve. Lo aplaza solamente y volverá a presentarse a cada momento. Pienso si lo mejor no será regresar y abandonar todos los

> sueños, todas las esperanzas, antes de sumirse en una orgía de sangre que no va a tener fin . . . (p. 337)

With this statement, Gorostiza causes the audience to expect another and stronger clash. He also strengthens the sense of predestination already established in the conversation between Cuauhtémoc and Malinche.

To express Cortés' awareness that his freedom of action is limited as well as the direction of the conflict, Gorostiza has Cortés present himself as a cornered beast, an image which remains valid throughout the rest of the play. The following quote by Cortés contains all the ingredients of the conflict to be unfolded in the next two acts--its background, specific development, Cortés' reactions, and its fatal resolution:

> ¡Sí . . . ! ¡Tengo miedo! ¡Me siento como una fiera acorralada . . . ! No puedo volver a Cuba, porque seré ahorcado por rebelde . . . Ir a España . . . prófugo, fracasado, sería caer más pronto en la trampa . . . Enfrente de mí, un poderoso imperio al que no cuento para combatir sino con pocos hombres que actúan bajo las órdenes de unos capitanes ambiciosos y traidores, dispuestos a abandonarme en cualquier momento . . . y . . . si es preciso . . . a apuñalarme por la espalda . . . No sé a dónde volver los ojos . . . Tengo miedo . . . y necesito

> mostrarme valeroso, enérgico, cruel . . . ¡La fiera acorralada que necesita enseñar los dientes para aplazar la lanzada definitiva! (p. 338)

The development of this image is valuable in unifying the play and in supporting the rise-and-fall movement of the structure. A cornered animal may seem to be winning up to a certain point, but the outcome is never in question. Yet we feel a certain sense of compassion and admiration for its refusal to admit defeat. The fatality of this image is further emphasized when Cortés expresses impotence to resist his magnetic attraction to both Mexico and Malinche. He decision to cut off retreat (by ordering his boats burned) and to look for a new avenue of escape (by sending tribute to Carlos V) are the desperate actions of a cornered man, but we admire his heroic efforts. At the same time as he takes these actions, Cortés indicates that he is aware of their ultimate consequences and of the futility of trying to postpone his fate. Thus Gorostiza makes him a potentially tragic figure, as he did with Malinche earlier.

The curtain scene reaches a high point of emotion and sets the direction of development of the rest of the play, since both major characters make irreversible choices. Cortés decides to burn his boats and fight rather than to retreat. Malinche decides to perceive Cortés as a <u>dios blanco</u>. The idea of the power of her ancestors' gods (manifested in the eclipse) emotionally blinds her, for

she still believes that humans are insignificant playthings of the gods and can do nothing but fulfill their predetermined fate (p. 339). The use of the eclipse to cause the characters to reach their decisions is essentially deus ex machina, as is the fortuitous discovery of sulphur in Act II and Catalina's improbable death in Act III. Pairing these occurrences with the crucial decisions of the main characters is an artificial recourse to strengthen the ideological impact of the scene.

Within the same framework as the first act, Act II takes the characters of Cortés and Malinche and illustrates how they function together, how they act individually when confronted with a choice between ethics and personal interest, and the implications of that choice in terms of intent and responsibility. In this act, Malinche's character evolves, while Cortés is consistently the fiera acorralada. The sense of fatality is increased, the conflict is expanded, and the dramatic tension is built to a climax. The act demonstrates how and why the partnership reached its peak of influence and indicates the socio-political factors largely responsible for its decline.

The first half of the act concerns Malinche's function in the partnership and the changes caused by her relationship with Cortés. In the first act, she supported Cortés primarily as a translator, while he assumed the dominant role. But in the negotiations with the

Cholulans in the second act, it is clear that their roles have reversed. She makes decisions for him and shows herself to be a shrewd leader. A comparison of two similar statements by Cortés clearly illustrates that he does indeed take a secondary role to Malinche in this act. In Act I, Cortés told Malinche: "De hoy en adelante tendrás que estar siempre a mi lado" (p. 324). But in Act II, "siempre me tendrás a tu lado" (p. 345) indicates a significant change in attitude and position. Cortés recognizes this change in her status when he calls her his guardian angel and attributes to her the success of the Conquest. In addition, Velázquez likens her to a commanding general and Cortés to her subordinate (p. 351). Gorostiza's use of an almost identical sequence of action, visual composition, and spatial movement as in Act I strengthens by contrast the impact of this shift in relationship.

The feat of the Conquest becomes Malinche's accomplishment, with Cortés in reality a figurehead. In a sense, Malinche makes Cortés immortal by using her instinct, intuition, and language ability on his behalf. She both actively constructs and defends the image of Cortés as a strong, invincible leader--the <u>dios blanco</u> she chose in Act I, rather than the vulnerable mortal. This image works effectively against the Aztecs, but it deceives neither his men nor the audience. Cortés helps to maintain that illusion by giving orders as if they were entirely his own. But it is Malinche's stability and her will that

carry the partnership to the peak of its influence. Malinche's crucial role in the Conquest is demonstrated in her spontaneous meeting with Coscateotzin. The meeting occurs at stage left, as did her earlier meeting with Cuauhtémoc. In contrast to her openness and honesty with Cuauhtémoc, she is purposefully deceitful with Coscateotzin. The importance of the scene lies in its being her second critical decision point of the play. When again offered a choice of loyalties, she still chooses to reject her own people in favor of Cortés and reveals their plan to him. This second irreversible choice, together with that which Cortés makes subsequently, arrests the rising movement of the play and initiates the downward part of its trajectory.

While Malinche consciously works to strengthen Cortés' position, Velázquez works to undermine him by plotting his assassination and by playing on prejudices. The conflict rapidly approaches a turning point in the second act. An insight by Cortés (carefully planted earlier) becomes reality in Act II: that his captains might try to stab him in the back.[2] But since Malinche has already foreseen it, it is turned to Cortés' advantage and buys him more time. Malinche is acutely aware of the increasing threat from Cortés' men, although she realizes that their presence supports the illusion she has created (p. 344). Alvarado and Velázquez come to represent opposing

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[2]See Cortés' observation cited on page 72.

sides among those men. Early in the second act, tension is established between the two of them when Velázquez opposes continuing the expedition, and Alvarado still supports Cortés, although not quite so fervently as before. Gorostiza captures this point of delicate balance in his treatment of the conversations which the two captains have between themselves and with Cortés. He also supports it psychologically with the composition of the scene. Alvarado is the pivotal point and vacillates between Cortés and Velázquez. Velázquez' physical presence rather than that of Cortés suggests that his influence has become stronger since the first act. He comes dangerously near convincing Alvarado to oppose Cortés when he succeeds in isolating Alvarado's racial prejudice. That prejudice (also emphasized in Los argonautas) operates against Cortés by setting in motion an irreversible trend of appeasement and cruelty which eventually destroys him.

The fortuitous discovery of sulphur and Cortés' approval of the massacre are a temporary setback for Velázquez. The two concrete complaints by which he seemed likely to win Alvarado to his side (lack of gunpowder and racial leniency) are apparently remedied. In addition, his planned coup d'état has been thwarted by Malinche. However, Gorostiza has Velázquez make the following observation on the socio-political reality of the Conquest as a prelude to the developments of Act III:

> La conquista no se hace aquí, sino en la Corte. Nosotros no somos más que un instrumento ciego del imperio. Cuando hayamos dominado todo el país con nuestro sudor y nuestra sangre, vendrán los golillas de Madrid a recoger el botín, a gobernar y tal vez a juzgarnos por nuestros crímenes. (p. 351)

This statement is a means of insuring that the audience grasps Gorostiza's view that Cortés' fate was not entirely his own doing, but rather the product of circumstances which he did not foresee. It is not until Act III that Cortés himself finally realizes that his hope of success does not lie in physical conquest, but in political conquest within the existing system. Cortés' inability to comprehend the larger political reality of the Hispanic system is the fatal weakness which causes his downfall (a weakness which ironically he himself recognized in Act I when he compared himself with a fiera acorralada). Similarly, Malinche pays lip service to predestination, but she nevertheless tries to fashion the world as she wants it. Although she never hesitates in fulfilling the role predestined for her by the gods, her attitude toward it changes. In Act I, her defiance of the gods expressed her innocent joy at love; in the second act, her resistance is the desperate determination of a mother to protect her young. While Cortés is desperately trying

to postpone his fate, Malinche has worked herself into a corner and become another fiera acorralada.

The last scene between Malinche and Cuauhtémoc concerns the questions of intent, responsibility, and especially freedom of choice brought out in their earlier conversation. Pointing out the disparity which often occurs between intent and result, she protests that she did not intend to murder her people but rather to protect the Spaniards from a similar fate. When Malinche accuses the Aztecs of unjust slavery in the name of unity, Cuauhtémoc defends against that accusation with almost the identical words concerning intent and result which Malinche had used to defend herself (p. 357). While Gorostiza sympathizes with Malinche's intentions in choosing to betray the Cholulans, he does not absolve either her or Cortés of responsibility for their actions. Cortés' decision to authorize a massacre at Cholula in order to placate Alvarado's discontent marks the point at which Malinche's influence begins to lose ground to that of Velázquez. Since her betrayal of Coscateotzin's plan leads almost directly to that massacre, Malinche is as responsible for the bloodshed as is Cortés. We can sympathize with the tragedy of the participants, as Cuauhtémoc does with Malinche. But they must accept the consequences and can only hope that the process, once started, will eventually result in something which will be better than its creators. The latter idea is introduced when Malinche reveals that she is

pregnant, as the curtain descends on Act II. She is determined to fight to defend her child's right to live in its own way (p. 358). She no longer chooses to support Cortés out of love and loyalty. Rather she is bound to that choice by her unborn child, who means more to her than the gods. She is torn between two opposing loyalties--race and offspring--and no matter which choice she makes, she herself is condemned to lose. As the curtain closes, her despair is punctuated with the emotional note of uncontrolable tears.

The third act brings the dramatic forces into direct opposition and the conflict to a maximum. The focal point of Act I was Cortés' character and placement of loyalty, while in Act II it was Malinche. The third act exposes the false premises of their relationship, which has come full circle. Each confrontation destroys an opportunity and shows the progressive dissolution of their partnership. In the first two acts, Malinche simultaneously defies and fears the Aztec gods. In Act III, she commits the sacrilege of no longer fearing them, blinded to reality by her belief in the illusion on which the partnership was based --an error which she only now recognizes.

> Nuestro amor . . . nuestra unión . . . fue también nada más eso: un sueño . . . A la primera prueba nos hemos visto frente a frente y no nos hemos reconocido. Nos hemos tratado como

extraños . . . Distintos . . . separados . . .
Solo cada uno en su soledad. (p. 376)

Malinche has always expected punishment without knowing the form it would take, just as she has always been aware of Catalina's existence but never expected her to appear. She realizes too late that the gods' chosen punishment will not be as dramatic as an eclipse, but rather will be the agony of watching her and Cortés' work continue without them:

> . . . seguir viviendo después de terminada la tarea que nos fue encomendada. Ver cómo la vida sigue sin nosotros. Ser espectadores de la comedia en la que ya terminó nuestro papel. (pp. 376-77)

Catalina's impending arrival brings together all of the elements of conflict and the ideas contained in the play. Finally, Cortés and Malinche must accept defeat as well as responsibility for their part in the Conquest. Cortés must expose his true character, and Malinche must admit that all her efforts have been based on an illusion created by herself. Both must recognize the end of their influence and relinquish their control to the established political system. Each fiera acorralada has been defeated and must embark alone on a new life and a new set of choices.

The expectation of Catalina's appearance was planted in Act II when Velázquez suggested that Cortés' only hope

of success was to marry well, which he could not do so long as he was married to Catalina and she remained in Cuba. The questionable circumstances surrounding her death were also insinuated there (p. 351). Their reunion is a confrontation of honesty and hypocrisy, with Malinche ironically still bridging the communication gap. Cortés and Catalina, accustomed to hiding the truth beneath social appearances, are unable to deal with Malinche's composure. Cortés' hypocrisy and cowardice are directly contrasted with Malinche's honesty and loyalty, which increases the tension between them. Until the third act, Cortés and Malinche have not actually dealt with each other face-to-face, but rather have based their relationship on the illusion they have created. Malinche catches Cortés in his own deceit and forces him to admit his cowardice, thus revealing her loss of faith in him (p. 365).

The unlucky accident of Catalina's death reinforces the fiera acorralada image by illustrating that a person can be defeated by circumstances which he cannot or does not foresee. True to his character, Cortés tries to shift the blame to Malinche, who nevertheless remains loyal to the end. Her quick mind sees the political opportunity of an advantageous marriage, which is Cortés' one slim hope for success and to which his fear had blinded him. However, he later admits that the future battles of intrigue and deceit at court will be more difficult than the physical ones of the Conquest (p. 376). Gorostiza

shows his faith in humanity and his sympathy for his characters by restoring some of Cortés' dignity when he has Malinche, as a last token of her loyalty, encourage Cortés to continue fighting.

The tension produced by the meeting of Cortés, Catalina, and Malinche sharpens the impact of the climactic meeting between Cortés and Velázquez. As Malinche did first (p. 365) and Cuauhtémoc did later (p. 372), Velázquez confronts Cortés with the fact that he has worked himself into an inescapable labyrinth. His own insidious behavior has cost him the respect of his men, and he is exposed as the coward that he really is. The idea communicated here is that defeat or success is a combined product of the individual and the circumstances. As Cortés observes: "Todo lo que el hombre necesita es incurrir en la primera debilidad para despeñarse en un precipicio sin fin" (p. 373). Both he and Malinche committed that fault in Act II. He still bares his teeth like a cornered animal, desperately hoping to escape (or at least to postpone) the final blow. But no matter how he chooses to act, he has lost the battle.

The final test of Cortés' character is <u>how</u> he loses --with dignity or cowardice. He chooses the latter in consenting to Cuauhtémoc's unjust torture, which will have no effect on his own fate. He even attempts to absolve himself of guilt by passing on the responsibility to his captains, as he earlier attempted to do by accusing

Malinche of Catalina's death. Cortés' cowardice stands in stark contrast to Cuauhtémoc's proud, fearless acceptance of his fate as a sacrificial victim in the struggle between Cortés and his captains. This antithesis between characters repeats the basic one between Cortés and Malinche and reinforces our impression of Cortés' pusillanimity. When Cuauhtémoc divests himself of his imperial regalia, he symbolically strips Cortés' act of political significance and reveals him as a coward who torments a defenseless man because he cannot attack his own tormentors.

Gorostiza allows us to follow the progress of the internal conflict throughout the play by establishing a polarization of loyalties between Alvarado and Velázquez concerning Cortés. The conflict involves a process of position reversal. As the play opens, Cortés is in a relatively strong position, which consistently weakens. Alvarado is identified as Cortés' right-hand man, who obeys him without question. Velázquez' opposition is established in a few words exchanged with Cortés at the beginning of Act I, and it is reinforced by the fact of his having signed the petition opposing Cortés. In Act II, Cortés' captains are more or less equal to him in power and status. As their strength grows, Cortés resorts to increasingly drastic measures to control them. His attempt to regain the upper hand unfortunately strengthens the reversal trend. By the third act, where Velázquez is the spokesman for the dominant sentiment of the

captains, Cortés is struggling from an inferior position. Throughout Act I and into Act II, Malinche's uplifting influence on Cortés is strong enough to negate the captains' downward pull. But by the middle of Act II, Malinche's dishonest act of betrayal marks the turning point where her influence has reached a peak and begins to decline, while the captains' strength is still increasing. As they are largely responsible for determining Cortés' actions, the captains are the principal element in the downward movement of the play.

A prominent part of the scenery in Act III is the cradle of Malinche's child. Identification of the mestizo with her child began at the end of the second act when she defined him as the "nuevo ser que quiere vivir y que da con la suya un nuevo sentido a mi vida" (p. 358). In Act III, Cuauhtémoc refers to the child as a phoenix arising from the ashes of Tenochtitlan (p. 360). Malinche further proudly terms her child an alloy of silver (Cortés) and copper (Malinche)--a new race evolved from the union of two very different cultures (p. 360). By the end of the act, this identification is complete, and Malinche addresses her hope in the future to her child. As in the opening scene of the play, she sings a Náhuatl lullaby to her son. This lullaby, which begins and ends the third act, ties it together as a single unit and refers to the double heritage of the mestizo. At the beginning of the act, it appears to be a simple lament for Malinche's lost

race. By the closing recitation (in Náhuatl) it is also a lament for the personal tragedy of Cortés and Malinche and an expression of hope in the future. The act concludes with Cortés and Malinche facing away from each other, symbolically bringing their partnership to an end.

In his play, Gorostiza identifies Cortés and Malinche as tragic figures and establishes the inevitability of their tragedy in terms of social circumstances. He supports the development of the tragedy by the use of reversal in the basic conflict and by contrast between major characters. However, his deep concern with technical perfection and symbolism (e.g., Cuauhtémoc = Christ; Malinche's child = the mestizo) makes his play appear artificial. Gorostiza does attempt to approximate the three unities in La Malinche. Since the central question in the play is always when and how the gods' vengeance will destroy the partnership between Cortés and Malinche, there is unity of action. Visual repetition in character relationships and movement simulates unity of place, even though three distinct locations are used. Though over two years are spanned, Gorostiza creates the impression of a twenty-four hour period by extending the darkness of the eclipse in the first act into nightfall in Act II. He follows that with afternoon and evening in the third act. Darkness also accentuates key decision points, which decide the fate of Cortés and Malinche. Malinche's initial choice of Cortés and his decision to fight occur during the

eclipse. While she betrays her people by deceiving Coscateotzin, night closes in and envelops Cortés' decision to allow the cruel Cholulan massacre. Darkness begins to gather again as Cuauhtémoc is led away for torture.

In balancing his play, Gorostiza is careful to see that even the stage setting reinforces the structural design. In Act I, the setting reflects the Hispanic culture. The only scenery is a temporary altar on the beach at Villa Rica and a tree at the right, which serves as Cortés' headquarters. Movement gravitates toward the open space at the left. The sea and ships in the background reinforce the implication of unlimited opportunity and challenge and also suggest the arrival of an alien culture. Conversely, the scene for Act II reflects the Aztec culture. The porch of an Aztec palace in Cholula is perfectly balanced with columns, steps, and braziers at either side. The magnificent Aztec temples in the background reinforce that impression of balance. But this apparent harmony is belied by the laughter of passing Indians, which transforms the scene into an illusion, whose parts are in the delicate balance preceding success or failure. In Act III, a cradle with Malinche's child hangs from a tree at stage right. Cortés' headquarters reflects the disparity of Spanish taste superimposed on Aztec architecture. The destruction of the previous act's balance is echoed in the smoldering ruins of temples in the background, which calls our attention to the dissolution of the partnership.

Little has been said up to this point concerning Cuauhtémoc. Apart from his role as the innocent victim of Cortés and his captains, he occupies no greater plot-related role than the two other Aztec chieftains whom Cortés encountered in the play. Throughout the play, Cuauhtémoc plays a functional, rather than an individual, role. Gorostiza uses him like the chorus of Greek tragedy to comment upon the action, to analyze motives, to offer alternative courses of action, and to predict the outcome of the actions taken. He provides commentary from outside the plot itself and compels us to step back momentarily to re-assess our previous interpretations. This functional role significantly affects our expectations of structure in the play. As Cortés rises in power, Cuauhtémoc's repeated admonitions and the fiera acorralada image predetermine in our mind the inevitable downward movement of the play. Cuauhtémoc's primary role is to build to a peak our expectation of a final punishing blow by the gods. Like Malinche, we never question its inevitability, but we do not know the form it will take.

Malinche's changing attitude toward her fate parallels the unfolding of the structure. Cuauhtémoc's presence also affords Malinche three opportunities to express these attitudes directly. In Act I, Cuauhtémoc's warning seems terribly remote, and she laughs it off. By Act II, it frightens her, as she can already see its fulfillment approaching. In Act III, she resigns herself to the

inevitable. Although the gods are unforgiving, Cuauhtémoc becomes more compassionate and understanding as Malinche becomes more entangled. This evolution in both of their attitudes reflects the author's own stern, yet sympathetic perspective toward his characters.

Cuauhtémoc's role as commentator allows Gorostiza to interject his own comments on unity, responsibility, positive action, and socio-political reality and to expose his own perspective and ideology--all of which influence our interpretation of the protagonists' actions. Through the personal tragedy of Malinche and Cortés, Gorostiza suggests that the Conquest was the product of a joint effort--not merely of two individuals, but of two cultures--whose alliance was based on a desire for personal gain, as well as on a misconception of the other's intentions. He further suggests that, since we cannot change history, we must look to the <u>mestizo</u> to achieve the ideal unity for which all battles seem to be fought.

CHAPTER IV

CORONA DE FUEGO: TRANSFORMATION OF A PEOPLE

Rodolfo Usigli's Corona de fuego (1960) presents another lesson for 20th century Mexico in the tragedy of Cuauhtémoc. Usigli equates Cuauhtémoc's martyrdom with the birth of a nation rather than with the death of a civilization. He substitutes a positive perspective for a traditionally pessimistic one and transforms the defeated águila que desciende into a demigod created by the very forces which destroyed him. Instead of a tragically defeated emperor, Cuauhtémoc becomes an inspiration for his people--their spiritual father--through which the Aztec way of life survived as a part of the new order. Usigli considers the Spaniards to have been merely catalysts in the formation of the Mexican nation, whose real identity stems from the Indians. As per his intention stated in the subtitle, "una tragedia antihistórica americana," Usigli's introductory choice of passages from Alfonso Reyes' works evoke both American and tragic images. La hora de Anáhuac shows the pitiless destruction of an entire indigenous people, while En la tumba de Juárez evokes a national indigenous hero. Usigli indicates his own attitude toward the Conquest with two passages from Ifigenia cruel which indicate compassion toward the

conquered people and reproach for the conquerors. However, his editorial notation, which relates the last quote with the close of his play, is a thinly disguised attempt to condition the reader's interpretation of the outcome. If the play itself cannot communicate this perspective, such a notation is misleading; if it does, the comment is unnecessary.

Although Usigli's epigraphs indicate a strong admiration for Reyes' works, the framework for the thematic and symbolic development of the play is provided largely by Aztec tradition and mythology. To convey the idea in American terms that Cuauhtémoc is a cultural martyr who chose to die in order to achieve his ideal of a Mexican nation, Usigli utilizes various Aztec concepts and myths. According to Aztec belief, earthly life was a bridge between thirteen superior and nine inferior levels of the Universe. The gods inhabited the upper levels, beginning at the top with Omotéotl, from whom all existence stemmed. On his death, a man's spirit had to progressively descend through the nine levels of trial and suffering before he could rest--a process which was believed to take four years. It was inferred that the lowest level led ultimately to the highest--to Omotéotl. However, a warrior taken prisoner in the guerra florida and later sacrificed by his conquerors did not have to experience the suffering of the lower levels and returned directly

to a higher level.[1] Since Cuauhtémoc succeeded in being sacrificed by his conqueror, this earned him the status of a god-hero--on a level above ordinary man.

Two well-known examples among many in Aztec mythology illustrate the concept of self-sacrifice and are particularly applicable to the play at hand. The first is the story of the creation of the Fifth Sun, in which the lowliest of the gods volunteered to be consumed in fire in order to be reborn as the Sun (which is the central god in the Aztec pantheon and the giver of life) so that he might light the world for the new humanity. Although he did demand the sacrifice of all the other gods before beginning his duties, the world would have perished without his self-sacrifice.[2] The other story is one of many concerning Quetzalcóatl, creator and father-protector of mankind. In this story, he descended to the regions of the dead, where he endured innumerable trials in order to recover a few bones of the previous generation of mankind, which had been destroyed by Tezcatlipoca. When finally successful, he restored their life by sprinkling his own blood over them and, as their spiritual father, he subsequently watched over and educated them.[3]

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[1]Miguel León-Portilla, Aztec Thought and Culture (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), pp. 49-61, 124-27.

[2]Caso, El pueblo del sol, pp. 29-32.

[3]Caso, El pueblo del sol, p. 22, 38.

Not only Aztec mythology, but also the Codices, provided inspiration for Corona de fuego. The Codices are colorful and stylized picture records of Aztec history and mythology which are characterized by separate groupings of easily identifiable human and divine characters. The visual composition of the play clearly shows their inspiration. Primary examples are the initial representation of the journey to Tuxakhá, the stylized scenery, the pantomimed interpretation of the Spanish and Indian celebrations, and the multiple planes of action and stylized movement specified by Usigli in the third act. Usigli's stage comments on the action's surrealistic visual representation refer directly to the Codices. He points out that the presentation of Corona de fuego should reflect the style of the Codices, in contrast to the style of a mural à la Diego Rivera (pp. 822-23). The entire play can be viewed readily as a connected series of pictures from the Codices, with the characters of each picture arranged in hierarchical order and the thread of action moving smoothly from one frame to the next.

Corona de fuego is an imaginative recreation of the tragic execution of Cuauhtémoc with the focus on the participants' motives and the significance of their actions. The play's action revolves around the question of Cuauhtémoc's participation in a conspiracy to oust Cortés and with Cortés' decision to hang him for treason. It is a documented fact that en route to Las Hibueras Cortés did

put Cuauhtémoc to death (by hanging) for his alleged conspiracy to overthrow Spanish rule.[4] It is unclear whether Cuauhtémoc actually was party to such a conspiracy or if Cortés ordered the execution out of fear for his own position. His having obliged Cuauhtémoc and his entourage to accompany him as hostages in the first place strongly suggests the latter, which is the view chosen by Usigli. As tragic antagonists, both Cuauhtémoc and Cortés are aware of their own motives and are conscious of the future importance of their decisions. In the first two acts of the play, their characters are developed separately, while the last act casts them in direct opposition with one another. The central question deals with the interrelationship of the Spanish and Aztec cultures on the development of a Mexican national identity and the effect of Cuauhtémoc's death on that development.

Subtitled "La llegada," the first act consists of four episodes which correspond to changes in location and are punctuated by intervening darkness. These are 1) a narrative introduction by the Choruses, 2) Cortés' entrance and his discovery of Paxua's lie, 3) Pax Bolón's dilemma of loyalty, and 4) the meeting of Cortés and Pax Bolón. The Choruses in Corona de fuego reflect the attitudes of the antagonists' peoples, but they have no direct influence on

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[4]Jon Manchip White, Cortés and the Downfall of the Aztec Empire (London: Hamish Hamilton, Ltd., 1971), pp. 278-79.

the action. They take a narrative, pantomimic role and merely observe, admonish, and react emotionally to the flow of events. They only interact with the protagonists on a symbolic level in order to expose the latters' motives and the attitudes of their respective cultures. Usigli's two Choruses portray the psychological make-up of two peoples--the collective Spanish and the collective Indian races. Two sub-choruses (mactunes and chontales) depict the strength of the master-slave tradition in Aztec society, while an extension of the Chorus as voices which torment Cortés with alternatives bares his motives to the audience. The Choruses' use of verse helps to keep the audience intellectually removed from the action and aware of style and content in the play.

In the first episode, the Choruses enter from the audience, while their symbolic journey is projected as shadows against the stage background. This movement is important in establishing the concept of the play as a voyage by two peoples from one state of being to another. They become involved spectators when they take positions at either end of the stage, from which place they observe and comment on the progress of the dramatic action and of their voyage. The two Choruses establish distinct Spanish and Aztec attitudes of optimism and pessimism. From these separate perspectives, they describe the events preceding the central action and predict the outcome. The parallel entrance songs of the Coro Mexicano and the

Coro Español reflect two divergent collective perceptions of the same events and places on the journey to Tuxakhá. Each group is devoted to its respective leader, distrusts the other group, and bemoans its own trials. The Spaniards come across as pleasure-seeking, egotistical, and distinctly aware of a manifest destiny. In contrast, the Indians are quietly suffering, humble, and apprehensive. They are like lost children searching aimlessly for something to replace their parents and home, now that the Aztec empire no longer exists.

This cultural contrast provides the background upon which are drawn the figures of Cortés and Cuauhtémoc, with Pax Bolón caught in a dilemma between them. The Coro Mexicano looks up to Cuauhtémoc as a child does to its father. Stepping beyond the time limits of the play, the Coro Mexicano sees him as the father of the Mexican nation and a constant inspiration for its future development:

> Y dijo No a su propio nombre, símbolo
> de descenso, y No a la profecía
> de Tonatiuh, en Malinche realizada,
> y en la noche sin fin de su destino,
> dijo No al Dios del teul que él de luz dice,
> y al fin en una negra, inversa aurora
> gritó su No a los dioses de su raza.

Hoy, estatua de pies quemados,

viviente No en pedestal de silencio. (p. 778)[5]

For the Coro Español, Cortés is a pillar of strength and determination, whose iron will sweeps them along as in the wake of a storm (p. 778). The Coro Español does not evolve as the play progresses. In contrast, the Coro Mexicano does evolve from a group of conquered Aztecs to a nascent Mexican nation awaiting the final catalyst of Cuauhtémoc's martyrdom to transform it into a single entity with a common goal.

Tuxakhá is the scene for the second episode, in which Cortés and the dramatic action are introduced. Cortés' short introductory monologue reveals his restless ambition, his distrust of the natives, and his Hispanic sense of manifest destiny. These characteristics have already been associated with the Spaniards through the Coro Español and are now embodied in his person. Cortés is briefly cast in a narrative role in which he introduces the other actors.[6] Doña Marina, Sandoval, and Bernal Díaz are actually minor characters, present only

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[5]Rodolfo Usigli, Corona de fuego, in Teatro completo II (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1966), pp. 774-840. All subsequent references to the play will refer to this source.

[6]The concept of the actor as a narrator has its roots in Greek tragedy. The original actors were merely members of the Chorus who began portraying parts of the narration. See Allardyce Nicoll, The Development of the Theatre (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1957), pp. 19-20.

as part of the historical picture, and have no significant participation in the main action. But by the use of this unexpected technique, Usigli causes the audience to focus more closely on Cortés' revelation of his character. When the Indians enter, Cortés plays the role of hijo del sol with enthusiasm, adding the flourish of calling himself "el sol que no tiene tramonto" (p. 787). After sketching Cortés' character, Usigli introduces a fundamental disagreement among the Indians themselves, illustrated in Paxua's game of pretense and in the Cacique's simultaneous game of treason. This intrigue is the pivotal point of the action. Paxua's fabrication reveals the conviction that predestination should be defied and Cortés rejected as a god. The Cacique's betrayal reveals the opposing conviction of accepting fate and adhering to tradition. The concept of treason presented in this scene is repeated several times throughout the play until Pax Bolón's final betrayal of Cuauhtémoc in Act III.

The next scene at Itzamkanac (represented by clouds and pedestals) states the dichotomy clearly. It also introduces Pax Bolón, who is essential as the catalyst in the dramatic action. He is torn between two loyalties or obligations, both social and religious, and is faced with the necessity of making a choice between the two:

No quiero faltarle a Cuauhtémoc
y no quiero perder con Cortés.
. . .

No lo quiero creer, pero no puedo
batallar contra el sol que es Cortés
ni hacer armas contra el mar que es Cuauhtémoc.
(p. 792)

On the one hand, he owes obedience to Cuauhtémoc as his ruler and as the head of the Aztec religion. On the other hand, Cortés could remove the Aztec yoke from his people and might even be Quetzalcóatl, returned as he promised from across the sea. In that case, Pax Bolón's obligation to Cortés would take precedence over that to Cuauhtémoc. The pedantic religious disagreement between Pax Bolón's high priests is vividly portrayed and reinforces a later contrast between Cuauhtémoc (the águila que desciende) and Cortés (the sol que se levanta)--p. 792. A concern which enhances Pax Bolón's own dilemma is the social reality of the plight of his people, which is reflected by the Corueta Mactún ("hombres de paz y de trabajo"--p. 789). His concern for his people is a key factor in his final decision to choose Cortés, for with Cuauhtémoc's martyrdom, there is only one god to satisfy.

The last episode (again in Tuxakhá) leads to Cuauhtémoc's entrance at the end of the act. Cortés discloses more of his character in an aside to the audience, in which he reveals that he is aware of his own precarious position (much as Pax Bolón admitted his dilemma in the previous episode). At the same time, he admits his belief that Cuauhtémoc is the key to his problems. This is an

early indication of his decision in Act III to dispose of Cuauhtémoc in order to quell the constant threat of rebellion. Both Cortés' asides and those of Cuauhtémoc are important in establishing tragic awareness in the protagonists and in bringing them to a climactic clash in the third act. In this last episode, Pax Bolón and Cortés come face-to-face in a game of pretenses. Pax Bolón establishes his character by pretending loyalty to Cortés (as Cortés feigns friendship toward him). He passively allows his idols to be destroyed without intervening and then seeks to fulfill his other obligation by requesting an audience with Cuauhtémoc. By the time Cuauhtémoc appears at the end of the act, we have already formed an image of him as a superhuman symbol based on the comments of the Choruses, of Cortés, and of Pax Bolón. But when he does appear on the scene, he creates disparity between our expectations and the reality of his appearance. It is on this note of dissonance that Act II begins.

The plot line of the second act, "Las fiestas," is simple. Pax Bolón proposes to Cuauhtémoc a joint effort at overthrowing Cortés. Cuauhtémoc decides to consider it while enjoying the party, which Cortés subsequently orders curtailed, due to his fears of a conspiracy. When Cuauhtémoc later refuses to sanction his proposal, Pax Bolón reports the conspiracy to Cortés as Cuauhtémoc's idea, in order to protect himself. He thus pays homage

to both faces of the two-headed god he mentioned in Act I (p. 792). Finally, Cortés decides to order Cuauhtémoc killed.

Symbolically this act is an attempt to communicate in visual and auditory impressions Usigli's image of the Mexican as an enigma, whose real character is not what appears on the surface. In the second scene, Cuauhtémoc defines the elusive Mexican as:

> . . . un indio triste
> que ríe y hace burla de su nada
> porque cuando parece no ser es cuando existe
> entre verdes de loros y palomas azules,
> como un color, como un sonido o como una danza,
> como un silencio, como una esperanza. (p. 805)

At the same time, the act is meant to illustrate the inherent differences between the Spanish and Indian cultures. Since Usigli couches the concepts of his play in rhetorical language, his insistence on a highly stylized visual presentation whose many levels and many interpretations are explored by rhetoric is also necessary for consistency of artistic approach. He attempts to make the entire act capture the verbal imagery in its visual form. The combination of verbal imagery with a visual counterpart does not, however, necessarily produce a viable dramatic form. Usigli'a primary problem is that he tries to communicate too complex an image, thus leaving us with a confused impression.

The first scene finally poses one of the twin problems of the play. (Usigli's play moves so slowly that he does not find time in Act I to do more than hint at the major conflicts.) Cuauhtémoc's problem is to conspire or not to conspire against Cortés. Later, Cortés' parallel problem appears as to kill or not to kill Cuauhtémoc. A ritual interchange between Cuauhtémoc and the Corueta Chontal first explains the significance of the brief formalities with Pax Bolón and of his proposal of rebellion. Cuauhtémoc's humility is in total contrast with the arrogance they expect of their emperor. He is more like the poet Netzahualcóyotl than an Aztec emperor. The tension created between Cuauhtémoc and the Corueta Chontal is transferred to the exchange between Cuauhtémoc and Pax Bolón. Any traditional Aztec emperor would accept, if not demand as his due, Pax Bolón's offer of allegiance and arms. However, in this case, it meets with a confusing and noncommittal statement that actions are worth more than words. Understandably, Pax Bolón is bewildered by such a statement.

However, Usigli has favored the audience with an inside glance at Cuauhtémoc's thoughts--a privilege not afforded Pax Bolón. In a soliloquy, Cuauhtémoc undergoes a self-examination, in which he exposes the internal struggle between his desire to destroy Cortés immediately and his dream of a future Mexican nation. He foresees his role as an inspiration for his people:

Porque Cuauhtémoc es el jefe de los hombres
que guardan ya silencio en nuestra tierra.
La sangre de Cortés haría que esta tierra
prodigiosa se nos volviera estéril.
Malinche vivo pagará su crimen,
Malinche muerto, inverso abono, secaría
esta tierra que vive contra la profecía. (p. 802)

This statement, like many Cuauhtémoc makes in the play, has little to do with his situation in the play. It rather is a poetic description of his future stature. Both the images of Christ and of Quetzalcóatl are elicited in Cuauhtémoc's soliloquy on the relative value of killing Cortés or of being killed by him. Whereas the spilling of Cortés' blood would have destroyed the new race in its beginnings, Cuauhtémoc's blood gives them life. Pax Bolón, of course, has no access to these thoughts and thus is totally taken aback at Cuauhtémoc's passive response to his proposal.

In the very brief second scene, Cuauhtémoc and the Aztec princes initiate a game of make-believe, and Mexicaltzinco is introduced. He is Cuauhtémoc's Judas and will precipitate his destruction. More importantly, the scene presents three concepts which will be elaborated on in the remaining three scenes of the act. First, the difference between the Spaniard and the Indian is like that between laughter and a smile, between a "flor que revienta y se marchita" and a "flor que abre despacio y que dura su

día, / una flor de silencio y de largo deleite" (p. 804). Second, the essence of what is Indian lies below the surface, below the ritual and elaborate exterior, for reality is not always as it appears on the surface. Third, the Aztec civilization was destroyed by its inherent disunity, handed over by its own people to the conquerors.

The dramatic action is not significantly furthered in the third and most of the fourth scene, although Mexicaltzinco's presence does increase tension. These two scenes are excellent visual and musical interpretations of the Codices, and their importance lies in the elaboration of the first two images indicated above.

The third scene is a short, pantomimic scene narrated by the Coro Español and accompanied by Spanish flutes and native percussion instruments. Visually it is very colorful, and its movement is stylized and restrained. Its brevity echoes the image of laughter, the beautiful, short-lived Spanish flower to which Cuauhtémoc referred. The Coro Español again states the Spanish attitude toward life and the Conquest. They are Spaniards first, last, and always, and have no intention of becoming Mexican. (In his first soliloquy, Cuauhtémoc declared that only when their hearts were rooted there would they truly own Mexico.) They feel a strong sense of manifest destiny and fully enjoy their role as gods. They do recognize their participation in the creation of a new race:

Somos el semen de la Nueva España.
De nosotros saldrá la raza nueva. (p. 806)
Cada español, Adán, cada india, Eva.
¡Qué paraíso éste que erigimos
y a Castilla y América renueva! (p. 807)

However, they live for the pleasures of the present and attach little significance to

. . . unos cuantos mesticillos,
chispas de nuestro fuego y alegría,
gajos de nuestra fuerza y valentía. (p. 807)

This image of the Spaniards remains unchanged throughout the play. The only thing that does change is our conception of their role in creating the Mexican nation. In the end, the spectator replaces the Spaniards' egotistical view of their own importance with a composite view which puts them in perspective with the Indian element.

The Indian celebration in the fourth scene contrasts strongly with the previous scene--as a smile compares with laughter. The flower that opens slowly and lasts a long while is echoed in the slow unfolding of the scene in three beats, each announced by the Coro Mexicano. First, the Aztecs rejoice at the news that their journey will apparently end in Tuxakhá and that they will return home. Then comes Doña Marina's abrupt interruption and the termination of the oelebration, followed by a sad retreat. Native instruments and pantomimic dances accompany the narration by the Coro Mexicano and form a background for

Cuauhtémoc's dialogues with his chieftains, with Doña Marina, and with Pax Bolón.

The fourth scene is an attempt to communicate the complexity of inner and exterior reality. The hallucinatory effect of a drug (filtro) taken by Cuauhtémoc and his chieftains illustrates the difficulty of distinguishing between the two states. The interweaving of these planes of reality creates an unreal atmosphere designed to communicate Usigli's concept of the various interpretations of reality. The dialogue of the first beat reflects diverse interpretations of the Coro Mexicano's news, ranging from the joyous elation of Coanacoch and Tetlepanquetzin, through the skepticism of Temilotzin, to the inner peace and confidence of Cuauhtémoc. As these impressions are communicated to the audience, the music and dancing build to a climax. At that point, Doña Marina is introduced by the Coro Mexicano and enters to deliver Cortés' ultimatum. She functions in the fourth scene as the agent which arrests the flower's opening and initiates its slow closing. In the third beat of the scene, the Coro Mexicano reflects this change by ceasing the dancing and music. The scene ends with the Coro Mexicano's soft recitation of a Náhuatl poem--"¡Ojalá nunca muera, nunca perezca yo!"--which expresses the characteristic stoicism of the Indian race.[7]

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[7]This stoicism is dealt with again in Cuauhtémoc by Salvador Novo. See León-Portilla, Los antiguos mexicanos, pp. 148-156 and Caso, El pueblo del sol, pp. 122-23.

To explain the roots of this stoicism and to introduce a key image of Act III, Usigli has Cuauhtémoc explain the Náhuatl concept of time. In the Náhuatl world view, time is a continuum (a journey) on which the present is merely an illusory, ever-changing bridge of "lágrimas, desilusión y sangre" (p. 813) between the past and the future.[8] As the past no longer exists, Cuauhtémoc's only hope of salvation for his people and of fulfilling his dream of unity is the future. The essential misunderstanding between Pax Bolón and Cuauhtémoc is based on that concept of time. While Pax Bolón understands and acts only in the present, Cuauhtémoc sees the present in terms of the past and the future. Usigli's concept of the future as a light which inspires Cuauhtémoc and blinds others, is expanded and further developed in Act III. At the end of the scene, Cuauhtémoc postpones a decision on the conspiracy. His recognition of Mexicaltzinco as his Judas is directly followed by Pax Bolón's and Mexicaltzinco's denunciations of him in the last scene.

The fifth scene is also tripartite. The first and second beats, anticipated in Act I by the betrayal of Paxua, release both the tension of Mexicaltzinco's mounting suspicions and that of Pax Bolón's painful dilemma. In their accusations, both act out of fear for themselves, and their betrayals reconfirm Cortés' distrust of all

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[8]León-Portilla, Los antiguos mexicanos, pp. 174-75.

Indians. In the third and key beat of the scene, Cortés undertakes a dialogue with his conscience, in which he examines the various options available to him and exposes the motives behind his final choice. His introspection parallels the opening dialogue between Cuauhtémoc and the Corueta Chontal and also Pax Bolón's soliloquy in the first act. These dialogues reveal that Cortés is aware of the consequences of his actions. His self-analysis is prompted by his own doubt:

> ¿Voy a dar muerte porque lo deseo
> o porque así mi Dios lo tiene escrito?
> ¿Es justicia lo que hago o es delito? (p. 818)

Cortés sees Cuauhtémoc's death as necessary to dispel his doubt and to protect his position. No matter what the motive, Cuauhtémoc's death has already been decided--only Cortés' rationalization of its necessity has not. Four voices represent his conscience. They are, in a sense, extensions of the Chorus and represent his avaricious and egotistical desires. The last voice is that of truth--which reveals that he is acting out of fear and hatred. He momentarily recognizes those as his true motives and does accept responsibility for his actions. This cognizance is the one point in which Usigli is consistent in attempting to develop his tragic antagonists. Through Cortés, Usigli expresses the belief that the one who holds the power at the moment is the only one who can and should act--no matter what the consequences.

The act closes as Cortés begins to put his decision into action. Here, Bernal Díaz performs his only significant role in the play. He challenges Cortés' decision, whereupon Cortés sharply reaffirms it. Díaz introduces the image of a boat which is constantly blown off its precharted course and never arrives at its goal. He applies this image to Cortés, and it is later extended to the Coro Español. The image reflects Usigli's concept of Spain as a catalyst in the development of other nations, while it never really achieves stability itself. Cortés challenges this image, but it is revived and reaffirmed by Cuauhtémoc in Act III. In a display of pride and arrogance, Cortés' final words prepare the scene for Act III. He pictures himself as a judge awaiting the arrival of the accused. (But Cuauhtémoc is really the condemned, as the verdict has already been decided.)

In Act III, Usigli especially emphasizes the importance of adhering to the style and tone of the Codices in the visual presentation of the play. The entire visual spectrum of the first act is brought together here in one composite scene. Usigli gives explicit instructions about the division of the scene into diverse planes, which change as the action develops. He even specifies the spectators' visual perspective on the characters, who must be made to seem to grow or diminish in size as they approach or depart from Cortés' tribunal in the center of the stage. Cortés occupies a pivotal position as the

judge (he was the conqueror and a deity in Act I). Cuauhtémoc's accusers (Mexicaltzinco, Tapia, and Juan Velázquez) are on the right, while Cuauhtémoc, Pax Bolón, and the Aztec princes are on the left. The simple, stylized presentation of Itzamkanac in the first act was done by a few visual suggestions. That technique is repeated here in the suggestion of a ceiba tree. The shadow projection of the Choruses' journey to Tuxakhá in Act I is also echoed in Act III, for the silhouette of a cross is projected against the background.

Act III examines the consequences of Cortés' decision and attempts to pull together the fundamental images of the play. The act is really a lengthy dialogue between Cortés and Cuauhtémoc. It is composed of two series of dialogues, which are separated by a choral interlude and terminated by a choral epode. The denunciation of Cuauhtémoc, his self-defense, and Cortés' verdict constitute what action there is. The first series of dialogues concludes the succession of betrayals in the play and is essentially Cortés' accusation of Cuauhtémoc, which is supported by the testimonies of Mexicaltzinco, Pax Bolón, and Doña Marina. In opposition to these declarations, Tetlepanquetzin and Temilotzin defend Cuauhtémoc. However, before Cortés announces his verdict, he undergoes a final struggle with his conscience. This struggle precedes the second series of dialogues in which Cuauhtémoc presents his defense (actually more an accusation of Cortés) and

his farewell. This second series of dialogues focuses on 1) the concept of reality and illusion and the relativity of roles; 2) the importance of time as the ultimate judge of one's actions; and 3) the concept of an endless journey, without rest or end, as in Bernal Díaz' image of the boat. The curtain scene, or choral epode, represents the fusion and metamorphosis of the central images of the play.

In contrast to their prominent role in the first two acts, the Choruses occupy a low-profile position in Act III. They only comment on two occasions, as if waiting for an important occurrence. In the prologue, the Choruses introduce the image of the play as a journey. Throughout the play, both the Coro Mexicano and the Coro Español appear to be on a road going somewhere. But they are not self-directed and do not know where they are going or why. The attitudes of the Coro Español and of the Coro Mexicano toward the journey differ significantly. The former's attitude is consistent throughout the play. It is Spanish to the core and only a catalyst in the transformation of the Mexican people. Its guiding principle is simply "obrar antes, preguntar después" (p. 778) (or as Doña Marina had admonished Mexicaltzinco: "Más vale errar primero que deplorar después"--p. 816). Cortés also illustrates this attitude when he decides to put Cuauhtémoc to death and consider the consequences later. Cuauhtémoc suggests that Cortés' cowardly deed will always block his road to success:

Así pues, hasta el último crucero,
siempre me encontrarás en tu camino,
y así será a igual distancia, Malinche,
del cielo y del infierno,
porque nunca sabrás cuál es tu sitio,
tu paradero, tu descanso eterno. (pp. 836-37)

Thus Cuauhtémoc reinforces Bernal Díaz' image of Cortés as a boat doomed never to reach its destination.

The Coro Mexicano's character is also consistent throughout the play until Cuauhtémoc's death, when it undergoes a metamorphosis. It also appears to be on a perpetual journey, with no direction except forward, which reflects the Aztec concept of time as a continuum. Like a child without a home, it wanders aimlessly. However, at the close of the play, it undergoes a transformation and ceases to be the pessimistic, disoriented Aztec people of the prologue. It has instead acquired an inner sense of purpose and direction which the Spaniards never have. The subtitle of Act III, "La ceiba en cruz," identifies this transformation as the central concept of the act. That image is visually echoed in the superimposition of the cross on the ceiba tree. Cuauhtémoc, by his martyrdom, becomes the spiritual father of the Coro Mexicano. His dream of a Mexican nation created through a merging of cultures becomes its goal. Both the Coro Mexicano and Cuauhtémoc refer several times to the father-child image in Acts I and II. In the third act, Cuauhtémoc sees the conspiracy as

the harmless daydream of a child (p. 826). As would a father, he continues to have faith in his people and in their future. On the other hand, the Coro Mexicano, like a child, is afraid of being abandoned upon Cuauhtémoc's death. However, his death is necessary to complete the image and to make him its spiritual father, much as Quetzalcóatl's sacrifice made him the father of mankind.

The importance of light in the play does not become evident until Act III. Fuego is used in reference to the myth of the Fifth Sun. Cuauhtémoc himself brings up the image (p. 835) and, in the final epode, the Coro Mexicano has a vision of Cuauhtémoc crowned with fire in eternity. He has symbolically redeemed his race with his death and has conquered Cortés with time. Light is also employed as a synonym for truth. It is brought specifically to bear on Pax Bolón and Mexicaltzinco, who betrayed Cuauhtémoc because they refused to recognize the painfully evident truth of the Aztec culture.

> ¿Sabes tú, Capitán, si hablan de espaldas
> porque la luz sus ojos no resisten
> y si niegan por eso la verdad que no ven? (p. 829)

Only Cuauhtémoc himself dares to look directly at the light and to be transformed by it.

Light in contrast to darkness is variously used by Cortés and Cuauhtémoc throughout the play. In Act III, it is focused on Cortés' mistaken image of his (and Spain's)

relative importance in the Conquest. At the end of Act II, he said of Cuauhtémoc:

> El no es ya más que la sombra
> de un avasallado imperio
> que la luz de la conquista
> proyecta en el ras del suelo. (p. 819)

But in Act III, Cuauhtémoc reverses that relative importance: ". . . tu figura / sobre el mapa de México será sólo una sombra" (p. 835). The audience is thus asked to re-examine the relationship of the Spanish and Aztec roles in the formation of the Mexican nation.

The most important usage of light in the play, however, is in a startlingly appropriate image of the relative brilliance and importance of two lights to each other. Although Cortés sees himself as the representative of enlightenment, his true role as a luminary is secondary to that of Cuauhtémoc, when viewed with the perspective of history. Cuauhtémoc compares Cortés to the taper used to light a torch, which, having fulfilled its purpose, is then extinguished:

> Y como aquél que enciende las antorchas,
> te apagarás después de crear ese mundo.
> Encendida, arderá siempre la antorcha. (pp. 834-35)

Gorostiza presented the same idea in La Malinche. Once their role was fulfilled, Cortés and Malinche were cast aside so that others could continue the transformation of Mexico. It is this same image which the Choruses' final

song is meant to illustrate. When Cuauhtémoc is martyred, the shadow of the cross is projected upon the ceiba tree. In this union of opposites, the Coro Mexicano is transformed, and the fire is miraculously lit which is to inspire the Mexican nation. This process is expressed in the interaction of the Coro Español with the Coro Mexicano. The former begins a victory song but is immediately drowned out by the strength of the latter's joyful reanimation, which is the marching song for its new-found direction. On this uplifting note, the play ends.

In part, Usigli has managed to create the blend of elements he proposed in introducing his play as "una tragedia antihistórica, americana." The play is anti-historical, as it does not try to recreate an historical event, but rather attempts to examine and interpret it in the light of historical perspective for the insight it can provide on 20th century Mexico. Usigli searches for individual and cultural motives which might enhance our appreciation of the outcome. Corona de fuego is obviously American not only in the sense of dealing with the history of the Conquest, but also in its sources of inspiration--the Codices as well as Aztec myth. Integrated into Usigli's own idea of classical form are an American hero and Chorus, a stylized visual presentation based on the Codices, and the development of a symbolism which reflects the Aztec concept of the Universe. This symbolism includes the idea of time as a continuum or journey, the legend of

Quetzalcóatl as the father of the new race, and the myth of the Fifth Sun.

Usigli also makes numerous references to águila, sol, mar, and serpiente or reptil. Taken together, these references appear to be aimed at eliciting an image of the founding of Tenochtitlan. According to legend, Huitzilopochtli directed that Tenochtitlan be founded on the site where an eagle was seen devouring a serpent in a nopal cactus.[9] In an extension of the legend to the events of this play, Cortés (the Sun) might designate the place and time of the founding of a new nation (Cuauhtémoc's martyrdom). Cuauhtémoc (the Aztec empire) and Doña Marina (treachery) might be the sea upon which it is founded. Cuauhtémoc might also be the eagle (the Aztec symbol) which defeats the serpent (Doña Marina and the Aztecs) by outliving it to found a new nation. Unfortunately, Usigli is not consistent in his use of these references, and a strict application of such an image is difficult.

Usigli calls his play a tragedy, which is a misnomer. In his interpretation of classical tragic form, the Choruses introduce the action, alternate their comments with the development of the plot, and close with an epode. As involved spectators, they pantomime their reactions to the events but do not participate directly in the action. Unity of time and place are respected, but unity of action

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[9]León-Portilla, Los antiguos mexicanos, pp. 43-44.

and concept is seriously fragmented, as there are several equally important conflicts occurring at once. As the hero, Cuauhtémoc demonstrates understanding of the more far-reaching implications of the conflict and of its resolution. Unfortunately, Usigli fails to create a truly tragic hero, for although Cuauhtémoc is committed to a course of non-action, he is hardly a man whom we can understand. He has been so abstracted by Usigli that he has become merely a symbol. Nor is there a struggle in any real sense between Cuauhtémoc and Cortés (nor even with Pax Bolón). Cuauhtémoc chooses--in fact, seeks out--martyrdom because he is so convinced of its symbolism. There is no real interior suffering on the part of Cuauhtémoc, nor any sudden revelation of truth. Nor is his death due to an error or flaw in his character. Only marginally can we say that he is in opposition to an established system. Pathos and identification are absent, leaving us with a dramatic poem in three parts, accompanied by pantomime.

In addition, on close examination of the play, Cuauhtémoc is not even the real hero. The Coro Mexicano (also reflected in Cuauhtémoc and Pax Bolón) is the true protagonist which undergoes character development in the play. Cortés' and Cuauhtémoc's conflict is merely a catalyst in the transformation of the Coro Mexicano. However, the Coro Mexicano is faced with the formidable task of functioning on two levels of symbolism--as one of two opposing cultures and as a Mexican nation in creation.

Neither concept is allowed to dominate and develop fully. As the play progresses, Usigli continually adds new and vivid images and levels of meaning. The result is a confusion of overlapping images and levels of interpretation in which even the identity of the hero is ambiguous. This confusion led the critics to reject the play resoundingly. In a review two days after the opening of Corona de fuego in the Xola, José Hugo Cardona observed:

> Sólo provocó el más grande desaliento que se haya palpado, en el estreno de una pieza mexicana, de varios años a la fecha, puesto que casi pisó los linderos del fracaso.[10]

A major difficulty with the play is that, on the surface, it appears to be a conflict between Cuauhtémoc and Cortés, or between the Indian and Spanish cultures. Both Cuauhtémoc and Cortés do have their own internal battle--Cuauhtémoc, between the duties of an emperor and those of a father; Cortés, between pride and fear. But Cuauhtémoc's death is not the result of a true conflict between the two characters or between their cultures (as some of the rhetoric would have us believe). It is instead the result of separate choices by each of them: action by Cortés and non-action by Cuauhtémoc. Their respective victory or defeat is only relative to the plane of time with which each is concerned--the present or the future.

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[10] José Hugo Cardona, "Las coronas y los ripios," El Universal (Sept. 13, 1961), Sect. 3, p. 7.

The Aztec civilization was ultimately destroyed by an irresolvable conflict of views in its approach to the world. Both views were accepted as truth, for each was supported by a segment of the clergy (reflected in the dispute between Pax Bolón's high priests). This division prevented the development of unity and the formation of a nation, for rulers found themselves caught in the middle, forced to serve a god of two faces. The entire play revolves around this division and its consequences. However, the conflict is not limited to Cuauhtémoc and Cortés, but is just as strong between Cuauhtémoc and Pax Bolón or the Corueta Chontal and between the Coro Español and the Coro Mexicano. It is introduced in the betrayal of Paxua and is clearly defined in Pax Bolón's conference with his high priests. His ensuing actions amply illustrate the conflict, which is further reflected in the interplay of reality and illusion in Act II. But the real conflict is this lack of a clear identity within the Aztec culture itself. Usigli tries at one and the same time to present a conflict between two cultures and a conflict within the same culture, to present a choice between two alternatives and a synthesis of opposites. It is the attempted resolution of the latter problem which is the real crux of the play.

Usigli gets carried away with the complex nuances of his idea and introduces too many complications, all of which he apparently hopes will be resolved in his image of

the Mexican. This image is defined by Cuauhtémoc and portrayed by the evolution of the Coro Mexicano. The play at first seems to suggest a synthesis of opposites, a creation of a new race from two old ones. But the addition of light images and the treatment of the Choruses at the end destroy that image. In order to create such an impression, the voices of the Coro Español and the Coro Mexicano should have merged in the same song. Instead, the Coro Mexicano overpowers the Coro Español. After having changed the course of development of the Mexican people, Cortés and the Spaniards continue on their road. Instead of both uniting in one fire, the Coro Español is merely the kindling that lights the dead embers of the Coro Mexicano. This is a beautiful and very apt image. However, it was introduced too late in the play to avoid confusion with other strong images already created in the play. This confusion of images is the major factor in the play's failure as viable drama.

CHAPTER V

CUAUHTEMOC: PERPETUAL REINCARNATION

After the resounding failure of Usigli's play on stage, Salvador Novo approached the story of Cuauhtémoc from a different perspective in an attempt to avoid the confusion of images of Corona de fuego. Cuauhtémoc (1962) is the first of three plays by Novo which deal with pre-Colombian or Conquest themes and relate Mexico's indigenous heritage with elements and values in force at the time of the play's writing.[1] A one-act play, Cuauhtémoc is a chronological series of related episodes about the career of the last Aztec king. The central conflict is Cuauhtémoc's single-handed struggle against the inertia of tradition and the strength of predestination. Although Cuauhtémoc spends the majority of the play attempting to disprove those forces, they are reasserted in his defeat. Nevertheless, Cuauhtémoc emerges heroic, symbolically preserving the Aztec heritage through his sacrifice. This is what Usigli purported to do in Corona de fuego but did not accomplish.

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[1]The other two plays are In Pipiltzintzin (Los niñitos) o La guerra de las gordas (1963) and In Ticitezcatl o El espejo encantado (1966).

Novo presents history as an eternal story of ruler and oppressed, where the individual ruler changes, but never the essential relationship between him and his subjects. Aztec mythology provides a suitable example of that reality in the opposition between Tezcatlipoca and Quetzalcóatl. According to Aztec myth, these two gods alternately created and destroyed man and the world. In the five ages of the world, their struggle illustrates the history of the universe.[2] Another related example is the Aztec concept that man collaborates in his own destiny and that only by sacrifice can he keep the universe going. Just as man owes his existence to the sacrifice of the gods, so the gods cannot exist if man does not nourish them with the sacrifice of his own blood. The sanguinary cult of Huitzilopochtli is an extreme manifestation of that idea.[3] Both of these myths, as well as others, are employed in the play to illustrate Novo's concept of history.

Novo maintains a remarkable equilibrium and simplicity in dialogue, structure, and images. The play's concise organization demands that the spectator listen carefully, for the emphasis is not placed on <u>what</u> will occur but on <u>why</u>. Parallels and oppositions which are essential in developing Cuauhtémoc's character and in building the

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[2]Caso, <u>El pueblo del sol</u>, p. 25.

[3]Caso, <u>El pueblo del sol</u>, pp. 22-23.

symmetrical structure are quickly established without the laborious expansion of Corona de fuego.

Cuauhtémoc is an excellent example of the Brechtian technique of presentation. The use of an episodic form allows the author great freedom in rhythm and in structure and lends itself easily to the accretion of images. Each idea or image flows smoothly into the next and is an integral part of the whole. Much like a snowball, each segment of dialogue builds on another, and together they create the central images and the structure of the play.

The episodes are preceded, punctuated, and followed by the narrative comments of the principal actor. The narrator functions as a prism between the events of the play and the spectator. He reminds the audience that the play is an idealized and imaginary re-living of Cuauhtémoc's struggle and reflects the influence of present-day values and experiences. The merging of identities of the narrator and the protagonist is the play's chief means of achieving alienation, i.e., of avoiding identification. The narrator's interruptions insure our conscious mental participation and direct our analysis of the presentation, which is informal and unsophisticated. Novo achieves this through the narrator's informal appearance and unaffected behavior. Through the narrator, Novo establishes a positive and somewhat respectful attitude toward the Aztec civilization. The narrator does not consider the imprisonment, torture, and death of Cuauhtémoc as shameful nor as

a defeat, but rather he is proud to play that role. Through its structure and perspective, the play itself becomes an interpretation of that pride.

The use of masks is an additional alienation technique, inspired in the commedia dell'arte. The mask is an external means for an actor to assume the identity of the character he is portraying. Its use began in religious ceremonies, where the mask identified gods, spirits, and animals. In the Greek theatre, it identified the character by the stylized presentation of a few salient features, such as age, station, and predominant mood. It allowed only a few actors to play a number of roles. In the Italian commedia dell'arte, the mask portrayed any one of a number of stock characters of the stage.[4] Its use in Cuauhtémoc reminds the spectator that he is watching a theatrical performance, rather than real life. By means of the masks, half a dozen actors assume all roles of the historical characters in the play. In Corona de fuego, on the other hand, there are twenty individuals, and in addition four choruses and several groups of dancers, singers, soldiers, and Indians.

Novo's major accomplishment in the first scene is the establishment of the narrator as a type outside the

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[4]See Nicoll, The Development of the Theatre, pp. 38-49, 112-15. Also see Pierre Louis Duchartre, The Italian Comedy (New York: Dover: 1966), pp. 41-49.

action of the play. The main characters are symbolic types, except the narrator-protagonist, who maintains a double identity throughout. Tecuixpo represents the Aztec nation, an innocent child whom Cuauhtémoc tries to protect, but sacrifices instead. Moctezuma and Cortés are respectively rulers on the wane and on the rise. Ixtolinque, the Rey de Tlaxcala, Doña Marina, and the two soldiers are discontent subjects, who ride the currents of fortune and follow the strongest leader. All are types except the hero himself, and here Novo adds his own touch. Cuauhtémoc alone does not wear a mask and is recognizable in any setting. However, this important exception assures a constant link with the present. For in addition to his role as protagonist in the play, the narrator identifies himself as a well-known type in the spectator's everyday world--the Indian. The spectator always sees the modern Indian type before him as the hero of the play, although the action, scenery, and other characters are set in the past. As a result, the dialogue functions simultaneously on the two levels of history and actuality.

Although the narrator plays the role of Cuauhtémoc, he is always recognizable as an Indian type by his appearance, his insistence on anonymity, and his own description of his typically Indian characteristics:

> Soy indio--, moreno, de pelo lacio, de dientes fuertes y blancos, lampiño . . . No aguanto los zapatos. Camino mejor sin ellos, o con

> mis huaraches. Y no tengo frío. Me cubro con manta, más por pudor que por necesidad de abrigo. y mi sombrero de palma me defiende suficientemente del sol, y refresca mi cabeza.
>
> Bien--eso es todo. Fuera de que no soy muy comunicativo. No me gusta hablar mucho. (p. 257)[5]

The fact that there is no transition between the introduction and the body of the play helps to cement the narrator's double role as Cuauhtémoc and the Indian type. Had he left the stage after the introduction, that identification would have been weakened instead of reinforced.

By means of these maneuvers at the beginning of the play, Novo assures the co-existence of two simultaneous levels of meaning--the first, that of the story of Cuauhtémoc's ordeal, and the second, that of the Indian's ordeal in similar circumstances today. This dual level of interpretation was noted by the critic Mara Reyes, who observed that Novo's use of the Brechtian technique of distancing was aimed at making clear to the spectator that what happened yesterday can occur (or is occurring) today.[6]

The first and last scenes are narrative and enclose a symmetrical structure. Between those two scenes, in

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[5]Salvador Novo, Cuauhtémoc, in Teatro mexicano del siglo XX (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1970), pp. 256-82. All subsequent references to the play will refer to this source.

[6]Mara Reyes in Diorama de la cultura (Nov. 18, 1962), p. 3. (Review)

order of occurrence, are two scenes ended by darkness, three punctuated by narrative, and two closed again by darkness. This balanced pattern is repeated in various aspects of the play, i.e., scenes, images, and the central conflict. However, Scene II establishes the structural pattern to be followed by the entire play. In this scene, Novo exposes the fundamental conflict of the play in only a few sentences. Moctezuma identifies it doubly as the delicate balance maintained between equal and unequal relationships and as the opposition between age and youth.[7] The tension between their divergent attitudes (e.g., pessimism vs. idealism; ennui vs. enthusiasm; tradition vs. progress; surrender vs. resistance) is illustrated through the dialogue, which establishes firmly the opposition and tension upon which the rest of the play is based. Upon this background are cast Cuauhtémoc's youthful enthusiasm, his faith in ideals and his willingness to resist the dictates of tradition, all of which reach a climax at the point when he leaves Moctezuma and begins his desperate battle to save the Aztec civilization. This tension having been presented, Novo again focuses on the formal relationship between Moctezuma and Cuauhtémoc shown at the beginning of the scene, which reaffirms the weight of traditional

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[7] El sitio de Tenoxtitlán uses a similar opposition of ideology between Cuauhtémoc and Cotztemexi and the concept that rebellion is the law of youth.

concepts and actions. In its over-all structure, the play also follows this pattern. Cuauhtémoc's battle takes place against a background of invariable traditional cultural behavior, which is stated at the beginning and reaffirmed at the close of the play.

Novo portrays Cuauhtémoc and Moctezuma as respectively activist and defeatist with regard to the question of what to do about Cortés. Cuauhtémoc, with a strong pride in the Aztec empire and faith in its strength, views Cortés as a mortal and tries actively to avert defeat. His enthusiastic exclamation of "¿No te das cuenta, Moctezuma? ¡Tu imperio llega al mar!" sharply contrasts with Moctezuma's defeatist reply: "¡Y ahí termina!" (p. 260). Moctezuma, on the other hand, follows the guidelines of cultural ideological tradition when he approaches Cortés as a god. He expects to lose his empire, but he hopes to postpone his defeat as long as possible and avoid suffering (as did Cortés in La Malinche). In contrast to Cuauhtémoc's idealism, Moctezuma reveals his comprehension of the system of ruler and subjects. He realizes that his own power is on the wane, and he chooses to follow the path of least resistance.

Although Moctezuma makes the gesture of seeking Cuauhtémoc's advice, Cuauhtémoc realizes that a serious attempt to influence Moctezuma would be futile. But he does offer to undertake personally the task of uniting all the Indian tribes against the Spaniards:

> Será fácil convencerlos de que son más hermanos nuestros que de ellos; hacerles ver que nuestra destrucción entraña la de todos los indígenas; que la esclavitud que esos extranjeros les impondrían, sería mucho más dura y terrible y definitiva que la que sufren a tus plantas. (p. 261)

This statement is the basis for the action of the rest of the play, which deals with Cuauhtémoc's futile attempts to create unity among the Indians. On this note of enthusiasm and idealism, he leaves the stage. But we are aware that his noble endeavor is doomed to failure before he even starts. He has a stubborn faith in his fellow Indians' sense of brotherhood and does not give full importance to the effect which their resentment toward Moctezuma has on their actions. Hence, he finds himself forced to fight against his own brothers to preserve their culture. After Cuauhtémoc's enthusiasm, the balance of the scene falls heavily, with Moctezuma discounting Cuauhtémoc's project as soon as he leaves the stage. The fact that Cuauhtémoc is ignored is the first indication of predestination. In each episode, that sense of fate recurs, becoming stronger with each occurrence.

Scene III depicts Cuauhtémoc's first attempt to unite his people against Cortés. The nucleus of the encounter is a complex game of words between Cuauhtémoc and Ixtolinque, which develops a central image to describe Cuauhtémoc's

struggle. (A similarly important word play was noted in La Malinche.) Novo does this by drawing a parallel between Cuauhtémoc and his father Ahuízotl. Ahuízotl was emperor before Moctezuma II, and his character was, like that of Cuauhtémoc, the opposite of Moctezuma's character. He was very warlike and sacrificed great numbers of victims to Huitzilopochtli (as Cuauhtémoc sacrificed his entire people to preserve his culture). Instead of passively accepting the intruders, he would have immediately repelled them, as Cuauhtémoc urged. Despite warnings from his advisors, he accomplished the project of bringing fresh water to Tenochtitlan from Coyoacán. The excess water flooded Tenochtitlan and, in trying to escape from his palace, Ahuízotl was seriously injured. Although he died of that injury three years later, in the meantime, he managed to repair the flood damage and consolidate the Aztec empire further.[8]

Ixtolinque first proposes a limited parallel between father and son in the idea of a flood. Novo then has Cuauhtémoc demonstrate the arrogance of his father when he both formulates and then takes on the challenge of arresting the wave of intruders: "¿Crees de veras que no pueda el hombre contener la avalancha de una corriente que amenace ahogarlo?" (p. 263). This defiant attitude towards

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[8]León-Portilla, Los antiguos mexicanos, pp. 104-105.

destiny anticipates Cuauhtémoc's later "reinterpretation" of his ill-fated name, el águila que cae.

This dialogue states again the ceaseless opposition of forces presented in Scene II. Ixtolinque, representative of the attitude of Moctezuma's subjects and the inherent subjugation of the Indian, is blinded by resentment toward his master. He is naturally suspicious and even cynical regarding a conciliatory approach. He does not aspire to be his own master, but rather regards Cortés as a more desirable master and merely seeks a better position under him. As far as he is concerned, the transfer in power is already an accomplished fact. Since Cuauhtémoc can offer him nothing concrete in exchange for his support, and Cortés can offer him material advantages, the matter of alliance is merely a question of economics.

When he dismisses Cuauhtémoc, Ixtolinque says that he is glad that Cuauhtémoc is following in his father's footsteps. This brings us back to the parallel between Cuauhtémoc and Ahuízotl and suggests that, like his father, he will in some manner salvage his empire from its ruins. Cuauhtémoc's enthusiasm for action, his dedication to the gods, and his willingness to sacrifice both himself and his people are supported by this parallel. By returning to the parallel of Ahuízotl and the flood, Novo reinforces that image and our expectation of its fulfillment. Like the previous scene, this scene ends on a note similar to that on which it began and reaffirms the omnipresence of

destiny. The strength of that sense of fate grows each time Cuauhtémoc fails in his mission.

Aside from being important in defining Cuauhtémoc's character, the flood image chosen to represent the parallel between Ahuízotl and Cuauhtémoc controls the development of tempo in the entire play. Flood waters build up pressure to the point of breaking a dam and rushing over. Similarly, Cuauhtémoc's determination to resist increases until the climax, when his people are suddenly and definitively obliterated. This compact image is successful in communicating the theme of the play, while Usigli's conflicting images, though good in themselves, only confused his theme.

Scene IV is an answer to Cuauhtémoc's own question in Scene II: "¿Crees que hayan de regirse por las [reglas de la hospitalidad] nuestras si, como dices, son tan distintos de nosotros?" (p. 261). While Scenes II and III use only a few elements to describe the Spaniards' character (they are different culturally, they covet gold, and they have superior weapons and boats), Scene IV allows us to see them in person. The scene is divided into two parts. The first is an introduction to the Spaniards themselves. More importantly, it is an interpretation by his own people of Cortés' character. Two Spanish soldiers depict opposing philosophies (as did Moctezuma and Cuauhtémoc), and we see that the Hispanic as well as the Aztec

culture is divided within itself.[9] Soldier 1, much like Cuauhtémoc, is a warrior--idealistic, energetic, and imaginative. Soldier 2, similar to Moctezuma, is pessimistic, skeptical, and prejudiced. Their discussion brings out the Spaniards' cultural expectations and views, their avarice and the important role that their superior weapons play in the struggle (characteristics to which Scenes II and III have already referred).

Novo uses a select number of traits to describe the Spaniards in general. He again chooses only a few to characterize Cortés (and politicians in general): cunning, rhetorical ability, and espousal of the concept that "might makes right." Cortés' abrupt entrance at the precise moment at which the two soldiers discover Moctezuma's hidden treasure is timed so that it highlights the avarice he has in common with his soldiers. A few words and a rapid decision reveal his greed: "¡Este es sin duda el tesoro de Moctezuma! ¡Era el tesoro de Moctezuma!" (p. 269). The rest of the scene deals with his cleverness in accomplishing the reversal he has indicated. The solution to the problem is simple--to change the terms of the situation. In a few moments, he has shifted these terms from secular to religious and the right of possession from Moctezuma to himself. He takes his cues from Alvarado and

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[9]Act II of El sitio de Tenoxtitlán has a similar scene in which three soldiers discuss Cortés' qualities. Their discussion is also terminated by his abrupt entry.

Fray Bartolomé and convinces them (through skillful rhetoric) that his motives and logic are religiously and politically valid.

The key statement of Scene IV about Cortés' character is provided by Soldier 2, who understands his method quite well:

> Ya ves que el Capitán raras veces pierde el aplomo. Siempre trata a estos salvajes como a personas--aunque bien sabe que no lo son. Pero es . . . diplomático. Dejándolos hacer, se entera de sus usos y costumbres. Así supo en Tlaxcala que aquellos odiaban al Moctezuma. (p. 268)

It is exactly this method which Cortés has used to rally Moctezuma's subjects to his side. He now repays Moctezuma's hospitality by establishing it as his duty to depose him. Based also on the concept that "might makes right," which the Aztecs themselves used in creating their empire, he makes it his own divine duty to take possession of Moctezuma's kingdom.

Cortés steps beyond his character for a moment to observe that in Villa Rica:

> se estableció . . . un derecho--de la más legítima cuna y substancia: lo que un día los hombres acaso llamen . . . "democracia." Yo fui favorecido por vuestros votos para hacer no mi voluntad, sino la vuestra, en servicio de Dios y del Rey.

> Por delegación, otra vez. Soy así el último eslabón en una cadena que a todos nos vincula . . . (p. 271)

In making this statement about his position of authority at that time, he also comments on the same situation today --the justification of power in the hands of a few men in the name of democracy. Like many of today's politicians, Cortés recognizes political and cultural realities (as Soldier 2 pointed out) and, with the shrewd use of rhetoric, can rationalize injustice for his own benefit. In effect, Cortés becomes Novo's image of the politician who consistently manages to dupe the common people into willing bondage. This image reinforces the dual level of meaning of which we are constantly reminded by the narrator-protagonist's physical appearance.

In Scene V, the narrator-protagonist simply and with no fanfare steps toward the audience to summarize the events of the previous three scenes:

> Así los teules dieron con el tesoro de Moctezuma --y así lo sentenciaron a muerte. Yo, mientras tanto, había visitado a otros señores en demanda de ayuda para Tenochtitlan. Pero sin éxito. El de Coyoacán no era el único resentido con los tenochca, y a todos los cegaba el rencor, para que no advirtieran el peligro común. (p. 272)

The spectator, of course, has already come to that conclusion, due to Novo's careful choice of details and attention

to dialogue. This narrative intervention leaps a chronological and spatial gap, breaks any identification we may have felt with the protagonist, and focuses our attention on the author's intended point. It comes at the precise point when Cortés' character has been extended beyond the immediate level. An intervention by the narrator at this point reasserts the broader level of present-day meaning and forces the spectator to realign his focus on the presentation to include both levels.

To reinforce the narrator's analysis and to illustrate the additional effect of Cortés' political and religious oratory on the Indians, Novo creates an encounter between the Rey de Tlaxcala and Cuauhtémoc in Scene VI. This brief scene is closely related to Scene III. Cuauhtémoc again proposes a break with tradition, and again the response indicates distrust and resentment. Time is a crucial factor in Cuauhtémoc's struggle: his proposal is too late, since the Spaniards' arrival has already precipitated change. History is described as merely a cycle of beliefs, each imposed and deposed by war, with religion as a political yoke, differing little from one ruler to the next. In Scenes III and VI, the common Indian is shown as shifting his loyalty between rulers. But he is still fundamentally subservient to whoever will be his master. This further illustration substantiates the dominance of an unequal over an equal relationship as presented in Scene II. In the abrupt end of the scene and in the Rey de Tlaxcala's

attitude, we feel a heavy sense of the futility of Cuauhtémoc's struggle.[10]

In the seventh scene, the narrator again interrupts to compare Cuauhtémoc's situation with that of the founders of the Aztec empire and with modern Mexico:

> Volvíamos a estar solos como al principio: acosados por los bárbaros de antes--y por los nuevos bárbaros. Pero si habíamos sobrevivido, podríamos volver a luchar contra todo, contra todos, con todas nuestras fuerzas, para seguir viviendo a nuestra manera. (pp. 273-74)

He sees the Aztec people alone in a world full of enemies. The statement further illustrates the fierce determination shown in Scenes II, III, and VI as characteristic of Cuauhtémoc and now suggested as illustrative of the Aztec nation as a whole. This we will see explored in the following scenes, which present the desperate but belated decision of the Aztec people to resist the Spaniards.

Scenes V and VII not only break identification for the spectator, but also speed up the tempo to support the flood image created in Scene III. It is important that

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[10] In another version of the play, contained in the volume entitled In Ticitezcatl o El espejo encantado (Xalapa: Universidad Veracruzana, 1966), the Rey de Tlaxcala says very bluntly: "Por lo visto, no hay otro medio de establecer entre los hombres ninguna fe, que a sangre y fuego" (p. 98). This statement reveals a very pessimistic view of the world and of mankind.

the narrator does not leave the context of the play in making his comments. Rather, his observations are like a character's discussion of his own and others' actions after time has passed and he has reflected on those actions. Thus, he manages to leap for a moment from the immediate level of the play to new insights on the Conquest, seen from a 20th century perspective.

The eighth scene also commences without transition. In a few short passages, Novo sets up Tecuixpo to represent the Aztec people. She is an innocent and trusting child-wife whom Cuauhtémoc wishes to protect from reality. But the Caballeros Tigres give her a brief and horrifying glimpse of that reality. Unfortunately, Cuauhtémoc's final massive effort at resistance results only in the destruction of the entire system and people he wished to protect. In this scene, Cuauhtémoc admits that he will fall, like his appellation, el águila que cae, suggests. But he is convinced that the Spaniards, rather than his own people, will be destroyed by his fall. By reinterpreting his name, he portrays his strength of will in defying predestination. He does not surrender to despair, as Moctezuma does momentarily in Magaña's play. Nor does Cuauhtémoc curse the gods, as he does in El sitio de Tenoxtitlán. He shows himself unfaltering in his decision to resist and in his willingness to make any sacrifice necessary rather than surrender. This quality of determination is transferred to the Aztec nation as a whole at

the close of the scene, when Cuauhtémoc observes that Cortés does not understand the stoicism of the Aztec people. For even women, children, and the aged do not fear death or suffering. (This stoicism is elaborated on in the tenth scene.) This is an important point, as it does not merely extend Cuauhtémoc's own heroic qualities to his people. It also suggests that Cortés achieved only a hollow victory when he destroyed the Aztec empire. Such a consideration puts a new light on Cuauhtémoc's insistence that he will destroy the Spaniards. What he will annihilate is their victory, for in his own culture, if a warrior kills his enemies and takes no prisoners to be sacrificed, he has failed in his duty to the gods.

From the opening of Scene IV to the end of Scene VIII, the narrator's comments provide the only pause between scenes. The brevity of Scenes VI and VIII in comparison with the second, third, and fourth scenes increases the tempo and the tension to the climactic pitch of Scene IX. After such an extended period of no stage darkness between scenes, the total blackout of Scene IX is quite effective. It is not an empty blackness, as it is filled with the sounds of clashing arms and battle cries. This technique forces the spectator to participate consciously in the creation of the scene. The abrupt silence which follows those battle sounds impresses the scene much more vividly on our consciousness than would a live battle on stage, as our imagination can supply more than enough detail. Novo

in this manner illustrates both the Aztec quality of determination or sense of purpose, with which reference the preceding scene closed, and the total finality and inescapability of predestination. The scene is an answer to the question Cuauhtémoc posed in Scene III: one man cannot stop a flood once it is loosed.

After Scene IX, Scenes X and XI are anti-climactic (as were Moctezuma's actions in Scene II after Cuauhtémoc's departure). Although they are also quite short, they nevertheless contrast with the inordinate brevity of the ninth scene and enhance its effect. In the tenth scene, Cortés describes the effect of the dramatic silence which terminated Scene IX as "un silencio mortal. Han enmudecido las piedras. Como si se hubieran todas derrumbado" (p. 277). As Cuauhtémoc wished, Cortés' victory is empty, for there is no longer a people for him to subjugate. The narrator's listing of Indian characteristics in Scene I suggests that the silence of the Indian today is an extension of that occurrence. In Corona de fuego and El sitio de Tenoxtitlán, silence is used as a form of protest and of continuing resistance by the Indians.

Novo further establishes the characters of Cuauhtémoc and Cortés. He accurately depicts the role-playing present when any exchange of power is made. Cortés is determined to salvage some of his intended victory by taking Cuauhtémoc prisoner, which he terms "reciprocity." He wants Cuauhtémoc alive for symbolic sacrifice later, just as the

Aztecs would have sacrificed Cortés to their gods, had they captured him. The terms of Cortés' peace and "friendship" (which Cuauhtémoc had foreseen and which Scenes III and VI depicted in formulation) are total submission to a new master and a new religion. But true to his character, Cuauhtémoc refuses to submit, despite Malinche's pleading. In Scene XI, Ixtolinque terms his complete absorption by the new culture and religion "collaboration." But Cuauhtémoc astutely observes that Ixtolinque's situation has not changed: he still must submit, obey, and pay tribute to a master. By "collaborating" with Cortés, he literally creates his own destiny by assuring the success of a new master and the continuance of the cycle of retribution from which he hoped to escape.

The presence of the bonfire, in which Cuauhtémoc and Tetlepanquétzal are to be tortured, performs two functions. On the one hand, Cuauhtémoc feels that his actions have been censured by Xiuhtecuhtli:

> Xiuhtecuhtli. El dios del fuego. Ha desertado de esas llamas lívidas. No está ahí. No nos reconoce, ni reclama nuestro sacrificio. Somos indignos de su amor, Tetlepanquétzal. Dos prisioneros. Dos esclavos. Encadenados. (pp. 278-79)

A tenet of Aztec mythology was that the man who controls fire (power) without the consent of the gods will be punished for daring to think that he can act by

himself.[11] Tetlepanquétzal protests that his tears are caused by smoke rather than by sorrow or fear. This is a reference to a Náhuatl poem which reflects the stoic attitude typical of the Aztec concept of life. (La Malinche was based on this poem; its original title was La leña está verde, a quotation from the poem.) Nevertheless, Cuauhtémoc is steadfast in his determination to resist and to remain silent. He still hopes that the gods will come to his rescue.

And that is the other element which the bonfire represents, for Cuauhtémoc's hope reflects Novo's concept that resistance is more valid in the long run than submission. On the one hand, resistance has ended in the destruction of his people. But on the other hand, while Ixtolinque assured his own subjugation by collaborating with the white gods, Cuauhtémoc refuses to compromise his beliefs. In the end, he is called (by Xiuhtecuhtli) to offer himself as the ultimate sacrifice for his culture, a concept inspired in the myth of the creation of the Fifth Sun. As a result of his martyrdom, Cuauhtémoc transcends death and becomes a god-hero to his remaining people.

The narrator-protagonist steps out of his role as smoothly as he stepped into it, with no pause between Scene XI and the epilogue. In a few lines, he presents the historical events on which Corona de fuego is based

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[11]Caso, El pueblo del sol, p. 57.

and offers an image of Cuauhtémoc as a discarded instrument of the Spaniards:

> Cuauhtémoc siguió prisionero del teul--y fue llevado en su séquito a la expedición de las Hibueras, hasta Tabasco . . . . [Cortés] explica cómo supo por el renegado Mexicalcingo . . . que Cuauhtémoc y Tetlepanquétzal aún conspiraban, y dice escuetamente: "De esta manera fueron ahorcados estos dos, y a los otros solté . . . ."
>
> De modo que en esto terminaría la vida de Cuauhtémoc: colgado su cuerpo de una ceiba en Acalán --balanceándose al viento mientras se alejaban, en busca de más oro, los conquistadores.
>
> (pp. 281-82)

But, more convincingly than Usigli, our young actor insists that Cuauhtémoc has conquered death. He recalls for us the myth of the Sun's eternal battle to give man one more day of life, so long as man nourishes the Sun with his own blood. When the Sun comes out (is born) each morning, he must do battle with the Stars and the Moon (his brothers and his sister). His triumph signifies a new day of life for man. He is then carried to the west by the souls of warriors killed in battle or on the sacrificial stone and by those women who died in childbirth. There he falls and dies, to be gathered in by the Earth,

his mother.[12] Like the Sun (which is also compared to the eagle in its flight), Cuauhtémoc battled with his brothers, whom he first tried to win over to his side. His loyal people--warriors as well as women, children, and the aged--supported him until the moment of his death, when the earth received him again. Further, the narrator suggests that Cuauhtémoc's presence can still be felt today in the four elements (earth, air, fire, and water), in the hummingbird (a melancholy reminder of the warriors' paradise mentioned in Scene VIII by Tecuixpo), and in his Indian descendants, "formados con los huesos de nuestros muertos--nutridos como el sol con la sangre de nuestros corazones" (p. 282). (This, of course, refers to the myths of Quetzalcóatl and of Huitzilopochtli.)

In the character of Cuauhtémoc, Novo brings together the myth of Quetzalcóatl's creation of man and the myth of the creation of the Fifth Sun. The entire cycle of relationship between man and the gods is embodied in his person. As a man, he sacrificed his people to nourish the gods; as a god, he sacrificed himself to inspire future generations. Like the Sun, he is reborn every day as an inspiration for his people and a reminder of the necessity of their continued dedication to the Aztec principles of life. With the simplicity of his play, Novo has accomplished what Usigli, Ortiz-Palma, and Moncada Galán did

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[12]Caso, El pueblo del sol, pp. 23-24.

not, with all the elaborate ritual and detail of their plays. He has succeeded in creating an image of Cuauhtémoc that is, like the Aztec gods, both single and multiple. Cuauhtémoc is at the same time creator and created, priest and sacrificial offering, god and man. As Quetzalcóatl, he inspires and encourages his people; as Huitzilopochtli, he demands their sacrifice so that he may continue to illuminate and inspire them.

Novo assures final recognition of the play's modern application by having the actors remove their masks, while the narrator speaks of their characters having been absorbed by the land. When the narrator and his fellow actors thus all appear as typical Indians of today, we understand that the same observations apply at any stage in history, that the struggle between ruler and oppressed is eternal and can never be abandoned. The concept of an unbreakable cycle of dominance is established by Moctezuma and by the Rey de Tlaxcala. The words and actions of Ixtolinque and of Cortés depict the concept of "might makes right," which ensures the continuance of the cycle, in which power changes hands within a select group who "democratically" represent the common people. Although there is an illusion of change, the plight of the common Indian never changes, as we see in the case of Ixtolinque. What we call "democraoy" is merely a version of that concept. The same situation exists today as always--but the names of the masters and the terms of the situation have changed.

This concept, reflected in Aztec mythology, is still valid today. As one critic was moved to comment, the play succeeds in establishing for the spectator the necessity of recognizing the value of the Aztec civilization and its relationship and application to today's world.[13] Another critic, Miguel Bautiste, summarized the play thus: "En suma: he aquí que nos encontramos con una obra pequeña--es cierto--pero que logra, sin embargo, una justa adecuación de la forma y del contenido."[14]

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[13]"En el Xola. Teseo y Cuauhtémoc, dos piezas importantes en el futuro del teatro mexicano," in the rotosection of Excelsior (Nov. 11, 1962). This critic also notes Novo's economy of resources and dexterity of construction, as well as the play's intended parallels with modern Mexico.

[14]Miguel Bautiste, "Cuauhtémoc," El gráfico illustrado, No. 31 (Jan. 27, 1963), p. 1.

CHAPTER VI

LOS ARGONAUTAS: LINKS IN A CHAIN

The episodic format used in Cuauhtémoc is expanded into documentary theatre in Sergio Magaña's Los argonautas. The latter made its debut in INBA's Teatro Jiménez Rueda on May 26, 1967, and was an immediate success.[1] Unlike Moctezuma II, which purports to be a tragedy, Los argonautas is a satire. But like Moctezuma II, it uses the Conquest to study the circumstances which surround man and pertain to his search for freedom. The play operates on three levels simultaneously: as a study of the Conquest, as an examination of man's condition in the world, and as a satire of 20th century North American intervention in Mexico.

Magaña presents Cortés' character from the premise that individuals are merely links in the cause-and-effect chain of history. Cortés' efforts to liberate himself from that chain only link him more tightly to it. The play suggests that "freedom" is to be unencumbered by bondage or oppression. However, like men throughout history, Cortés considers money and power to be synonymous with

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[1]Rodolfo Rojas Zea, "Los argonautas, una sátira sobre la conquista de México," México en la cultura (May 28, 1967), p. 2.

freedom. In order to acquire them, he enslaves others below him in the chain. By doing so, he continues the system of freedom defined in terms of bondage, shows that he himself is a slave to the system, and relinquishes any moral right he might have had to freedom. Two key images of the play reflect this elusive concept of freedom: a banner with the word libertad, which conceals an infinite number of identical banners; and a chess match, in which the prizes are freedom and enslavement for the winner and the loser respectively.

The plot follows the advance of Cortés' expedition from the coast to Tenochtitlan. The Argonauts' search for the Golden Fleece is clearly intended as a parallel with the 20th century invasion of American business interests into Mexico, a parallel which did not go unnoticed by critics. Since the majority of an audience can be expected to be familiar with the legend, it serves as a mold into which the events of the play can be fitted for comparison. Certain character types and allegorical dimensions are thus added to the basic historical plot, which significantly affects how we interpret the relationships and circumstances we observe on stage. Cortés is likened to Jason, an enterprising young man who must obtain money from and dominion of a distant land in order to buy his freedom from his sovereign. Like the Argonauts, his men joined the expedition because they had little to lose and were attracted by the prospect of a share in the riches. Doña Marina is

likened to Medea, a disinherited princess who helps Cortés out of love and a desire for vengeance and who is deserted once his mission is accomplished. And Moctezuma, the king of that distant land, loses his kingdom by trying to play Cortés' game.

The narrator, a by-stander to the action, guides us through the maze of historical episodes (like Orpheus through Hades) and introduces the primary relationships and concepts of the play. The main characters themselves also comment on or justify their actions and motives to the audience. A large cast (twenty-seven individuals plus two five-member choruses) is required in order to communicate the panoramic scope of the documentary. In addition, the techniques of simultaneous and arrested action are used to present events removed in time and space from the main thread of action. Lighting and sound effects as well as placards indicating time, place, and the emotional tenor of the events also are important. Together, these techniques give the presentation the aura of a documentary film.

The play is divided into two parts which differ in intent and in presentation. The first part introduces the metaphor of the Argonauts in search of the Golden Fleece and carefully identifies the individual elements of the Conquest, pointing out how they are all interdependent. Those elements are the principal antagonists (Cortés and Moctezuma), Cortés' weapons (i.e., his soldiers, the

disunited Indians, and Marina), other interested--and disinterested--parties (i.e., La Marcaida, Juana la Loca, and Carlos V), and the commentator, Bernal Díaz. Cortés is merely one link in an interminable chain of relationships. Also in the first part, Bernal Díaz introduces several key ideas to be expanded upon in the second part. These ideas are that history is an eternal search for freedom; that circumstances determine individual actions; and that war involves conflicting personal interest, resulting in the unjust enslavement of the weak by the powerful. The second part takes this complicated interweaving of individuals and events and presents it as a dramatic collage to show how each element necessarily affects the whole and other elements.

As in Cuauhtémoc, the narrator makes some introductory comments before the action commences. Although the curtain opens while he is yet speaking, it is not until Cortés beckons him to participate in the play that we are told that the narrator is Bernal Díaz, one of the most famous Spanish chroniclers of the Conquest. In his introduction, Bernal Díaz accomplishes several things: 1) by a reference to Orpheus, he establishes himself as an interpreter of events; 2) he alerts us to the episodic structure of the play; 3) he introduces the question of reality and appearances; and 4) he indicates the universal parallel of the Argonauts' search for the Golden Fleece.

Following the introduction, the first part of the play is composed of three main episodes. The first episode deals with the character and motives of Cortés and of Malintzin. The second examines Cortés' relationship with his soldiers and their common goal of freedom. The third explores the concepts that freedom is directly related to money and that there is presently no solution for the unjust exploitation of the poor by those above them. At crucial moments, each of these episodes evokes mini-episodes removed in time and space from the main event. The protagonists of these mini-episodes are related in some way to Cortés' enterprise. In some cases, they even go beyond temporal and spatial barriers to communicate with him or with the audience. Bernal Díaz also interrupts the episodes with interpretive or transitional comments.

The satirical intent of the play is evident from the opening moments of the first episode, when Cortés addresses the three Aztec warriors:

> Oídme: Os demando la entrega del oro de vuestros depósitos. A cambio de eso, nosotros os daremos aparatos técnicos precisos y varios instrumentos útiles, arados, por ejemplo, para trabajar la tierra; telas de buena manufactura, armas de gran propulsión para liquidar a todos los vecinos impertinentes. ¿Dónde guardáis el oro? (p. 11)[2]

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[2]Sergio Magaña, Los argonautas (México: Colección de Teatro INBA, 1967). All further references to the play will refer to this source.

Cortés' approach to the Indians--his demand that they buy his gods, his emphasis on weaponry, and his single-minded pursuit of gold--quickly suggests a parallel with a 20th century North American businessman in search of economic profit in Mexico.

Magaña attributes the loss of the Aztec empire to the superiority of the Spaniards as well as to the divergent interests of the Aztecs themselves--a parallel which still holds true for Mexico today in her dealings with other countries--particularly with the United States. Cortés feels that he has carte blanche to use any and all methods against Moctezuma--even dishonest or underhanded ones--when he learns that there is no sense of unity or patriotism among the Aztecs:

> He aquí, Pedro, un buen campo de acción y un excelente mercado. Donde no hay sentido de la unión, no puede haber lealtad, y donde no hay lealtad tampoco hay traición. Me gustan estos chicos. Llévatelos, e invítalos a comer. (p. 14)

Based on this disunity and on Malintzin's help, Cortés formulates a plan of action to conquer Moctezuma, a plan which the former expresses with the English phrase, "Divide the people and you'll win the war" (p. 26).

The first interruption of the main episode briefly reveals the soldiers' disrespect for Cortés, who is a fugitive from justice. It is a crisis point for Cortés' plan to create a situation where he can be a conqueror. When he

orders the boats burned, he comments to Gonzalo de Umbría that "siempre he tenido una gran predilección por los pies de la gente" (p. 15). Although the occasion for this comment is his order to have Umbría's feet cut off for his part in inciting the soldiers to rebellion, it also suggests that Cortés himself is habitually in a position in which he must entreat the benevolence of someone above him. The scene leaves us with the question of why he is so driven by his need to achieve a contrived victory. This question provides a note of suspense and expectation important in keeping our interest in the documentary.

Magaña then explores the attributes of a conqueror, which he identifies as 1) military superiority and the "protection" of weaker nations (p. 12); 2) the use of military might and of religion to elicit fear, loyalty, and cooperation (p. 18); and 3) a conviction that the conquest of underdeveloped countries is a "spiritual obligation" to redistribute wealth (p. 18). (These attributes have been clearly chosen with the North American image in mind and fit neatly with the initial impression Cortés gave of himself.) At this point, Cortés reveals (to Malintzin) the motive power of his character. The identification of gold as a universal language which is the key to power and freedom (p. 19) clarifies his need to conquer. Magaña likens this obsession to religious zeal and establishes an identification between God and money:

> Nuestro dios no se presenta así como así. (Habla para su coleto lentamente.) Está ocupado, posiblemente encerrado en sí mismo, como el oro está en los bancos del emperador. (Se vuelve a los soldados.) Es curioso que Dios tenga tantos bancos, digo, templos . . . pero es también indispensable; es el poder manifiesto en el misterio. (p. 20)

As the believer seeks God, so Cortés seeks gold--but without giving power in exchange, which would diminish his own relative freedom. Magaña expresses this concept in the scene where the warriors offer Cortés gold for his gun. His disproportionate ire at their gesture of disgust is really anger at their quick recognition of his motives.

The rest of the first episode parodies a clandestine relationship between a businessman and his secretary. Cortés and Malintzin are alone, focused in a spot of light. (In the first part, this lighting technique indicates the imminence of scenes outside the main action.) During his sexual advances toward her, Cortés never stops discussing business as usual, as if love were a "mero cálculo" (p. 21). In contrast, Malintzin is concerned about whether he truly loves her. Cortés, of course, avoids a commitment, and his comment, "Yo estoy haciendo historia y tú me hablas de amor" (p. 27) aptly describes their separate concerns.

Cortés' query "¿Quién eres?" (p. 21) initiates an extended examination of both their characters. Cortés'

picture of himself as a superior being is betrayed when he learns that Malintzin has been baptized Catalina. He briefly loses control of his temper and swears futilely at his wife, who is also named Catalina. At this irate gesture, his wife, La Marcaida, materializes in another area of the stage, as if her image were projected from his thoughts, and accuses him of being unprincipled. To present her reciting the rosary was an excellent maneuver on Magaña's part, for Cortés has just equated Malintzin with the Queen of Heaven and given her the name of María. So La Marcaida's parting prayer, patterned after the Hail Mary of the rosary, becomes a prayer to Malintzin for her help in destroying Cortés. But Cortés promptly renames her Marina, "una hermosa variante entre el cielo y la tierra, entre la intención y el beso, entre el amor y el destino" and invokes her help in his project (p. 28). She is a mixture of both the Spanish and Aztec cultures--not quite one or the other, an identity in transition, the key to movement between the two extremes.

When Malintzin next asks Cortés' name, Bernal Díaz interrupts the flow of action to liken him to Jason and her to Medea to remind us of the myth of the Argonauts. But more importantly, he spurs her concern about Cortés' commitment. At the close of the episode, she still clings to the illusion that she is the "esposa de Dios y heredera de los cielos" (p. 29)--a conviction which is important in her decision of the second part to betray her people. So

long as there is hope of Cortés' love, she will provide him with all the information he wants on Moctezuma and his empire.

While Cortés is gathering data on Moctezuma, Magaña presents Moctezuma directly to the audience in discussion with his minister and with his daughter Tecuixpo. We see that Moctezuma operates from the realization that Cortés is treacherous, that he himself has no support, and that his best hope is that Cortés will accept an offer of friendship. However, Tecuixpo suggests that foresight of the future may indicate one's intimate desires and that perhaps Moctezuma is also an unconscious accomplice in his own defeat. The impression given here is that Cortés by himself did not make the Conquest a success. Rather the simultaneous aid of Malintzin and of Moctezuma achieved that success. The end of this first episode is marked by stage darkness punctuated by intermittent flashes of light and the firing of howitzers.

The second episode opens with a candid scene of the sexual humor of soldiers at ease. While Bernal Díaz writes a letter to Carlos V, the soldiers talk of their exploits with the Indian women and later mock Cortés and Juana la Loca. Just as Díaz' thoughts are interrupted by the bug which falls on his paper, the audience's train of thought is broken by Díaz' remarks about realism and the type and style of drama being presented. He reminds us that, like Orpheus, it is his duty to advise the spectator of upcoming

events and to comment on and interpret the action in progress. He suggests that, since history is merely an interpretation of life, we should consider the possibilities of the future in light of what the past can teach us. By the end of the play, these possibilities seem quite pessimistic if changes in the present system are not accomplished.

In Cortés' address to his troops which follows (and the accompanying actions of Portocarrero and of Fray Bartolomé), Magaña deftly parodies simultaneously a professional orator, a general, and a preacher. The subject matter is discipline as the key element in winning any conflict. In the hope of booty which Cortés offers the soldiers, Magaña offers an implied lesson for the spectator: fertile land and cheap labor are exactly what makes Mexico so attractive to North American investors.[3] Magaña establishes Cortés' relative place in the chain of power by illustrating the strength of loyalty. His men trust him, as they would a priest, to guide them to the promised land. Like God, he is the refuge of the forgotten and homeless, and he swears (in his own name) that they will obtain honor and riches. But before God or the Emperor, he is merely one of them, hoping as they do for glory, with no choice but to follow the system. By establishing Cortés as the soldiers' only hope for freedom and the representative of Carlos V and of

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[3]While Novo's criticism of the concept of democracy was awkward in Cuauhtémoc, Magaña's criticism of capitalism does not seem out of place here in the context of Cortés' speech.

God, Magaña sets up the necessary preliminaries for the mini-scene of Juana la Loca and Carlos V, for Portocarrero's later meeting with Carlos V, and for Cortés' identification with God in the third episode.

The Argonauts' Hymn introduces the concept of freedom as Cortés' fundamental goal (as is salvation--again an undefined state--for the Christian). The miserere which follows continues the religious parody, focuses our attention on the implications of the word "freedom," and leads directly into the scene between Juana la Loca and Carlos V. It is indeed a depressing picture of the "superior" beings in which Cortés and his soldiers place their hope. On seeing that Juana la Loca is concerned only about inconsequential things within a closed system, we remember Bernal Díaz' warning on the dangers of avoiding reality. Because she is uninterested in foreigners, she loses the New World to her son, Carlos V, who recognizes its economic possibilities. Magaña's intention at parallel is clear, as he sees the same thing happening to Mexico in the 20th century. But so long as the present economic and political system is in effect, those like Carlos V and Cortés will continue trying to achieve status by pillaging and dominating others.

The transition between the second and third episodes is rather abrupt and is an exercise in the technique of arresting and repeating action for examination and emphasis. Bernal Díaz enters as a master-of-ceremonies to explain the replaying of Marina's entrance. In the second episode,

Cortés convinces his men that he is their savior. Marina does the same with the Indians in the third episode. In an obvious reference to the United States' concept of itself, she describes Cortés as follows:

> campeón del occidente, rompedor de yugos y tributos, líder de la alianza y del progreso, (que) ha llegado a estas tierras para humillar a Moctezuma y deponer la casta militar que os está explotando desde hace tantos años. (p. 42)

As Marina sympathizes with the warriors' complaint that they are victims of a military caste, she assures their support for Cortés. Her references and the conjectural comments of the warriors parallel Cortés with Christ and prepare us for the scene's climax--Cortés' emergence, like a god, from behind the altar curtain carrying an offer of salvation (the banner of freedom).

The word libertad on Cortés' standard elicits a series of three related episodes which illustrate that not even those who offer freedom to others are free. (In the second part of the play, Moctezuma will further explore this question.) One of the central concepts of the entire play and the key to this series of episodes is Bernal Díaz' introductory comment:

> La conquista de una tierra significa el conflicto de muchos intereses. A veces de naciones, a veces de individuos y empiezan los disgustos entre los que hacen la conquista y los que la dirigen desde lejos. (p. 43)

Like a commentator who provides explanatory and supporting material for his analyses, Bernal Díaz selects several scenes to illustrate this observation. The first illustrates the conflict of interests between Cortés (the entrepreneur) and his sovereign; the second between Cortés and his henchman (Alvarado); and the third between Cortés and the Indians--or better, between the powerful and the weak. In each case, although Cortés holds the upper hand, the concept of him as only one link in a chain of events is reinforced.

The first such scene comments on the power of money in society, politics, and religion. In Portocarrero's defense before Carlos V, Magaña transcends time and space barriers by the concurrent use of separate spheres of action which are delineated by spotlights. The advantage of this technique, which is used throughout the play, is that a key reference by a major character becomes a direct visual experience, from which the audience can draw its own conclusions. Cortés' justification of his past actions and announcement of his future actions as well as Carlos V's futile threat are merely vocalized thoughts presented in a form which simulates communication between them. Bernal Díaz' second supporting scene employs a variation of the fade-out technique used in films. A silent scene of torture illustrates in the extreme Carlos V's suggestion to use force in obtaining gold. In the third scene, Alvarado's use of enormous pliers to procure a worthless piece

of copper from the mouth of a dead Indian illustrates the disproportionate use of force to achieve one's ends. (In the second part of the play, Bernal Díaz also observes this discrepancy when both he and Fray Bartolomé swat mosquitoes.) At the end of the scene with the pliers, Cortés demands that Alvarado give him the piece of "gold" and then laughs at him on discovering that it is only copper. This scene contrasts with the later relationship between Cortés and Alvarado and indicates that Cortés understands what he faces in his opponents, while Alvarado discounts everything in his greed for gold. Ironically, the inverse is true in the final scene of Moctezuma's death.

Díaz' last scene focuses on Alvarado's cruelty and injustice and again brings in the three warriors of the third episode. Xicoténcatl describes their unfortunate and helpless position:

> Como el venado sorprendido entre el abismo y el cazador, como el tigre atrapado entre el hambre y la muerte, así estamos, caudillos . . . (Cortés) ha prometido librarnos de Moctezuma y de pagar tributos, y se ha convertido así en nuestra única esperanza de libertad. (p. 48)

Caught between two powerful forces, they have no choice but to do as Cortés demands. This scene, which concludes the first part, is even more important for its address to the audience on freedom:

> No puede hablar de libertad aquel que sólo conoce la palabra. Vence el fuerte, pagan los débiles. Y del que está caído se valen los poderosos para elevarse. . . . . De poderoso a poderoso hacen la guerra para la esclavitud de los no fuertes. . . . . Aventados los trabajos y los días a la catástrofe de los acontecimientos, y un dios girando arriba en la manufactura de los astros. (p. 49)

In this final statement, Magaña brings together the principal concepts of the first part of the play. History is an eternal cycle of rich against poor, with wars resulting from conflicting individual interests in the struggle for money and power. Freedom is merely an ethereal concept which no one has experienced and thus no one understands. But the only way to achieve freedom seems to be to enslave others. Thus the cycle of dominance and slavery will continue so long as everyone is a prisoner of the system.

The collage of the second part has two foci--the first centered on the Cholula massacre and the second on the Noche Triste. Cortés and Moctezuma are the core of that collage, and the outcome of their relationship is affected by the actions of both Marina and Alvarado. Other characters appear as necessary to comment on events or to provide additional background. Bernal Díaz directs the composition of the collage, while Carlos V observes and comments. The first part of the collage is built upon a

background of sedate music and dance, during which Cortés discusses appearances and motives with Alvarado. A number of scenes are presented against this background. Moctezuma challenges Cortés and Carlos V to prove that they are free. Marina justifies her actions to her childhood nurse. Cortés explains in a soliloquy how he uses Alvarado as a decoy for his own intentions. Bernal Díaz, the nurse, and the choruses comment on the question of racial identity. In addition, Bernal Díaz provides transitional comments and analyses for the benefit of Carlos V and of the audience. In the second part of the collage, martial music replaces the dance music in the background. Moctezuma reaffirms the meaninglessness of the word "freedom," and Bernal Díaz makes a lengthy appearance as narrator-commentator while writing a letter to Carlos V. There follow two simultaneous lines of action--those of Cortés and Alvarado--which converge in the climax of the chess match.

Moctezuma's appearance in the first part of the play gave us the impression that he might subconsciously be preparing his own downfall. Two closely related episodes in the second part complete our picture of his character. In these, he tries to establish what Cortés has to offer and how he can obtain it and defeat Cortés at the same time. He wants to ensnare Cortés in his own game, a desire which takes form in the chess match. These two episodes initiate the two separate parts of the collage.

In the first of these episodes, Magaña does not forget the insinuation he planted in the first part concerning Moctezuma's participation in his own defeat. He repeats it in Moctezuma's rejection of Cuauhtémoc's help: "De acuerdo a su nombre, Cuauhtémoc es un águila que cae . . . ¡Necesitamos un águila que suba!" (p. 52). As his minister had a few moments earlier labeled Cortés an "águila," Moctezuma subconsciously chooses him over Cuauhtémoc, even though it means his own demise. His advisors had prognosticated "que dejaría de ser rey y moriría pronto" (p. 25). In fact, in the second episode, he invokes his own death as a punishment for the short-sightedness of his people:

> Así castigará con mi muerte, el atraso de todos ustedes, sus odios caseros y la escasa fuerza moral que los alienta. Cortés no es Dios, pero como los dioses, sabe triunfar de los ignorantes. ¡Que los hunda entonces! Después de mí, ¡el diluvio! (p. 68)[4]

However, Moctezuma soundly rejects violence as a defense against Cortés, as he has the vision of obtaining "sus máquinas de guerra, . . . su civilización y . . . sus

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[4]A remark generally attributed to Louis XV of France, but actually made by Madame Pompadour in a letter to Louis XV after the Battle of Rossback, when the Prussians won over the Austrian and French armies. It refers to the fact that France was in such a lamentable condition economically and politically that the empire could not survive under his successor. The parallel with the condition of the Aztec empire is immediately obvious.

increíbles adelantos" (p. 68). The only way he sees to capture these is by a dangerous non-violent game of intrigue. Bernal Díaz later describes Moctezuma to Carlos V as "fuerte, y capaz de grandes hazañas si tuviera quien lo apoyara" (p. 56)--an allegation which elicits fault-finding by Cortés, Alvarado, and Carlos V to justify their alleged superiority. However, Bernal Díaz' statement reinforces our own impression arrived at by observing Moctezuma's actions.

The first episode is a discussion between Moctezuma and his minister about Cortés' offer of freedom, which becomes for a brief moment a direct communication among Moctezuma, Cortés, and Carlos V (as in the earlier scene between Portocarrero and Carlos V). By putting Cortés and Carlos V on the spot, Moctezuma astutely reveals that Cortés is merely offering words as "freedom," for he himself does not know what freedom is. In the second episode, Moctezuma reiterates the idea of freedom as a word with no reality:

> atrás del telón . . . otra palabra igual adorna
> otro telón y luego otro, y otros, hasta perderse
> en un horizonte vacío, lleno de muertos, donde
> otros telones llevarán inscrita la brillante palabra Libertad; una palabra fácil, sencilla; pero
> encadenada como nosotros a la catástrofe de los
> acontecimientos. (p. 68)

In this image, Magaña brings together Cortés' earlier emergence from behind the tabernacle curtain, Moctezuma's exposure of Cortés' empty promise, and the futility affirmed by the three warriors at the close of the first part.

Alvarado also receives close attention in the second part of the play. His character has already been established through his actions in the first part of the play and through the description of him provided by Moctezuma's minister. In a soliloquy, Cortés blames Alvarado for introducing racism (a concept which we saw was also important in La Malinche). But he insists that Alvarado's violence is necessary to conceal his own vices and establish himself by contrast as a savior. This attitude on the part of Cortés leads directly to the catastrophe of the Noche Triste, because Cortés gives Alvarado too much rein, when he should have controlled him. Marina's sudden entrance causes a display of Alvarado's prejudice. His chastisement (by Cortés, Carlos V, and Bernal Díaz) and penitence resemble the Catholic rite of confession. Bernal Díaz later says of Alvarado as the final showdown nears: "El oro y la codicia son como el vino; no cambian a la gente, le sacan de adentro su verdadera condición" (p. 78). However, this description also fits Cortés, for although he has tried to hide his true character behind Alvarado, he quickly and rashly gives in to violence on learning from Marina of the planned intrigue.

Like Moctezuma, Marina has two important scenes in the second part--before and after the betrayal of Cholula. In the first, she justifies her choice of sides to her nurse; in the second, she defends herself afterwards to her people (two choruses--male and female--who curse her for her action). She loves Cortés because he has elevated her in station, saved her from prostitution and anonymity, and because she carries his child. She declared to her nurse in the first part: "Soy esposa de Dios y heredera de los cielos" (p. 29). Now she says:

> El es un hombre . . . o es un Dios; ha limpiado mi historia y borrado mis vejaciones. Y me salvó, nodriza, me ama. . . . . La noche pasa . . . Y cuando llega el día soy una señora encima de esos . . . (p. 58)

Her decision to reveal the Cholulan conspiracy to Cortés is based on her love of him and of the child she carries. Accordingly, her nurse defends her action as motivated by love rather than by the baser desires of a prostitute: "No tiene nada que esconder. Las excusas son para las prostitutas. ¡Ella ama!" (p. 65).

One of the few indigenous references used by Magaña in this play is the Aztec myth of the birth of Huitzilopochtli. It is strikingly similar to the Christian story of the birth of Jesus. According to this legend, one day Coatlicue, goddess of the Earth, was sweeping in the temple and found a ball of down, which she slipped into her

apron. On finishing her chores, she found that it had disappeared and that she was pregnant (a virgin birth, like that of Christ). When her children, the Moon and the Stars, found out, they were so angry that they decided to kill her. But her unborn child comforted her, assuring her that he would defend her against all of them. When the sacrifice of Coatlicue was imminent, Huitzilopochtli was born and, with the serpent of fire, cut off the Moon's head and put the Stars to flight.[5] The myth is used in Los argonautas when Marina identifies herself with the Earth after she betrays the Aztecs. Just as Huitzilopochtli was Coatlicue's hope of survival, so Marina's unborn child is her hope of destroying "la racial ignominia de los pueblos" (p. 64). But the male chorus rejects her prediction of a great new race, cursing her betrayal of them, while the female chorus seeks new gods to replace their old ones and to give them a new identity.

Bernal Díaz appears for the first time in the second part when he interrupts Cortés and Alvarado to announce that Marina will commit treason. At the same time, Carlos V becomes a commenting observer--a role which he will fill throughout the second part. Both his stereotyped, prejudicial reactions to the events of the Conquest and his concern for appearances reflect "la venalidad de nuestro sistema" (p. 75), in which gold is the supreme force. An

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[5]Caso, El pueblo del sol, p. 23.

uninformed spectator, he provides Bernal Díaz with an excuse to explain events. From this point on, Bernal Díaz acts as a free agent in the play. By turns, he speaks directly with the audience, critically interprets the history of the Conquest, or comments on the play to Carlos V. At other times, he directs the actors and participates in the play itself.

The Entrance Hymn mid-way through the second part (together with the device of marching silhouettes) serves as a temporal division between the Cholulan massacre and the Noche Triste. But more importantly, Magaña uses it in conjunction with realistic mini-scenes to present a discordant picture of Spanish intention and action. "Y a todos ofrecemos / la pipa de la paz" is belied by scenes of cruelty: a raping, a hanging, and others which are provided at the discretion of the director. "Qué mozos tan decentes / correctos y elegantes" is reflected by soldiers in rags. And, like the Argonauts' Hymn before, this hymn ends with an invocation of freedom: "venimos a mostrarles / . . . / lo que es la libertad" (p. 66)--which Moctezuma has already established as without substance.

In a letter-writing scene which precedes the events leading to the climax of the play, Bernal Díaz likens the Indians' post-Conquest situation to the difficulties of adjusting to an "industrial expansion," which is forced upon them (viz., the Indian tied to a pole and holding a welcome sign in the following scene). In a moment of

clarity, Díaz calls this "un ejemplo de rapiña contra pueblos mal organizados" (p. 69). Magaña thus makes a strong attack on North American intervention in Mexico. He also uses Díaz to illustrate the effect of political pressure on recording the historical truth. Bernal Díaz sympathizes with the Indians throughout the play, but he recognizes that they are not victims of Cortés, but of a political and economic system. Although these are his honest thoughts, fear of punishment prevents his recording them, and what he finally writes in his letter to Carlos V is different.

The transition into the main episode is smooth. Bernal Díaz insinuates that Alvarado will cause difficulty (as we have already surmised from Alvarado's actions and from Cortés' comments). The mundane act of swatting a pesky mosquito causes Díaz to comment on the disproportionate use of power to destroy such a fragile creature (like the earlier scene with the pliers). Thereupon, the main scene begins with Fray Bartolomé also killing mosquitoes. But in direct contrast with Bernal Díaz' sentiments, he curses them for being ferocious and prolific.

In this last portion of the play, there are two separate lines of action which converge at the climax and result in chaos. The main one is Cortés' plan to realize the Conquest legally, which terminates in the chess match with Moctezuma. The other line, of which Cortés indicates that he is uncomfortably aware, is Alvarado's desire to "sacrifice" the Indians in order to obtain their gold.

Bernal Díaz and Carlos V are again observers who provide insightful comments on the events.

Alvarado's line begins first and carries the dramatic tension. He is labeled a "tigre sanguinario y pedante" (p. 72), something that Moctezuma had already observed. Following the mosquito incident, Fray Bartolomé speaks with Marina on the relative value of singular or multiple, voluntary or involuntary sacrifice, and inadvertently reveals the racism underlying his religious zeal. At that point, Alvarado justifies his intended massacre in words chosen to approximate the attitude of Fray Bartolomé:

> Nosotros estamos aquí representando a un pueblo civilizado; y un pueblo civilizado tiene que ofenderse de contemplar estas fiestas idólatras y malsanas. ¡Muerte a los enemigos de la fe! (p. 73)

He echoes Fray Bartolomé's false spirit of crusade and salvation. When Alvarado appears later in the act of preparing the attack, Magaña interrupts the military firing squad command ("Ready, aim, . . . !") to create tension. The whole chess scene between Cortés and Moctezuma takes place before the "Fire!" order is completed. That occurs precisely as Moctezuma protests Cortés' three-move checkmate.

Cortés' first appearance in his line of action is elicited by Bernal Díaz. While Alvarado is enraptured by the vision of the gold raiments at the festival, Díaz

suggests that Cortés will be delayed in returning. The tension created by his observation elicits a scene which communicates Cortés' thoughts on Alvarado's possible actions while he is absent. His plea to Alvarado and his gesture toward Heaven flow smoothly into Fray Bartolomé's similar gesture when Cortés returns to appoint Fray Bartolomé bishop and to announce his plan to sell titles and war bonds to the Indians.

In the introduction to the chess match, Carlos V considers it to be "un juego muy intelectual" (p. 78), while Bernal Díaz calls it a low-class game. As we have been conditioned to accept Bernal Díaz' judgment as "unbiased" and to see Carlos V's comments as royally prejudiced, we expect the worst. The ensuing match is the crux of the play and reflects the ideas and the structure of the entire work. A reference to racism is included by means of the choice of white or black men (Cortés, of course, getting white and making the first move). Cortés' first move is with his king's pawn--his soldiers and his promise of freedom, with which he has stopped Moctezuma's initial resistance and won over his subjects. The second is with the queen--Marina, who has convinced the three warriors to follow Cortés in the first part and has betrayed the Cholula intrigue in the second. His final move is with the bishop --in one sense, the fanaticism of Hispanic Catholicism and, in another, the tradition of the Aztec religion, which helps to cause its own downfall. Until now, Moctezuma has

been playing a waiting game, trying to catch Cortés in his own territory. However, Cortés realizes that his key weapon is the shortage of time: "Moctezuma quiere ganar tiempo, y si lo dejamos, aprendería el juego nuestro, y lo perderíamos todo" (p. 82). Cortés thus forces Moctezuma's hand, and when Moctezuma protests his defeat, Cortés declares the game finished and Moctezuma no longer of any use to him.

It is precisely at this climactic instant that the two lines of action converge. With the news that Alvarado has killed Moctezuma (already figuratively killed in the chess match), Cortés is totally confused, defeated, and all his plans destroyed. Ironically, it is now he who has no time to prepare a defense and who turns to Moctezuma to offer "peace." (The Indian's skeptical laugh echoes that of La Marcaida in the first part concerning Cortés' love for Marina.) Cortés nevertheless attempts to realize some gain even in this loss, as he demands Moctezuma's crown from Alvarado (as he had done earlier with the dental filling). This time, however, Alvarado refuses to give it to him, and Cortés is left in the same straits as at the beginning of the play--in debt and in need of another conquest to pay what he owes and gain "freedom." The killing will begin anew, for Cortés says: "Regresaré a cobrarlas" (p. 85).

The play's end has some similarity to that of the first part. The three Indians, this time holding placards

demanding Cortés' departure, use the music of the Entrance Hymn to sing of Cortés' failure to carry out his promise of freedom. And before departing, Bernal Díaz leaves us with the moral of the play:

> pero esto no acaba aquí, se prolonga, se ha prolongado siempre y volverá a pasar hasta que . . .
> 'la racial ignominia de los pueblos se canse,'
> o hasta que el hombre aprenda que hay algo más grande que la libertad: ¡El derecho a tenerla!
> (p. 86)

These final words bring together Bernal Díaz' initial observation on the sameness of history, the legend of the Argonauts, and the injustices of racism and avarice exposed throughout the play. They add a cryptic comment evaluating man's selfish approach to life. For Los argonautas is a serious study of man's condition in the universe, as is Moctezuma II. Díaz' observations also bear directly on the anti-North American satire which has been continually present throughout the play--often subtle, but never far below the surface.

In Los argonautas Magaña creates a unique structure by building a collage from a number of individual but intricately interrelated elements. On carefully examining the play, one finds that most of the relationships and concepts presented separately in the first part can be found reflected in the second. A few examples: The enormous pliers and the mosquito incident; Cortés' demand for the

dental filling and later for Moctezuma's crown; Cortés with the banner of freedom and Moctezuma's comments on freedom; Carlos V's concern for appearances; Marina as the "esposa de Dios." There are a few instances when Magaña does not check himself carefully when referring to a previous incident, but his technical errors do not hinder the development of the play. One critic observed merely that the second half of the second part of the play seemed a bit hurried.[6] As Magaña readily admits in his introductory comments, the play's historical basis is minimal, but he claims the right of artistic license to create a dramatic work of art. Without that freedom, he could not have produced the unique creation of Los argonautas.

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[6]Luis Reyes de la Maza, "Las cartas de relación de Sergio Magaña," México en la cultura (June 4, 1967), p. 4. This article was written in the form of a letter by Bernal Díaz from Hades to the ruins of Tenochtitlan. He terms the play the best to come out of the Spanish New World, comparable only to Los empeños de una casa, by Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has presented an analysis of five contemporary Mexican plays whose themes cover the five years of the Conquest proper and deal with its four main protagonists--Moctezuma II, Cortés, Doña Marina, and Cuauhtémoc. The emphasis of that analysis has been on how the author communicates his message through the structure and imagery of his play and on how his message relates to modern Mexico.

Within the framework of the Conquest, these plays all treat the general question of the degree to which any individual can influence the direction of history. Through the development of the central conflict of the protagonists, the relationships established between characters, and the unifying imagery of the plays, they indicate that the question of individual blame in the Conquest is not relevant. The plays suggest that the intervention of the Spaniards at that particular time was largely circumstantial and that the fall of the Aztec empire was significantly determined by the internal state of the empire--a state of fundamental and insoluble ideological contradictions. These contradictions are especially clear in Moctezuma II, Cuauhtémoc, and Corona de fuego.

It is consistently demonstrated in the plays that an individual's actions and decisions are significant only within the immediate historical context in which they are made. An individual can influence the direction of history only through and in relation to his environment. At any stage in history, the political, economic, and social systems largely determine the direction of events. Each playwright chooses a primary image or combination of images to unite the dramatic development of his play and to embody the fundamental struggle between the protagonist and his environment. La Malinche, Los argonautas, and Moctezuma II in particular bring into focus the intricate relationship between the individual and forces outside himself.

To help determine the spectator's perception and interpretation of the author's message, a chorus or narrator is used in each play. This element also operates in conjunction with carefully chosen symbols from Aztec mythology to emphasize the importance of Mexico's Indian heritage and to relate the play's message to contemporary Mexico. Through the narrator in particular, these works indicate that the situation in contemporary Mexico is analogous to that which existed during Conquest times. Based on the conflicts dramatized in the plays, they indicate that the same unequal relationships that have always existed between the individual and his environment exist today in a continuation of the perpetual cycle of ruler and oppressed. As a whole, they suggest that the Mexican people today lack a unified sense

of direction and have deep internal cultural contradictions, which have their roots both in the Conquest and the Aztec culture itself. Cuauhtémoc and Corona de fuego especially call for a definite commitment of the Mexican people to a common ideal (their Indian heritage) in order to resolve those contradictions and to achieve unity. Los argonautas goes so far as to make the entire play a satire of the contemporary situation in Mexico.

The focus of La Malinche and Los argonautas is on the inter-cultural confrontation between the Aztecs and Spaniards. Gorostiza reflects this clash in the over-all structure of the acts (in Act I, Cortés' character is examined; in Act II, Malinche's; and in Act III, they face each other). He also reflects it in the composition of the scenes as formal pictures with the Indians on one side and the Spaniards on the other, with Malinche in the middle. Magaña shows the opposition most effectively near the end of his play with the chess game between Cortés and Moctezuma, which ties the preceding episodes together as maneuvers in that game.

Although its images compete among themselves at times, Corona de fuego manages to express simultaneously the conflicts within the Aztec culture itself and the struggle for survival against the Spaniards. Usigli uses two choruses to represent the Spanish and Aztec peoples, a difference which is especially well communicated visually and temporally in their separate pantomimes of Act II, "Las fiestas."

However, Pax Bolón's dilemma in dealing with a two-headed god illustrates the concurrent internal cultural discord, and his final choice of Cortés represents an effort to resolve that disharmony.

Cuauhtémoc and Moctezuma II depict the internal conflict in the Aztec culture clearly in the repeated confrontations between the protagonist and other major characters in the play. In both plays, the Aztec nobles (who represent the dominant mood of that society) refuse to cooperate with the emperor to save the empire from the Spaniards because they resent their role as subjects. Although the nobles appear to be acting in their own interest when they turn to Cortés, both plays show in their climax how the nobles' choice actually works against the status quo which they seek to preserve. Conversely, in Corona de fuego, the emperor Cuauhtémoc refuses to cooperate with Pax Bolón, who represents the nobility. Nevertheless, all three plays depict two diametrically opposed sides, one of which attempts to arouse the other to unified action. In each case, this leads to the same result--a handing over of the empire to Cortés.

Magaña adds more support in the first act by showing the incongruity in beliefs and actions in Moctezuma's own house (with Tecuixpo and the slave woman). Furthermore, in each conversation between Moctezuma and his Minister, their fundamental disagreement as representatives of two opposing beliefs is evident. The Minister in this play

and Pax Bolón in Usigli's are shown working to bring about the destruction of their own social and political order. This the former does by purposely fanning the nobles' resentment and by fabricating bad omens in order to wear down Moctezuma's will; the latter achieves it by denouncing Cuauhtémoc as the author of a conspiracy which he himself initiated. These two plays in particular demonstrate that indeed the Aztec culture was fated to topple before long, as its lack of unity and direction was so fundamental as to induce an unconscious seeking of cultural destruction by its own members.

Although society is made up of individuals working collectively toward the same end, the cases of the Minister and the Aztec nobles in Moctezuma II and Pax Bolón in Corona de fuego demonstrate that the result is sometimes the opposite of that desired and also that the forces of politics and economics exercise a much greater influence on history than do individuals. In each play, the individual is shown in direct and constant conflict with numerous elements of his society. Although convinced that he will win the struggle because right is on his side, he must finally recognize the supremacy of the established order. Corona de fuego illustrates the lack of individual control in the direction of history through the Coro Mexicano, which sways back and forth emotionally as the plot develops. They do not show a strong sense of identity until an accident of history--Cuauhtémoc's martyrdom--gives them a hero.

Similarly, the Coro Español and Cortés believe that the one who holds power at the moment controls the direction of history. But Bernal Díaz' image of them as a ship which never arrives at its destination because of the many factors which blow it off its course shows that they too are guided not by themselves but by the general principle of "obrar antes, preguntar después."

The same minimal importance of the individual before universal forces is reflected in the unifying images of La Malinche and Cuauhtémoc. Novo's image of a flood unites his play and intensifies Cuauhtémoc's hopeless battle with the social forces which threaten to inundate him, suggesting that the individual has as little defense against the forces of society as he does against those of Nature. This image is reflected in the tempo of the play. When Cuauhtémoc begins his mission to unite the Aztecs, each scene becomes successively shorter and communicates an ever greater sense of urgency until the climactic scene of total darkness which represents the destruction of the empire. The continual increase in tempo reflects the build-up of flood waters to the point that the dam is finally broken and destruction is inevitable. The image effectively illustrates how ineffectual one individual is against the current of social order and direction.

In La Malinche, the central image of a cornered beast serves the same purpose. Through the development of the play's dramatic action, each choice of the protagonists

successively reduces their alternatives until they are backed into a corner by the social and political environment they oppose, with no means of escape. The image is supported through a trend toward reversal in the dramatic action and in the visual composition of the scenes, which underscores the idea that order, once disturbed, tends to re-establish itself by destroying the disturbing element. Gorostiza additionally has Velázquez observe (just in case we had not noticed it in the play) that Cortés and Malinche are merely blind instruments of the political system and have little real effect on the outcome of the Conquest, for individuals cannot alter the flow of events by their particular and isolated actions.

Moctezuma II in its entirety illustrates the struggle between the individual and his society. Moctezuma makes the mistake of believing that he himself, rather than society, is the source of power. The Minister, however, points out that the time is not yet right for Moctezuma's ideas--which is to say that the system is against him, and therefore he cannot implement his ideas. Through the two primary subplots (Cacama vs. Ixtlixóchitl and Cuauhtémoc vs. Tetlepanquétzal), the play indicates that there are only two options open to Moctezuma--rebellion or cooperation within the established order of society. Magaña uses the conspiracy scene (with the three nobles representing a cross-section of the society of the time) to illustrate the solid front which the established system raises against

any dissident factors. The prologue embodies man's erroneous belief (or dream) that he himself controls his actions, while he is actually governed by forces beyond his control. The prologue supplies a supplementary symbol which, by its re-occurrence in the third act, unites the prologue's universal level with Moctezuma's personal story. The feather cape represents Moctezuma's individual destiny to be destroyed by the beliefs he opposes. Together with the worm which the dwarfs give Moctezuma in Act III, this cape forms an image of man's insignificance in the order of the Universe.

Los argonautas also has a central unifying imagery which communicates man's unfortunate position in the Universe. That position is shown not only in the myth of the Argonauts (on which the play is patterned), but also in the idea of history as a chain of cause and effect, in the chess game, and in the visual and temporal collage created by the play's episodic presentation. The Indians who close the first part of the play observe that man is a slave both of circumstances and of the drive to power. Cortés is presented as merely one link in a complicated chain of interrelated political, social, and economic factors, a series of circumstances so intricate that the individual cannot act independently of others nor of his society. This image is rendered dramatically by the technique of periodically interrupting the main action with related mini-episodes which demonstrate the extent to which the individual is

inextricably entangled in that chain of cause and effect. This impression of history is supported and amplified in the second part by the chess game, which illustrates at once the multiplicity of alternative actions available to the individual, the limited control which he has over the results of his actions, and how greatly one's choices depend on the movements of other players in the game. Cortés' opponent is not only Moctezuma, but also Alvarado, the Spanish system, and the element of chance. Whether he wins or loses in the game depends on his making all the right decisions--on not making a single mistake in strategy or movement--and additionally on having circumstances favor him. Magaña intensifies the effect of the image by actually presenting a chess game on stage. Both the idea of a chain and the chess game suggest the minor importance of an individual action in terms of the larger historical picture. The episodic presentation of the play creates a visual collage of impressions which illustrates the intricate spatial and temporal interweaving of individual factors.

Finally, the plays studied indicate that the same basic truths which existed during the time of the Conquest about the relationship between an individual and his society hold true in modern Mexico. This is accomplished principally through the use of a narrator or chorus and the incorporation of universal Aztec myths. In Moctezuma II, several comments made by the Minister and by the Choruses can

be applied to modern Mexico. The only direct references, however, are a few words which refer to the Republic and are directed toward the audience by one of the old hags at the beginning of Act II. In La Malinche, the references are similarly indirect, with Cuauhtémoc making a few subtle comments applicable to modern Mexico. However, there is a direct reference to the present in the emphasis on the mestizo in the last act and especially in Malinche's admonition in the final moments of the play that the hope of the future is in their mestizo offspring.

Cuauhtémoc and Corona de fuego both employ the two basic myths of Quetzalcóatl and the Fifth Sun to appeal to the modern Mexican to recognize the continuing importance of his Indian heritage. Novo further emphasizes this point by identifying the narrator-protagonist from the beginning of the play with the Indian type of today. Through Cuauhtémoc's conflict, the play itself, as well as the narrator, underscores the Aztec quality of stoicism and dedication to sacrifice and suggests that it can help to create true unity in the Mexican nation. (Both Moctezuma II and Corona de fuego also illustrate that idea.) While Usigli employs the two Choruses as collective protagonists, which represent the contrasting Aztec and Spanish cultures, it is significant that he labels the principal Chorus "Mexicano" to suggest the direct evolvement of the modern Mexican character from the Aztec culture. Additionally, the image of a torch lit by a taper emphasizes the greater importance

of the Indian heritage over that of Spain. This idea is expressed dramatically in the final scene when the voice of the Coro Mexicano drowns out that of the Coro Español, when Cuauhtémoc is symbolically reborn, as in the myth of the Fifth Sun.

That myth, as well as that of Quetzalcóatl (which both Usigli and Novo use), suggests also that a sense of commitment and sacrifice is necessary to give direction to a people. In both plays, Cuauhtémoc symbolizes the strength possible when an entire culture has a sense of purpose. Corona de fuego and Los argonautas suggest the need for a sense of purpose in their treatment of the Conquest as a journey. This treatment also serves to universalize each play's message and to bring it to focus on contemporary Mexico. In its evident satire of U. S. - Mexican relations, the latter is in its entirety a reference to the contemporary situation. As the narrator, Bernal Díaz makes numerous clear references to the present, and Magaña consistently uses phrases and images (e.g., "campeón del occidente," "Divide the people and you'll win the war," "la alianza y el progreso") which also clearly refer to the 20th century. Additionally, parodies of modern businessmen, politicians, orators, and ministers make the contemporary reference of the satire unmistakable.

Gorostiza states at the close of his play that the mestizo is the reality of modern Mexico. Although he is potentially of stronger fiber than his ancestors, he

nevertheless retains within himself the contradictions inherent in each of the two cultures which engendered him. The modern Mexican is like Pax Bolón in Corona de fuego--frustrated by the necessity of serving a two-headed god. Through Pax Bolón's dilemma, Usigli points out how crucial was the lack of unified direction on the Aztec side--and its corresponding presence on the Spanish side--during the Conquest. Because of its internal contradictions, unity was impossible in the Aztec culture. But Pax Bolón's choice of Cortés over Cuauhtémoc was the catalyst for the achievement of unity and a common direction by the Coro Mexicano. Similarly, no unity of action can be achieved by the Mexican people today until they make a commitment which solves the contradictions in their character.

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