Cultural Icons in Latin American Theater: Studies of Frida Kahlo, Carlos Gardel, Eva Perón and Selena Quintanilla-Pérez

by

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ABSTRACT

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My dissertation entitled *Cultural Icons in Latin American Theater: Studies of Frida Kahlo, Carlos Gardel, Eva Perón and Selena Quintanilla-Pérez* demonstrates that the thread that unites these figures is their foundation in art and performance. Although in some cases much has been written about these famous artists, there is surprisingly little research in the area of theater. Through their individual arts (Kahlo's paintings, Gardel and the tango, Evita's career as an actor and Selena's Tex-Mex style music), this study shows how these famous figures fashioned public personae and created roles for themselves that they subsequently performed in everyday life. These performances on stage and in life became layered, and this multidimensionality allows them to continue their popularity even after death. Their art and images have begun to appear everywhere, and in the same way that historical icons came to represent various liturgical texts, these icons of popular culture resurfaced at the end of the twentieth-century as symbols for debate about various discourses circulating in literature, culture, society and politics. Through a performance and cultural studies based approach, this project explores topics as diverse as gender studies, Mexican politics from the Revolution to the 1968 massacre at Tlatelolco, the NAFTA trade agreement, dictatorships in South America, national apathy, immigration, exile, border cultures and Latino(a)/Chicano(a) identity.

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Secular Saints of the Twentieth Century

Writing for a recent edition of the journal *American Photo*, editor David Schonauer tried to explain the need for icons in the year 2000. He speculated about the reason we continue to create icons: "We need heroes to idolize and model ourselves after, if only in our imaginations. Today's icons aren't only saints and statesmen; they're actors and sports stars, products of the media so desirable that they've become brand names" (67). In that same edition of *American Photo*, Owen Edwards defines an icon as "an image of implausible power, one you'd better not mess with unless you're ready for big, big trouble" (68). Whereas the study of icons was traditionally relegated to the realm of religious and art history, Schonauer's comments point to the modernization of the concept and its broadening scope. The icon now encompasses a large array of secularly oriented themes instead of the traditional religious concepts from which it developed.[1] This means that the icon has transcended its original meaning as a purely religious tool and has become a medium for expressing secular themes; after all, an icon simply stands for something else. An icon is a symbol that represents a multitude of meanings.[2]

My study applies the metaphorical capacity of the icon to theatrical works dealing with cult figures of the twentieth century. In particular I consider four figures: Frida Kahlo, Carlos Gardel, Evita Perón and Selena Quintanilla-Pérez. These artists function as icons because of their symbolic personal actions and because they endowed their artistic media with

metaphorical meaning. Consequently, all of these cult figures show up in theatrical pieces at the end of the twentieth century, and dramatists use them as a means for exploring topics as diverse as performance, cultural studies, gender studies, national identity and politics, border crossing, exile and immigration. These iconic artists of the twentieth century became symbols for various national and international scripts. Through the analysis of theatrical texts, performances and a few films, this project shows the trends of popular culture throughout the twentieth-century in parts of Latin American and the United States. Though they are modern icons that reveal the themes of popular culture, Frida, Gardel, Eva Perón and Selena are figures that have much in common with ancient icons and images that represented the scripts and scriptures of past civilizations.

Speaking for the traditional study of iconography, Konrad Onasch explains that the icon is typically seen as a sort of "window on eternity" because it depicts the tension between eternity, conceived of as ubiquitous and immutable religious truths, contrasted with the world, that is shown through material forms of color and light (*Icons* 9).[3] As Onasch's statement makes evident, this type of art work was always religious in nature. In fact, the rise of iconography is historically associated with Christian religious practices after hostile attitudes about idolatry lessened in the eighth and ninth centuries (Onasch 9).[4] In time, icons came to serve as an important tool for the education of the masses. A complex system of symbols and visual

representations was displayed on *sarcophagi* at first, and later on church walls and *iconostasis* (screens) as a way of conveying Biblical texts to an illiterate population (Skrobucha 1-3).[5] The Church utilized these alternative media for disseminating its doctrine and propaganda to its followers, most of whom would not be able to understand the written liturgical texts.

The rise in popularity of the icon accompanies the revival of drama in medieval Europe where it had all but died out with the fall of the Roman Empire. The Church is responsible for the resuscitation of theater as a method for educating the masses. Oscar G. Brockett makes the case that European theater can be traced to liturgical services. For Brockett the use of symbolic objects and actions, vestiments, altars, censers, the pantomime of the priests, emblems associated with certain biblical characters, and a certain type of dialogue in antiphonal songs where responses were divided between two groups were the first step toward theater in Medieval Europe (85). The first liturgical drama is usually dated around 925 A.D., and consists of tropes that formed part of the Easter service (Brockett 86).[6] The earliest extant playlet that exists, complete with directions for performance, was written between 965 and 975 A.D. by Ethelwold, Bishop of Winchester (England), and is titled *Regularis Concordia* (Brockett 86).[7] Full development of liturgical drama saw its peak in the second half of the Middle Ages in the period beginning around 1050 and ending close to 1300 (Brockett 87). The majority of religious drama was written in France and Germany. The most popular

topics dealt with the visit of the three Marys at Easter, and plays about the Christmas season were also very numerous (Brockett 87-88). However, by 1300 the dominant role that the Church had played in society began to be contested by the rising power of secular guilds and merchants. By this time drama had begun to be staged outside of the Church and began to incorporate more secular themes (Brockett 90-91).

An identical course of development is true for the icon, and as medieval society began to mature, a shift in subject matter became evident. This was especially the case in Russia where iconography flourished. Onasch explains that the rise of the burghers and merchant class exerted a new kind of power over the production of icons (Onasch 13-16). Whereas before, the icon was confined to images of saints, apostles, Madonnas, and other biblical figures, artists later began to incorporate foreign elements that they extracted from commercial trade. Accompanying the change in subject matter was an effort to humanize the subjects depicted. The most significant example of the humanization of subjects can be found in the Novgorod School's collection. The Novgorod community represented an urban, oligarchical setting and "window to the West" through wealthy commercial connections in an otherwise medieval Russian society (Onasch 14-18).[8] The influence of wealthy burghers led to a community that favored more individualism and independence in the artistic production of icons. As a result, instead of the typical religious mysticism that marked almost all other icons of the same

period, the Novgorod School preferred to display reality and truth, often depicting on their icons the disparities and social contrasts that were the consequences of the capitalization of wealth and its circulation (Onasch 14-18). Icons recovered from this period in Novgorod frequently discarded religion and opted for more secular depictions. Onasch explains that the Novgorod School was not financially dependent upon the Court, and therefore developed independently by incorporating elements from the West and the Balkans (*Icons* 14-18).

Slowly, the transformation from purely religious production and control over the icon shifted into a more secular orientation. Eventually, this evolution culminates with the formation of guilds that produced icons in mass quantity as commissioned pieces, and ultimately ends with the creation of portraits and devotional pictures (Onasch 22-24). As the icon moved through the Middle Ages, it began to represent more specifically the consumer society that characterizes the modern world.[9] Instead of representing eternal religious truths, a new drive toward individualism took hold and soon the icon came to demonstrate more closely the ideals and philosophies of the Renaissance.

The icon made its final leap with the invention of portraiture, and eventually the camera. It is at this stage that the true democratization of the icon took place. Once confined to the domain of a group of select artists, iconography was strictly controlled. With the creation of guilds and mass

production the control was, of course, lessened greatly and the subject matter changed drastically. Finally, with the invention of the camera anyone could create an iconic image (Edwards 69). Edwards explains: "From photography's earliest days, perceptive men and women, both those using the camera and those posing for it, understood that an image on film could raise someone out of obscurity or protect the already famous from the erosion of time" (69). The exact replication of an image and or scene could be canonized, so to speak, with the click of a button. Through photographic representation, anyone could be part of an eternal image; anyone could become an icon. It is said that:

> A peculiar characteristic of photography is that the camera is almost incapable of not making icons. At least, icons can result whether or not a photographer intends to make them. Something about the way the lens focuses the eye and the frame isolates a subject from a distracting context create a singular importance, adding to the potency of powerful figures and bringing an unexpected significance to Every[wo]man. (Edwards, my brackets 69)

Creating an image is the key to modern concepts of icons. Projecting an image of character, either real or invented, is one important factor in the making of an icon. This is the case with movie stars, politicians and other actors, but the camera also captures the ordinary, often elevating the mundane to heights of popularity never before imagined (Edwards 70). In both cases,

what is at stake is the symbolic nature of the photograph to stand for other discourses, ideologies, and/or experiences. Icons now hold a significant part of our collective memory, and photographic representation of these memories is crucial in the modern world.

Both modern and traditional icons rely heavily on the recreation of some kind of text, a biography of a saint or person.[10] Both icons and biography seek to capture key moments and record them for posterity, immortalizing the figure and his/her deeds. In traditional iconographic images artists recreated three-dimensional space on a two dimensional panel to portray a saintly figure and his/her life in three ways: 1) the saint as the central image with other images of events surrounding him/her, 2) through a single picture where no boundaries existed between events, and 3) where pictorial strips formed a visual narrative of his/her biography (Onasch 271). Scenes and events can be considered an important feature of icons in photography as well, marking the important events of particular lifetimes or collective history (Edwards 70). The scenes and events of the saint's life become the visual backdrop for the figure. Herein lies the connection with theater, because in addition to the use of a backdrop, the three-dimensional recreation of a text through perspective, and the use of space and time in the representation of a story all connect iconography with theater. The recreation of a text in a painting was the first step toward the revival of theater in

Europe, because after incorporating techniques of perspective the next logical step was an actual three-dimensional representation of the text on a stage.

The icon's primary function was to instruct and project the doctrine and rhetoric of the Church, and often that of the State. As early as the fourth-century St. Nilus of Ankara deemed it necessary to cover church walls with scenes from the Old and New Testaments, "so that the illiterate, who cannot read the scriptures, may through paintings be reminded of the righteousness of the sincere servants of the true God, and thereby be roused to emulate their magnificent and glorious virtures" (Kollowitz 57). As Nilus's statement demonstrates, the icon was used as a didactic tool for forming and shaping religious beliefs, as well as a means for constructing moral behavior. It is precisely the emphasis on behavior and consciousness that makes iconography an interesting medium for the study of culture. Icons understood in this way became symbols for culturally defined nationalistic and religious beliefs and practices. They became examples of how to conduct oneself in a certain society, and set out roles for the population to adopt in order to conform to the Church/State sponsored norms of behavior. Icons became the keepers of the values and ideologies that marked each society in Medieval Europe. These beliefs varied according to the society's particular set of values.

A clear example of the individuality and flexibility of icons to represent different ideologies can be found in tsarist Russia during the

fourteenth-century where icons slowly began to display political beliefs as well as spiritual teachings. Specifically, records indicate that a client commissioned paintings from the artist Dionisius that "supported the extension of the tsarist ideas of regimentation into the religious life of the individual. It established a system of spiritual power and control, using as an economic base the wealthy monasteries" (Onasch 22). With the incorporation of politics, the icon became a tool for propagation of national identity. The concept of nation is understood as a geographic zone defined by national borders and politically held beliefs. By using the icon to promote these elements societies shifted the set of meanings from the strictly religious arena to the stage of national identity. The meaning that the icon now embodied became plural. Consequently, the icon evolved into a symbol of cultural significance, a didactic tool used for forming national, political behaviors as well as spiritual beliefs and conduct at the end of the Middle Ages.

During the Renaissance in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries Europe again became interested in Greek and Roman literature and art. The myths from these ancient cultures were revived and interpreted as "moral allegories or purely poetic or artistic representations of human emotions and aspirations" within the context of the new humanist philosophies (Bidney 4). They were thus tolerated by the Church so long as they did not compete with Christianity. Utilizing the traditions already in place for representing subjects

from the Old and New Testaments, artists working in the Renaissance began to substitute figures from the newly discovered Greek and Roman mythologies for those traditional biblical figures most often found in iconographic art (Bidney 4). As a result, artists such as Titian, Tintoretto, Leonardo, and Michelangelo introduced new secular ideas into iconography and art. As David Bidney explains: "Renaissance art gave symbolic expression to Greek ideals of beauty in the context of Christian culture" (4). Bidney goes on to explain that attention to mythical figures and mythical texts throughout the next centuries would resemble a pendulum swinging between the poles of complete disregard and veneration. The eighteenth-century, the Age of Enlightenment, looked upon myths as "either irrational superstitions or as deliberate fictions foisted upon the multitude by the crafty priests" (Bidney 4). However, the pendulum swung in exactly the opposite direction during the Romantic period of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries where myth was exalted and regarded as the "mainspring of human culture" (Bidney 5). Finally, according to Bidney the theory of myth coalesces into a philosophy of culture in the work of Ernst Cassirer (5). Under Cassirer's theory myth must be understood as a "self-contained form of interpretation of reality" and not as "a representation concealing some mystery or hidden truth," concluding furthermore that in "myth there is no distinction between the real and the ideal; the image is the thing and hence mythical thinking lacks the category of the ideal" (Bidney 5). Bidney goes

on to hypothesize, along with Cassirer, that society is the model for myth, and therefore the rites and institutions of society are the elements of that social reality to which myth refers (11). Consequently, the truth of myth lies in its symbolic representation of social rites (Bidney 11).

Today our myths replicate this symbolic representation of society in an even more concrete way, perhaps, because frequently we pick mythic figures that come from our own society, culture, and lifetime. More often than not, our mythic figures and our icons are the people we see on our television and movie screens, on magazine covers, on billboards, on key chains and other memorabilia. We hear them over the radio waves or on CD's. We make gods out of individuals who inhabit our same space and time, instead of inventing gods of infinite space and time. The allegories that we choose to represent are those that surround us in daily life: political matters, personal and (inter)national identity, socio-economics and many other themes that are reflected in the art and icons of the twentieth-century. Iconography is no longer strictly religious, nor is it simply political—it is both of these things and more. It is popular art made for the masses, but studied by the elite as well. Our icons are no longer saints, but ordinary people, artists, actors, singers, dancers, talk show hosts, royalty, business and computer industry moguls, comedians, athletes, and on and on. Our icons no longer represent eternal truths, but rather they ground us ever more firmly in reality, showing us the latest fashion we must wear, the latest products we

must own, the latest perspective on government and lifestyle that we must adhere to if we are to function in the here and now. Our icons reflect and promote the consumer culture that surrounds and envelops our daily lives. Instead of paintings on church walls that function as role-models, these icons and their images today show up on museum walls, on stage, on websites, in books and in photographs.

In much the same way that pictorial art and icons evolved into secular art, myths, and eventually theater and social rites, so too has contemporary performance metamorphosed into an entirely different and new category of theater, that is, perhaps, not theater at all. Diana Taylor makes this view explicit in her introductory essay to *Negotiating Performance*: performance has cast away its traditional definition of a "representation or mise-en-scène of the dramatic text," and instead has gravitated to the opposite end of the spectrum where it has"claimed its autonomy from the dramatic text and its representations to constitute itself in various antitheatrical forms--among them performance art, public art, and what we might call public performance" (11). Taylor also explains that all of these varieties of performance share the rejection of traditional ideas about culture and art as a common denominator and often subvert the dominant structures of society such as hierarchies and patriarchal systems (11). The other characteristic of performance is that it is grounded in the actor, and not in the text, frequently showcasing a decided preference for personal themes and narrative (Taylor

11). More often than not performance tends to be political, but as Taylor argues, it is mostly political in a personal way (12). Performance then can be understood as a diverse genre that incorporates public spaces, culture, identity, organized causes that take place in public spaces, societal roles and many other behaviors, thereby contesting traditional notions about theatrical representations.

This dissertation presents a twentieth-century conception of the icon as found in the theater and performance art of Hispanic America. This collection of studies about modern icons explores their value in the twentieth century as artists and performers of culture. Frida Kahlo, Carlos Gardel, Eva Perón and Selena Quintanilla-Pérez all function as symbols of national identity, they embody the concerns of a particular age, and they are associated with politics and socio-economic trends. In that sense, they are modern icons. Yet, each of these figures also exemplifies the qualities of traditional icons. Specifically, these artists have transcended death and experienced a kind of apotheosis in the eyes of the world, allowing them continued popularity in the minds and hearts of a broad public. The paintings, the music, and the style and rhetoric have been revived on the big screen, in countless biographies, on CD's, on the stage and even in auction houses. Likewise, all of these modern icons, like their traditional predecessors, exhibit a certain model for behavior that they project to the masses.

The premise of this study is that these artists were pioneers in the cultural activity that we now term performance. Through their individual arts, Frida, Gardel, Evita and Selena developed and staged performances. They created their own characters and performed them through dress and political affiliations, through myths perpetuated about their own lives, and most importantly through art. Using art as their particular medium for expression, these figures scripted new public personae and performed these identities on the canvas, on stage, and on political platforms. However, in all of these cases the line dividing art and life became blurred throughout time, making the distinction between the "performed" identity and the "real" identity almost impossible to distinguish. For Frida, Gardel, Evita and Selena the performances of the inner and outer identities became layered and multiple. In the eyes of their fans, the real blended with the fictional and became multidimensional. In each case, the public and the private intermingled through time to such an extent that there was virtually no way to separate the performances. These artists wrote their own fictional autobiographies and performed them through art, and through such repeated performances fashioned real autobiographies of performance. As Taylor has suggested, performance here is based on the personal and on narrative. It is simultaneously factual and fictional. These performances subverted the binary systems of true and false, life and art, real and imagined, by collapsing them into one. They did not require a proscenium stage nor did they pay

homage to the typical text; rather, they were performances that were delivered through photographic and artistic images, songs, physical appearance, videos and even birth certificates, in some cases. In other words, they were public, as well as private, performances.

Understanding the performances of these particular icons is paramount in the following analyses, because it explains the revival of interest in Frida, Gardel, and Evita and the continued fascination with Selena, long after their deaths. By fashioning themselves into newly scripted characters, these icons were able to represent a new set of meanings. The flexible nature of their identities makes them attractive characters for dramatists working at the close of the twentieth-century. The duplicitous nature of the lives of Frida, Gardel, Evita and Selena makes them perfect characters for biographical theater containing messages about ideology and discourses that dramatists hope to highlight. In this way, just as traditional icons stood for religious and political ideologies, these modern icons represent myriad social and cultural beliefs. Here I demonstrate that the ability to represent various discourses simultaneously is the underlying reason that these figures have become such popular subjects for exploration in the theater. The number of theatrical texts that deal with the lives of these four icons has continued to grow at the end of the millennium. By examining these figures' real-life performances and the traditional theatrical works that represent them, I explore the themes of politics of national identity, gender,

dictatorships, border culture, immigration, national apathy, and other topics of cultural and political interest that the four icons generate.

The reason that these icons are so perfectly suited to theatrical studies is the basic principle of Richard Schechner's well-known concept of "twice-behaved behavior." The four artists created roles and traits that often overlapped in the public and private spheres, making it difficult to distinguish between life and art. Using the work of Joseph Roach in *Cities of the Dead* and theories discussed by Elizabeth Bronfen in *Over Her Dead Body*, I explore the theme of "effigies" and "revenants" in every chapter. These concepts help to explain the repetition inherent in performances about those who are dead. A double performance occurs in every case because the artists themselves performed created personae, and the actors that portray them repeat, and recreate, these roles a second time (or perhaps, an infinite number of times) on stage. In this way, performance becomes a kind of metatheatrical device that allows dramatists to discuss other performances in the everyday life of the population.

The other component of the metatheatricality associated with the icons is the notion of representation. For all purposes it can be said that Frida, Gardel, Evita and Selena re-presented themselves to their publics. Each icon took great care to re-create an image that conveyed a new element of political rhetoric, of star quality and of cultural norms. These figures then adopted these images in their arts and in their personal lives. The original re-

presentation of an image is mimicked in the actions of actors representing these figures to us each night on the stage. As a result, the staged representation is a "twice-behaved behavior" *a priori*. In this way, it seems that these icons are uniquely connected with spectacle, performance, and theater in an intimate way.

Earlier critics have discussed the importance of these four figures in historical contexts, as political messengers, in biographies and in countless other forms, but there are relatively few, and in most cases no examples of their place in performance and theater studies. The Gardelian icon has typically generated the greatest number of theatrical works, and there are a few studies that focus on his importance in the theater. The most notable critic to tackle the topic of Gardel in theatrical pieces is Luis Ordaz. However, most of Ordaz's work simply chronicles the plays, provides brief plot summaries of each, and the dates of publication and/or staging. There is no comprehensive study that places Gardel in a contextual framework for the analysis of performance and cultural studies in the River Plate or, more generally, in Latin America.

The same can be said of Frida who is fast becoming a topic of much interest in the dramatic world. The number of plays featuring Frida and her artwork continues to multiply at a fast rate. However, as with Gardel, there is no overall study that looks at Frida as a performance artist in her life and in her artwork, or that combines the biographical information with theatrical

pieces being performed in Latin America and in other parts of the world. Frida's popularity continues to soar in the art world as collectors pay increasingly higher prices for her works, and her images (her paintings and representations of her body) can be found on objects of daily consumption as diverse as posters, stationery and videos. Yet, many of the performances that include Frida have received little, if any, critical attention.

Finally, no substantial studies exist to establish the links between performance artists like Evita and Selena, and the performances of these artists on stage. In the case of Eva Perón, Diana Taylor is the only critic who discusses her briefly in her article "Dancing with Diana" and her book *Disappearing Acts.* However, Taylor does not discuss specifically the two theatrical pieces that deal with Evita's legacy, or how they relate to her performances in politics and on the Argentine national stage. Regarding studies on Selena, the proximity to her death just over five years ago precludes much research on her life as a performance artist and the subsequent dramatizations of her life. Recently the work of the young playwright Hugo Salcedo and the Chicana film director Lourdes Portillo examine these topics that prove to be fertile ground for exploration.

Given the lack of scholarly attention to the relationship between iconography, performance art and traditional theater in these four cases, I have designed a project to discuss the connections and similarities among these four figures in life and also in death. Using performance theory and a

cultural studies approach, each chapter provides biographical information on the cult figures, discusses their particular art form and the art of their performance, and further analyzes the metaphor of performance in dramatic works, films and, in some cases, other media that represent them. These analyses demonstrate how and why dramatists and audiences use these icons as vehicles for political, social and cultural messages.

Chapter one, "The Body as an Icon in Art and Life: Performances by Frida Kahlo," examines the transformation of Frida from a sick and invalid young woman into a major political player and artist of the twentieth-century and beyond. Frida is the logical choice for the first chapter because her artwork provides the closest link to religious iconography that existed in the past. In Frida's art work the intertexts of religious figures such as Saint Sebastian and Judas often served as bases for the poses and themes of Frida's self-portraits. However, the key difference between traditional iconography and that of Frida is that she used her own image for secular purposes. Casting herself as the martyr, Frida manipulated her image to evoke sympathy, attention, and political action. Frida used her body on the canvas and in real life to politicize her ideas and to goad her audience into noticing her through shocking images of broken bodies and indigenous themes.

Frida's body in real life became the intertext for her paintings, and eventually over time her paintings functioned as the intertext for her real life as well. The line between art and life for Frida was difficult to distinguish. In

this way, Frida not only created performance art, but she was also a performance artist in her daily life. Through her use of clothing, her bisexuality, and even her hair styles, Frida questioned the norms of society. Several plays develop the art-as-life, life-as-art perspective by including her paintings and lithographs as the main references for the dramatic action (*Las dos Fridas* by Barbara Córcega, María del Carmen Farías and Abraham Oceransky, *Frida Kahlo: Viva la vida* by Federico Schroeder Inclán). Other works focus on the important use of the mirror in self-portraiture (the play *Arbol de la esperanza* by Enrique Mijares, and the film *Frida: Naturaleza viva* by Paul Leduc and José Joaquín Blanco). Here, the concept of the speculum and the mirror image are important for highlighting and questioning gendered performances in daily life (cross-dressing is also addressed in the play *El espíritu de la pintora* from Alberto Castillo).

Frida's other performances also included her political campaigns. Her political views about the Mexican Revolution and communism/socialism and her insistence on equal rights for the disenfranchised portions of the Mexican society were a driving force behind Frida's activism. Many of the same ideals that Frida and her husband Diego Rivera fought to preserve are still alive with the Zapatista movement in Chiapas and were questioned with the implementation of the NAFTA trade agreement (*El espíritu de la pintora*, *The Child Diego: Dreaming on a Sunday* by Carlos Morton). Finally, many of the same ideals, behaviors, and consequences of the legacies of Frida and

the Revolution in Mexico can be found in the politics of Argentina and the figure of Eva Perón. Similar themes of right-wing dictatorships clashing with leftist movements, internal wars waged between citizens, and the importance of female icons leading these fights make the unlikely parallel between Mexico and Argentina surprisingly logical (*Frida, la pasión* by Ricardo Halac). By blending biographical and historical information with a discussion about Frida and her artwork, the study shows that the number of meanings that she came to embody and continues to accrue is infinite. Frida's body, as well as her body of work, are the ideal referents for the concept of effigy that Roach describes in his theory of performance. Frida is "bodied forth" in her own artwork, as well as on the stage.

The second chapter, "The Living Dead: Mythical Performances and Carlos Gardel," explores the complex relationship between Gardel, the tango, and politics in Latin America. Both Gardel and the tango are cultural referents that point to layered meanings of history. The acceptance of the tango in Parisian society and later in the middle and upper classes of the River Plate, after it transcended the reputation of being music associated with prostitutes and bawdy nightlife, made it an attractive tool for dramatists to examine the sexual, historical, and political transformation of society in the River Plate from the first half of the twentieth century to the last half. Likewise, the rise in fame of an unknown, poor young man named Gardel who for the first time put lyrics to the tango, also served as important icon for

dramatists to speak about a nostalgic past. For immigrants, the tango became a symbol of a mythic past where Argentina stood as a land of opportunity in which they could make their fortune. The nostalgia associated with the tango made it an ideal symbol with which to contrast the present period (the decades of the 70s, 80s, and 90s) riddled with dictatorships and failed economies.

The dramatist with the most substantial collection of plays about the tango and Gardel is Roberto Cossa. Cossa treats the Argentine condition of nostalgia for the past as a way of contrasting the failures of the present and future with the "Argentina that might have been." Using the tango and Gardel, Cossa speaks about the instabilities of the 50s and 60s (*La ñata contra el libro*), elevates the obsolete past to mythic proportions showing the dismal state of the Argentine nation in the 70s (*La nona*), warns the public about the greed and torture to come in the Dirty War (*No hay que llorar*), parodies Gardel and Perón to show the ultimate shifts in society that transformed the tango and prostitution into acceptable elements of society (*El viejo criado*) and finally tackles the condition of political exile (*Gris de ausencia*).

Building on the myths that Gardel perpetuated about his personal history and origins, dramatists like Carlos Gorostiza (*El acompañamiento*), Marco Antonio de la Parra (*Matatangos*), and José Ignacio Cabrujas (*El día que me quieras*) use the many layers of Gardel's created persona to elaborate

on political façades marketed to the public during dictatorships. For Gorostiza the concept of a palimpsest is crucial to understanding how it is possible to read between the lines of created texts and identities to overcome censorship. In de la Parra's and Cabrujas' plays, the lyrics, films and identities of Gardel function as metatheatrical frames for the ultimate performance of national politics and chicanery of dictatorships in Chile and Venezuela.

Finally, in the last section of the chapter Gardel and the tango function as vehicles for discussions about national identity. Fernando Solanas (in the film *Tangos: El exilio de Gardel*) traces the journey of exiled Argentines to France in the 70s where they try to preserve their cultural identities in spite of their new surroundings. The exiles find themselves in what Homi Bhabha would term a "third space," that is neither one side nor the other but a space of translation, transference and transnationalism. The Argentine dramatist Carlos Pais (*Desfile de extrañas figuras*) and Uruguayan playwright Ana María Magnabosco (*Viejo smoking*) deal with identity in the post-dictatorship periods in their respective countries where both populations struggle to define themselves. Unsure of their new courses, both countries looked to the past personified in Gardel and the tango in an effort to recuperate cultural roots and identities.

Gardel's own efforts to sabotage any true identity through the proliferation of myths, combined with his meteoric rise to fame, make him an

icon that is loaded with any number of meanings and the possibility of creating new ones. Likewise, the transformation of the tango into a song with lyrics by Gardel, along with the cross-over into mainstream society, provides the perfect image for the exploration of historical, social, and political developments in Latin America. In the same way that Frida created performance art and was a performance artist in life, Gardel also used his musical abilities as well as his life to create performances. Subsequent plays modeled after Gardel and the tango are implicitly metatheatrical as a result. By using Gardel and the tango in their plays as metaphorical devices, dramatists are able to speak about other performances of identity and the staging of national politics.

The third chapter explains the apotheosis of Eva Perón, and how she became a symbol for both sides of the political spectrum: for the Left an enduring legend and fuel to keep up the fight, and for the Right a political bomb that had to be destroyed at all costs. In the case of Evita, the notion of body is central because of the political scandal that accompanied the embalming. Not only was Evita's body preserved, but like a holy relic, all that she embodied was also preserved in the minds of her followers and detractors. Her death and national mourning constituted what one might call performance art, an installation of national proportions where a grieving population poured into streets and created altars. Films and posters projected Evita's image in the streets.

Evita, like Frida and Gardel, created her own image. Her career as an actor (some might argue she was never more than a starlet) gave her the basis for her performance as the wife of the president of Argentina. Evita scripted her own role, combining the Cinderella story with that of Christ, and made herself into an icon that could be worshipped and admired. Through her charitable deeds, her designer clothing, and extravagant lifestyle, Evita portrayed herself as an idol and a star for the nation to follow. The publication of her supposed manuscripts helped solidify her role as "Evita."

However, the other subversive side of Evita was also important for the transformation of the Argentine nation. By inserting medieval notions about government into the political system Evita combined her secular and religious roles and created a feudal system where she ruled.[11] She challenged traditional male dominated spheres by including women in the political process, delivered political speeches and influenced public policy through the Fundación Eva Perón.

Reflecting the controversy surrounding Evita's life and death, Copi (*Eva Perón*) and Osvaldo Guglielmino (*Eva de las Américas*) represent both extremes of her legacy. Copi highlights the most ugly traits (mis?)taken as part of Evita's personality, and through a grotesque parody represents her as a monster and an imposter who stages her own death. Conversely, Guglielmino presents only the most endearing qualities of Evita through the voices of her supporters. Though an actor playing Evita never appears on the

stage, Evita's voice can be heard and she speaks through the various groups that laud her efforts to build a nation that includes the *descamisados*.

In this chapter as in the first one, a parallel between Argentina and Mexico can be drawn by examining similarities between corruption in each of the governments. Jesusa Rodríguez based her version of the Evita story on the Copi play, but altered it to make it more Mexican by including references to corruption in Mexican politics. All the plays in this chapter demonstrate the inherent theatricality of Evita's persona and her ability to represent varied discourses simultaneously. Evita also illustrates perhaps in the most concrete way the concept of effigy because her body was the focus of so much controversy, representing both the best and worse of Argentine (and Mexican) society. By "bodying her forth" on the stage, these dramatists recall the real body that came to unite and divide a nation.

The final chapter centers on the growing iconicity of Selena Quintanilla-Pérez, slain tejano music star. Her death in 1995 has not dimmed her rising popularity nor has it diminished her marketability. Selena's products and albums continue to sell posthumously. Many contend that she is simultaneously an entire industry that keeps her family's music business afloat and a myth that feeds the aspirations of her many fans. Selena, like the other icons in this study, created an image that symbolized the constantly shifting border culture, that was and is Mexican, American, and its own unique subcategory. She created an example of how a Chicana from a

working class background could rise to the top of both Spanish and English markets and could do so by dressing provocatively, while still maintaining her reputation as a "good girl."

The duality that Selena invented (good girl reputation/bad girl physical image, Mexican/American identities, immortality in death) all contribute to her status as an icon. The creation of a double is the basis for Selena's performance and for performances in general, and the metaphor is expanded even further in the coverage of Selena's death in the media. The media created a second Selena when they recounted the events of her life and death, only to kill her again later in the courtroom. The metaphor of performance and the restaging of her death in the trial are the focus of María Celeste Arrarás' tell-all biography (*El secreto de Selena*) about the life and death of Selena. Through the discussion of Arrarás' recreated drama, I outline the concept of the double as the basis for understanding the performance of culture, especially along the border between the Mexico and the United States.

The main themes of the reproduction of an image, the cross-over effect, the instability of identity along the border and the politics of immigration resurface constantly in the two theater pieces analyzed in this final chapter. In the musical by Eduardo Gallardo and Fernando Rivas (*Selena Forever)*, Selena's ability to cross-over and achieve fame in the Spanish and English markets continued in the year 2000 by bringing

audiences of diverse backgrounds together for the staging. In Hugo Salcedo's work *(Selena: La Reina del Tex-Mex)*, issues such as political and cultural instability are couched in performances by transvestites, the Border Patrol, Yolanda Saldívar and of course, by Selena. Salcedo's play also suggests the importance that the NAFTA trade agreement had on the need for developing a star that could bridge the dividing line between the United States and Mexico. Finally, the Tex-Mex music popularized by Selena and others and alluded to in Salcedo's title finds its parallel in the tango discussed in chapter two and the confusion of languages and immigrant and native populations.

Final comments in the chapter revolve around Chicana film director Lourdes Portillo's vision of the legacy established by Selena and her death (*Corpus: A Home Movie for Selena*). Portillo researches the impact that Selena's image and music had on young girls, women and the general population along the border. In a heated discussion with female writers/artists, Portillo examines the importance of Selena's physical appearance and her performance of Chicana/Latina identity through the use of her body.

For all the artists, Frida, Gardel, Eva Perón and Selena, their staged persona and art became the metaphors for performance of culture, politics, identity, sexuality, economics and many other categories of modern society. The thread that unites all of these icons is their ability to represent ideologies and discourses through their own performances, and this in turn makes them

attractive on the stage for others to add and perform new messages. These four icons present and represent popular culture by functioning as secular saints of the twentieth century and beyond. The metatheatricality present in their lives prompts the questioning and examination of roles that are performed in our daily lives. Returning to the opening quote of this introduction, "we need icons to model ourselves after" if only to question our own models of behavior.

[1] In Greek *eikon* means "image as the likeness of a prototype or model" (Onasch and Schnieper 17).The icon in this sense referred to every visual depiction, even the large-scale murals on walls or domes of churches, as well as the miniatures in books of Biblical or liturgical texts (Onasch and Schnieper 17-18).
[2] Mihail Alpatov writing about Russian icons supports the view that icons stand as markers of multiple meanings:

> To the eyes of casual observers, the world of the icon is limited, unsophisticated, even naïve. Some notice only the legendary themes, the iconography, while some delve into the theological implications; but others go even further and perceive beyond what is represented, the artist's vision of the world and mankind. The icon thus possesses several layers of meaning which makes interpretations difficult, but at the same time enriches the work of art. (243)

[3] Mihail Alpatov explains the icon as a "window to the other world" where painters (he writes specifically about Russian painters) tried to give people a vision of the world that was not a precise replica, but rather a likeness (241). The icon's function was to supply a minor part of the world and help the viewer through this suggestion conceive of the whole. In Medieval times the world was explained not through science, but through myths, legends, poetry and art (Alpatov 241) The Medieval mind was convinced that these forms (myth, legend,poetry and art) would enable "one to penetrate the truth and touch upon the supreme mystery of life" (Alpatov 241).
[4] Citing the Old Testament's ban on images, Onasch explains that this type of censorship made it difficult for artists to create renditions of religious figures. In 726 A.D. the Byzantine emperor Leo III politicized the dilemma by attacking what he considered to be the worship of icons instead of God or the Holy Trinity (Owens 68-9). Leo's son Constantine V continued to ban the use of icons in religious ceremonies, which led to a great crisis in political and religious arenas in his era (Owens 69). However, by 843 A.D. icons were accepted as a normal part of Byzantine life.
[5] The Byzantines inherited traditions from the Orient that used paintings of deified emperors to inspire fear and respect in the spectator. In this way, humans were reminded that they were nothing before the great image of their ruler, who had been elevated to supernatural proportions through art and attitude (*Icons* 9-10).
[6] The entire text reads as follows:

> ANGELS: Whom seek ye in the tomb, O Christians?
> THE THREE MARYS: Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified, O Heavenly Beings.
> ANGELS: He is not here, he is risen as he foretold. Go and announce that he is risen from the tomb. (Brockett 86)

[7] One of the oldest vernacular religious plays that exists in fragments is the *Auto de los Reyes Magos* (c.1200) from Medieval Spain.
[8] The Novgorod community is widely considered to be one of the most important producers of icons. The Russian medieval city was an important stop on the trade routes that linked the Baltic with the Mediterranean during the Middle Ages and had close ties with important European cities such as Constantinople. In the tenth and eleventh centuries, Novgorod was considered one of the most important international centers (Likhachov 10). Novgorod is also remembered for its contribution to the preservation of Russian culture during the invasions by the Mongols. Novgorod, along with Pskov were able to ward off the Mongols and spare destruction of many ancient Russian books. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries these books were brought to Moscow and were among the few surviving artifacts of Russian culture from eleventh to the thirteenth centuries (Likhachov 11). As a result, Novgorod is responsible for the seeds of the Proto-Russian Renaissance through its preservation of Russian culture in spite of the Mongolian invasions that destroyed much of the literature in Russia (Likhachov 12).
[9] A prime example is the Novgorod community that preferred to venerate local saints such as Florus and Laurus, Elijah, Anastasia, Paraskiva and Pyatnitsa who were believed to help with the city's farming and trade (Lazarev 5). Evidence of modern debates about culture can also be found in the Novgorodian icon *Paternitas* from the late fourteenth-century. This icon addresses the debate concerning heresy by the Strigol'niks, a group originating in Pskov, that saw Christ as an ordinary man; a teacher and a preacher. The Strigol'niks directed their criticism at the Church's control over doctrines and not at the Christian religion. The *Paternitas* icon is a response to the infiltration of Strigol'niks into Novgorodian society, and

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attempts to show the indivisibility and consubstantiality of the Three Divine Persons. This piece is believed to have been commissioned by a wealthy patron (Lazarev 24).

[10] For a complete study on modern icons and their continuing influence see *Santos and Saints: The Religious Folk Art of Hispanic New Mexico* Thomas J. Steele, S.J. Also see the website: <<www.si.edu/scmre/santos>> sponsored by the Centro de Investigación y Educación sobre Materiales del Smithsonian and their exhibit *Santos: Sustancia y Alma* (December 2000).

[11] I use the term "feudal" to emphasize how Eva Perón borrowed from Medieval governmental practices. A more contemporary term is "clientelist," which is a form of government in single-party or personalist dictatorships across the right-left spectrum.

The Body as an Icon in Art and Life: Performances by Frida Kahlo

The Mexican artist Frida Kahlo, who died nearly 50 years ago, continues to enjoy popularity because of her uncommon artwork and lifestyle. She was a painter and lithographer, an artist in the traditional sense, but she was also what we now term a performance artist. Much of her creative work was performative; she used her body as a medium for expressing her political, social and cultural ideologies. In most cases, her approach was considered non-traditional for a woman living in Mexico during the first half of the twentieth-century: she was a Marxist, she experimented with lesbian relationships, she cross-dressed and she was a woman who made a living as an artist. Her artwork reflected her unique life and follows the criteria for performance art in several ways. According to Diana Taylor, performance art tends to focus on the actor rather than the text, and it emphasizes personal narratives (11). Taylor also explains that performance art often seeks to destabilize traditional notions of "culture" and "art" and it subverts repressive, hierarchical, and patriarchal societies (11). Kahlo expressed all of these traits in her life and work. As a result, Kahlo is one of the most popular iconic figures of the late twentieth century. Her iconicity consists of an unusual combination of customary religious motifs and innovative secular themes, and it is this mix that accounts for her great depth of meaning.

Kahlo's performative nature also makes her an attractive character for the traditional stage as well. She appears as the protagonist in a great number of plays written especially in the last two decades.[1] Dramatists and audiences alike

have shown a renewed interest in Kahlo's life and artwork over the last 18 years. Her re-discovery can be traced to the publication in 1983 of the biography written by Hayden Herrera, *Frida: a Biography of Frida Kahlo*. Until the early 80s, Kahlo was mostly known only in Mexico and in a small international circle of artists and aficionados. In a recent article, Mario Vargas Llosa notes that the impact of Herrera's thick volume: "tuvo la virtud de catapultar a Frida Kahlo al epicentro de la curiosidad en los polos artísticos del planeta, empezando por New York, y en poco tiempo convirtió su obra en una de las más celebradas y cotizadas en el mundo entero" (1). Recent plays about Kahlo include those written by authors from outside Mexico and even from the United States. The appropriation of a particularly Mexican figure by others points to her viability as an icon with a plurality of meanings. Perhaps, it is the iconic quality that surrounds Frida Kahlo that makes her so popular. Her shifting and flexible identity make her attractive to authors and audiences at the close of the millennium because Frida can and does represent a variety of issues that many living in the post-industrial, post-modern culture of the 80s and 90s were obliged to contemplate. The celebrity status that Kahlo achieved after death is not unique to her alone, but the broad interest in a figure that is so intricately tied to a certain geography and history is unusual. The shifting identities that Kahlo nurtured coalesce perfectly with the notions that permeated societies at the end of the millennium. In a post-Cold War, post-colonial world groups struggled to define themselves in political, ethnic and religious matters. Similarly, people were

faced with questions of identity that resulted from advanced technology and mass media. Women and men were confronted with difficult discussions about feminism and sexual roles as boundaries came under fire in laws, television and literature, and in the workplace and home. Taken into context, it is not so surprising then that Frida began "pop"-ping up more and more in our culture, and by extension in the theater.[2]

One of the most interesting examples of the connection between Kahlo and popular culture during the last decades of the twentieth century was the recent linking of the pop music star Madonna with Kahlo. Articles began to appear in 1990 in magazines and newspapers such as *Vanity Fair*, *New York Times*, and *Entertainment Weekly*, which discussed the relationship between Madonna and Kahlo (Bergman-Carton 441). Madonna became an avid collector of Kahlo's artwork around that time, and many reporters began to point out similarities between the two artists and their concerns over motherhood and other issues. Janis Berman-Carton pointed out that in a 1990 *Vanity Fair* article all the images in Madonna's home, " are treated as vehicles for revealing the celebrity's private self. Pervading the account is an insistence on the indistinguishability of art from life . . ." (445). In this way, Madonna utilizes (or is perceived as utilizing) art to reveal herself in much the same way that Kahlo did. Furthermore, others have concentrated on the ability of Madonna to create new roles for herself through the manipulation of other female entertainers' images, religious symbols and other cultural discourses. Similarly, Kahlo thrived on her

created roles and her metatheatrical life in similar manner. Roseann Mandziuk underlines the act of self-creation as it concerns Madonna and her career. Mandziuk states: "Madonna is often upheld as a model of self-determination and self-expression. . . . she is the consummate pop icon and self-engineered chameleon" (167). The other point of interest is how both of these entertainers push boundaries by using signs and symbols taken from other discourses and transplant them into new and different contexts. Often, the new uses of traditional signs are shocking and surprising to audiences and force them to question the established norms of our cultures. David Tetzlaff clearly sees this quality in Madonna of bending and pushing the limit:

> From the beginning, Madonna's self-representation in promotion and publicity material portrayed her as a defiantly independent woman who challenged and overcame gender restrictions. This representation was greatly bolstered by [her] role in . . .*Desperately Seeking Susan*. . . . In contrast to the image of woman as keeper of decency and morals, the metatextual Madonna was clearly thumbing her nose at the traditional discourses of femininity. She also expressed that she would reject the bounds of others' discourses as well and that she felt the right to use the imagery from the crucifix to the camisole in any way that suited her. . . . Madonna was a bad girl only in a performative sense. (245)

The ability to take popular culture and use it for her own ends and purposes is a quality identified repeatedly in the life, artwork and performances

of Frida Kahlo. Cathy Schwichtenberg sees Madonna as a "barometer" of culture that demonstrates the changes, shifts and struggles in society (3). The "barometric" quality that exists in Frida as well has fueled the joining together of these two female artists. Furthermore, the upsurge in attention toward Kahlo in popular culture and especially in the theater in the late twentieth century is a direct consequence of this questioning of identity and of cultural morés that became so prevalent.

In much the same way that Madonna reappropriated religious iconography like the crucifix for the purpose of performance, Frida Kahlo also explored alternative uses of religious artwork to represent scenes from her life. Though not a religious person, Kahlo was exposed to the techniques used in Christian painting, and chose to incorporate them in her more secularly-oriented art. Many have pointed out the similarities that exist between the style, subject, and composition of Kahlo's paintings and the Mexican *retablos* that sprang up as part of the popular culture of the Mexican *pueblo*.[3] Essentially, a *retablo* is composed of a thin piece of metal or wood that is painted in a rustic style by those wishing to document the miracles that a saint performed or the sufferings alleviated after an illness or accident. Often, the *retablo* pictorial image is accompanied by a simple text that records the miracle, the saint, the person(s) involved, a place and a date. Malka Drucker describes a *retablo*, sometimes called an *ex-voto*, as popular art that was found on church walls since the colonial period (68). Drucker points out that, "Like a fresco, the *retablo* tells a story

without words, but it's very small" (68). It is this quality of story-telling about a saint or virgin that connects the *retablo* with the tradition of iconography.

However, it is Kahlo who changed the nature of the *retablo* from being a "thank-you note to God," as Drucker describes it, to a stage for acting out her own life, crises, and personal dramas (68). At the suggestion of her husband, Diego Rivera, Kahlo began to paint on metal sheets and capture events of her own life during a particularly painful period (Herrera, *Frida Kahlo* 74-75). In this way, Kahlo completely relegated the role of religion to an inferior status while developing her own cult of personality. Instead of recording the miraculous deeds of the saints, she presented herself as the center-stage attraction. She (re)presented the high and low moments of her own life, and thus re-casts herself in the starring role of whatever action played itself out on the canvas.

Kahlo's first work painted on metal in the *retablo* style is *Henry Ford Hospital* (Herrera, *Frida Kahlo* 73). This painting depicts the trauma of Kahlo's first miscarriage. She lies naked and bleeding on a metal hospital bed with vein-like ribbons attached to symbols of female anatomy, sexuality, a fetus, a machine and childbirth (Herrera, *Frida Kahlo* 73). Here, her own body is the main focus of the painting; thus the body became the site for performing her story. Through the symbols she attaches to her body by umbilical cord-like ribbons, Kahlo conveys her emotions about the experience. The Frida in the painting represents and thus performs the story of the miscarriage for the viewer. In a sense, Kahlo

uses her body as a way of acting out the episode, and as a result her body tells her story. Frida performs Frida. Consequently, instead of a saint performing some supernatural act, Frida performs a very human act. She occupies at the same time the space of a traditional *retablo* victim who suffers and the saint who is worshipped. As Herrera explains:

> Her elaborate self-mythologizing performance provides psychological distance from what might otherwise be overwhelming grief. Calling perhaps upon the pieties of her Catholic childhood, she turns herself into an icon that she--and others--can worship, thus transcending pain. (Herrera, *Frida* 283)

This transformation of the body as a site for the simultaneous performance of a narrative of the super and supranatural is part of Kahlo's unique artwork. By cultivating her own "mythological performances" through re-enactments on the canvas, Kahlo developed another performed identity. In effect the role of the suffering victim became part of her identity, and the dramatization of her pain became central to her self-image (Herrera, *Frida* 76). She created her own identity through her performances in art and life.

The concept of the body as a part of the spectacle of performance is crucial in Kahlo's case. In her artwork Kahlo's body at times functions as a symbol for events in her life. Her own body is the site of a complex performance. Her body acts out a text of suffering, a narrative of her struggles,

and her emotions, and becomes a metaphor for her own life and what defines/defined her. Kahlo wrote about her own work in a job application:

> Since my subjects have always been my sensations, my states of mind and the profound reactions that life has been producing in me, I have frequently objectified all this in figures of myself, which were the most sincere and real thing that I could do in order to express what I felt inside and outside myself. (Herrera, *Frida* 288)

As a result, Kahlo's figures functioned as actors that played many roles in the dramas she created in her artwork. The accumulation of meanings and identities highlights the metatheatrical and metaphorical capacities that Kahlo cultivated. Most of her images represented several different subtexts. Herrera explains:

> Frida herself spoke of the "duality" of her personality, perhaps referring to the Frida she felt herself to be from within and the Frida she saw from without--the observer and the observed. There was the flamboyant creature whom she presented to the world, the woman full of laughter, compassion, and heroic strength who served as the priestess in Rivera's temple. This persona hid the dark side of Frida, the needy, manipulating woman who in part embraced the role of victim in order to be admired for her martyrdom. (Herrera, *Frida Kahlo* 137-38)

If this is true, Kahlo participated in creating myths about herself and different images to stand for the things that most concerned her. Again, Kahlo's body

became a site for acting out various roles. Here, the roles dealt with her public and private personas, as Herrera noted.

One of the most explicit examples of the creation of different characterizations of her emotions and preoccupations appears in the painting *Las dos Fridas* which shows two versions of the artist. In the painting one figure is dressed in a stiff white Victorian-style dress, and the other is dressed in a loose native *tehuana*-style dress. The former holds in her lap a pair of pincers and cuts off a vein connecting the hearts of the two Fridas. The vein extends into the lap of the latter Frida, who holds a picture of Diego Rivera. Symbolically, these figures represent the loved and unloved halves of Frida. Kahlo is most likely dramatizing the struggle of her decaying marriage to Rivera because of his infidelity and her suffering.

However, the way in which she has depicted her two selves points to the Indian and European heritage that she has inherited. The different costumes in which the two women are clad reflect Kahlo's German ancestry from her father and the indigenous background on her mother's side. Again, Frida performed Frida. However, Kahlo also connects herself to a larger national discourse by incorporating these two different roles. In the painting *Las dos Fridas*, Kahlo's body/bodies tell(s) the story of the period of colonization when European and American blood were mixed. As a result, the body/bodies of Frida become an icon for the Mexican nation and represent the turbulent period of colonization and its after-effects. Here, Kahlo clearly shows the creation of different

personifications of herself. There are two distinct versions of the same woman performing different roles, with different costumes and yet, they are both Frida.

The two Fridas in Kahlo's famous painting are the basis for the play *Las dos Fridas* written by Bárbara Córcega, María del Carmen Farías, and Abraham Oceransky in 1998. The inherent metatheatricality of Kahlo's artwork lent itself to the development of traditional theatrical characters who express many of Kahlo's emotions in the play. Specifically, *Las dos Fridas* dramatizes this "self-mythologizing performance" that Kahlo created. Capitalizing on the inherent performativity of the painting, the three actor/writers collaborated on staging some of the many "performances" of Frida. Aware that Kahlo created personas in her artwork, the trio employed the metatheatrical aspect as a frame for the live, staged-version of the painting by Kahlo. The stage directions indicate as follows: "A la derecha un caballete de pintor sobre el que está colocado un boceto de algún autorretrato de Frida Kahlo" (8). By including this sketch of Kahlo as part of the set the play highlights the fact that being Frida was a role, or in fact, it may have been several roles. The sketch serves as an icon to remind us that Frida was comprised of many different parts requiring various texts. She existed as an actor who performed on the canvas, and was also brought to life, so to speak, by Córcega and Farías who played the two Fridas. This element of metatheatricality is also apparent from a few of the names that mark the scenic divisions in the play: "Mi vestido cuelga ahí," "Columna rota," "La boda," and of course, "Las dos Fridas." The play borrows these names from the artwork that Kahlo created

over the years which depicts various important moments and objects from her life. By including these titles from her artwork as part of a play, Córcega, Farías and Oceransky recognized the fact that the figure of Frida represents a multiplicity of meanings and texts.

The play *Las dos Fridas* concentrates on Kahlo's creation of identity. The action begins with an interview between the two actresses who play Frida. One actress plays the part of Espina, the Frida identified with the figure wearing the *tehuana* dress. The other actress plays Flor who is dressed elegantly in a suit from the forties (8). As the two sit down to a enjoy their tea and converse, the interview begins. Flor opens the interview with the fundamental question: "Antes que nada quisiera agradecerle que me haya recibido en su casa. La primera pregunta sería: ¿Quién es Frida Kahlo?" (8). Espina's response is intriguing: "Pues ya lo ve: Frida Kahlo soy yo. Una mujer, una pintora, una militante. . . ." (8). Not only does Espina outline three distinct aspects of Kahlo's persona, but she also informs Flor, who is supposedly a part of Kahlo, as well. If Flor is unaware of the other roles that make up Kahlo's persona it calls attention to the fact that here, as in the paintings, one Frida creates another Frida. Just as in the paintings, where Kahlo creates diverse roles/identities for herself on the canvas and charges her "body" with representing them for the viewer, here too separate identities are being created. Likewise, because Flor is a stranger/guest in the space that Espina occupies the viewer sees them as two distinct personas that represent Kahlo. Identity, then, is a multifaceted concept when associated

with Kahlo. The two figures on the stage and on the canvas that represent Frida can be identified with many distinct meanings, and thus make Kahlo's identity a shifting concept. As a result, the images that we have of Kahlo are just that--images. She is truly an icon that stands for other identities.

Throughout the rest of the play, Flor and Espina stage several periods from Kahlo's life. These snapshot-like recreations of moments do not follow any chronological order and range from her memories of an imaginary childhood friend, to her accident, to her marriage to Diego Rivera and their subsequent divorce. At times Flor and Espina speak in monologues and at other times they engage in a dialogue. They are aware that they are performing for an audience, and speak most of the time in the past tense, explaining these moments for the viewers. During some moments the Fridas refer directly to their roles in life. For instance, during the scene entitled "Columna rota," Espina complains bitterly to Diego about his philandering and for leaving her alone to await his return. Espina laments during one of her outbursts: "No te dan vergüenza los papelazos que hacemos. . . Ya no voy a fumar, ya no voy a dormir tanto, ya no voy a hacer nada que tú no quieras. . ." (12). Espina, who is trapped in this cruel marriage where she is forced (or perhaps, chooses) to play the *mujer engañada*, turns her back on the reality of things in order to hold the marriage together. She tries to play the part by avoiding anything that might upset Diego. This scene echoes the real life drama that Frida endured as a result of Rivera's infidelity.

Again, by using the painting *Columna rota* as the frame for the action, Córcega, Farías, and Oceransky invite the spectator to see the role of martyr that Kahlo so often invoked as a way of capturing Rivera's wandering attention. Often, Kahlo engaged her role as the suffering, stoic victim as a means to extract sympathy from her husband and hold him at her side, even temporarily. Some have argued Kahlo believed that Diego would not leave her if she were ill (Herrera, *Frida* 346-47). The reference to the painting *Columna rota* also connotes restrictions that Kahlo felt while trapped in a marriage with an unfaithful husband. The connection between iconography and Kahlo becomes clear in this scene as we see the various layers of performance at work. First and foremost, Frida in real life played the part of the victim many times to retain her hold on Diego. In much the same way, the scene enacted by Espina shows this suffering and need to hold on to Diego at the cost of giving up smoking and sleeping, becoming the abnegating wife who conforms to the will of her husband. The reference to the painting emphasizes the idea of martyrdom and the performance that Kahlo was fond of enacting in her life, as well as her artwork. In 1944, Kahlo endured a steel corset that trapped her and severely restricted her freedom of movement after yet another surgery. Herrera describes the Frida in the painting *Columna rota*:

> A Mexican Saint Sebastian, [she] displays her wounds and demands that we marvel at her miraculous survival. Like many Saint Sebastian paintings, *The Broken Column* combines the sexual attraction of a well-

> formed nude with the physical mortification to convey the message of spiritual triumph. But Frida is no saint. Instead of lifting her eyes heavenward to pray for salvation, she stares straight ahead, challenging both herself (in the mirror) and her audience to face her situation. (*Frida Kahlo* 183)

This intertext of the painting functions to make the viewer aware that Frida is cultivating the role of the martyr in this scene. The undertones of sexuality and mortification highlight the struggle for fidelity and the role of the victim that Kahlo played in her life and in her art.

This role of the martyr is also the focus of the play by Mexican author Federico Schroeder Inclán, *Frida Kahlo: Viva la vida*. Staged in 1966, this work is one of the first to portray the life of the famous painter(s). The play centers around the escapades of her on-again-off-again husband Diego Rivera. In three acts, Inclán moves through some of the stages of Kahlo's life such as her first meeting with Rivera, her accident and their subsequent marriage, and a confrontation with one of Rivera's *amantes*, and he finally ends with Kahlo's plea for a divorce. In addition to the two main protagonists, the audience also views the interventions of the three characters that represent the Mexican Judas figures: Compadre, Compinche, and Comanche. [4] The comments that these three figures from popular Mexican culture make through song and dialogue throughout the entire play remind the spectator that death is always near for Frida. In fact, the Judas figure crops up in much of Kahlo's artwork as well. One

example is the painting *El sueño* (1940) created during her estrangement from Rivera. Here, Frida lies sleeping in a bed that floats in a swirling sky of clouds. On top of the bed a *papier-mâché* Judas in the form of a skeleton mimics her sleeping position by resting its head on two pillows. However, unlike Frida, the Judas figure stares at us with open eyes. Closer to reality than a dream, this painting echoes the actual figure that Kahlo kept atop her own bed in real life. Herrera explains that to Frida the skeleton was an amusing reminder of mortality, and that her husband often joked that it was her lover (Herrera, *Frida Kahlo* 142). By blurring the lines between love and death, the Judas figure becomes a perfect technique for conveying one of the problems that existed in the Kahlo-Rivera relationship. Though Inclán does not refer directly to this painting, it functions as a powerful intertext for the action of the play. By joining her image with an ever-present death that imitates her actions, Kahlo links herself with the tradition of the martyr who suffers an inescapable death. As a result, Kahlo appropriates in her real life and in the painting that reflects her life, the role of the martyr. By extension, Inclán also adopts this role for his dramatic figure of Frida. In this way, Inclán's characterization of Frida becomes a natural extension of the performances that Kahlo enacted in her own life.

Throughout the play, these three Judas characters, Compadre, Compinche, and Comanche, relate how Frida bears the weight of her struggle for her cause: Diego Rivera. At the beginning of the first act, the Judas figures

come to life and begin to converse among themselves. They are the first to give the audience insight into Frida's plight:

COMANCHE: ¿Qué hace?

COMPADRE: Sufre . . .

COMPINCHE: Intensamente. (14)

In this way, the Judas figures establish the important role of the suffering martyr that is always ready to die. Once she encountered death at such close proximity during her accident, Kahlo seemed gripped by fear that it might come at any time. Drucker notes that whenever Frida felt a pain or became ill, she was certain that death was near (28).

However, the Judas figures also represent a sort of inner cultural strength for Kahlo. Given to her by Rivera as a present, the Judas figures come to have a double meaning in Kahlo's life and work. They are a direct link to her Mexican culture that treats death as a part of life. As an integral element of the celebrations on the Saturday of Glory one week before Easter, the *papier-mâché* dolls in the form of devils or skeletons are lined with fireworks and lit. These figures, symbols of sin and death, are destroyed in the town's square as reviled enemies (Drucker 29). For Kahlo, the Judas figures began to take on a new meaning as she survived and triumphed over death, both physically and emotionally. By painting the Judas figures during her separation from Rivera, Kahlo was able to recontextualize her suffering and redefine the meaning that the figures had in her life. Rivera's unfaithfulness struck very deeply at Kahlo's

emotional center of well-being, and by painting and triumphing over "death" in her emotional life, Kahlo was able to reappropriate the custom for her own personal experience. She mocked and incorporated *la pelona* (her own term for death) in her everyday life as a reminder that she had survived death and could survive it again if necessary, in whatever shape it took.

In the Inclán play, the Frida character emphasizes this need to conquer her physical pain and fear caused by her poor health, her emotional pain and her fear of losing Diego. In a conversation between the visiting Doctor Huerta and Frida, the cathartic use of the Judas figure in her paintings and in her life is a main focus:

> HUERTA: Sus mismos cuadros . . . Siempre la vida en su estéril lucha con la muerte. . . . Y el cordón umbilical, ¿qué significa para usted?
>
> FRIDA: Eso . . .
>
> HUERTA: ¿Los Judas de cartón?
>
> FRIDA: ¿Se ha fijado bien en ellos, doctor? Hace tiempo que el arte de nuestro pueblo descifró el misterio de la vida, y creó los Judas. Mire el cordón umbilical que tanto le intriga. Es una larga mecha rellena de pólvora que se enciende en un extremo . . .Comienza a quemarse la pólvora, y el Judas cobra vida. Danza ahora grotescamente al impulso de la mecha que se va consumiendo. De pronto, un estallido. Revienta el cuete. ¡¡Pum!! y el Judas salta en mil pedazos. Se quema. Pierde su

forma y se convierte en cenizas . . .¿Qué otra cosa es la vida humana? (21)

This conversation takes place at the beginning of act one, where the audience sees a mature Frida who contemplates her lot in life and ends the scene crying "¡Viva la vida!" (22). This final shout is a reference to her last work of art, which, incidentally, she has been painting throughout the scene. Her last painting is a still life composed of watermelons in all shapes and sizes. Some of the pieces of fruit are whole and some are cut open revealing their bright red flesh. Kahlo wrote on the pulpy open slice of the watermelon that occupies the foremost position: "Viva la vida / Frida Kahlo / Coyoacán 1954 Mexico." Again, there is a curious mixture of life and death, because the painting functions as a clear marker for the real Kahlo's death (she died in 1954), and yet at the same time it represents her unstoppable spirit. The painting also furthers this curious mixture by combining once living things in a *still life*. By writing her personal slogan, name, and place of birth on the cut slice of the watermelon, Kahlo utilizes the blood-red *flesh*, as she does her own, to tell her story. Cut and *disfigured* watermelons stand for the body that she occupies, and she both "welcomes death and defies it with *alegría*" (Herrera, *Frida Kahlo* 226). In the play, as in her life, death is the beginning and ending point for Kahlo.

The events from Kahlo's life combined with the plays *Las dos Fridas* and *Frida Kahlo: Viva la vida* demonstrate the overwhelming element of performances that Kahlo incorporated into her life and artwork, and how those

performances overlap with theatrical portrayals of her personas. Kahlo created roles for herself in which she played the victim, the martyr, the *tehuana* Frida, the more European Frida, the morose Frida that feared death, and the Frida that mocked it, among others. These two Mexican plays, *Las dos Fridas* and *Frida Kahlo: Viva la vida,* capitalize on the inherent theatricality of the Kahlo image, and use it as an intertextual frame for their action. In this way Kahlo's artwork, when used as a prop, as the basis for the dramatic action, or as a title for scenic divisions, functions as a crucial element of characterization. Essentially, Kahlo's body is the site for fleshing out her different roles. The characterizations of Kahlo on the stage further reinforce her performative nature. As a result, in her paintings and in the dramatic works Frida *embodies* many different personas.

The work of Joseph Roach on necrophilia is useful for considering the relevance of the concept of effigy as it applies to Kahlo. The body/flesh is of extreme importance in a performance, according to Roach. The word effigy can be used as a noun, connoting something similar to the Judas figure, or as a verb, meaning *to body something forth* (Roach, *Cities of the Dead* 36). Roach maintains that the more powerful effigies are those fashioned from flesh. These effigies are concocted through performance and hold open a place in memory. Roach insists that:

> A theatrical role, for instance, like a stone effigy on a tomb, has a certain longevity in time, but its special durability stems from the fact that it must be re-fleshed at intervals by the actors or actresses who step into it,

> condensing the complex erotics of memory into a singularly tangible object of desire. As such the living effigy, the actor, functions as a fetishized substitute for the corpse. And as such, the stage functions as a *lieu de mémoire* on which modernity presents what it calls "period revivals," necrophile spectacles . . . . ("History, Memory, Necrophilia" 26-27)

In this way, these plays substitute not only the "mutilated corpses" that Kahlo used to represent herself in her paintings, but they also represent the actual corpse of Kahlo.[5] As a result, Kahlo was in a sense an actor who substituted the images that she created for herself in her paintings. The plays, then, are an extension of this substitution: a period revival of Kahlo. Again, the lines between reality and performance become blurred, merging the body of Kahlo with her "body of work."

Indeed, Kahlo used her artwork and her subsequent performances to turn herself into a fetishized object of desire for spectators in general, and for Rivera in particular. This was a common ploy to capture the momentary attention of her husband Diego. Perhaps the most extreme example of this effort to flesh out the corpse-like image that she projected in so many of her works was in her solo art exhibition at the Galería de Arte Contemporáneo in the spring of 1953. Horribly ill from her unsuccessful operation and the diseased bone that was implanted in her spine, Frida was confined to her bed. Her friend and photographer Lola Alvarez Bravo planned an exhibition to lift her spirits and honor her work and

life while she was still able to enjoy the praise (Drucker 135-36). However, as the day approached, Kahlo's health declined even more drastically, and she was ordered to remain in bed. All through the day, the phone rang with reporters, friends and admirers wondering if Frida would attend. The tension mounted and soon crowds were gathering outside of the gallery, threatening to push the doors in. Finally, the exhibition was forced to begin early to accommodate the crowd's demands. Earlier, Kahlo had sent her four-poster bed to the gallery so that she would be able to receive her friends just as she had done in her room at home. Just after seven o'clock, a screaming siren announced Kahlo's arrival in an ambulance with a police escort. Herrera describes the scene of Frida entertaining her guests: "Like one of those lavishly gowned saints that recline on satin sheets and are cherished in Mexican churches, Frida held court" (Herrera, *Frida* 407). Her bed was placed in the center of the gallery, and decorated with mirrors on the canopy, Judas figures that looked down upon her, pictures of friends and political leaders, and even one of her own paintings (Drucker 137).

This scene illustrates the ultimate symbiosis between art, life, and performance that Kahlo cultivated. On her deathbed Kahlo invokes the images that she has portrayed so often in her paintings of her sick and feeble body disintegrating. Famous photographs of the event show her drawn and sickly face surrounded by concerned friends who appear to be shocked by her appearance (Stellweg 119). Placed in the middle of the exhibition, Kahlo and her bed became a sort of installation, a live performance to be contemplated along with

the artwork hanging from the walls. Just as her paintings evoke the suffering, sickness and death that haunted Kahlo all of her life, the real life scene of the dying Frida on her bed echoed these sentiments. Here the line is unclear between what was life, what was art, and what was performance. Kahlo was simultaneously corpse and actor. Friends, like Raquel Tibol, who attended the showing commented that: "It was a little spectacular, a little bit like a Surrealist act, with Frida like the Sphinx of the Night, presenting herself in the gallery in her bed. It was all theater" (Herrera, *Frida* 409). Herrera also explains Frida's conduct that night as a performance and states: " . . .if Frida had to perform to conceal her pain, this was the kind of performance that she loved--colorful, surprising, intensely human and a little morbid, very like her theatrical self-presentation in her art" (*Frida* 409). In this way, Frida on all levels embodies the concept of the term "effigy" used as a verb. In turn, she becomes the fetishized object of her viewers, that is, she "bodies forth" her own effigy, to recall Roach's term. Slightly more than one year later Kahlo died on July 13, 1954. Again, her friends came to be with her as she lay upon her deathbed in her home, dressed in her *tehuana* clothing in a scene that oddly resembled the one in the gallery only a year earlier.

Kahlo herself can be seen both as a creator and as a created personality. Her public and private personas were mutually reinforced, and elevated her to mythic stature. In effect, Kahlo perpetuated these myths about her personas and used them to her advantage in order to capture the interest of her audience. The

most explicit example of this making of the self is illustrated in the painting *My Birth*, where an adult Frida emerges from the body of an unidentified mother. Graphically, this painting expresses Kahlo's own participation in the creation of her persona. Sarah M. Lowe sees this painting along with *My Nurse and I* as Kahlo's attempt to formulate a self in the present (48). According to Lowe:

My Birth functions as a double self-portrait: Kahlo identifies with both figures [the emerging Frida and the Mater Dolorosa in the picture at the head of the bed] and so manages to give birth to herself, in the image and by creating it" (48). As a result, Kahlo transformed herself into an image or façade that comes to stand for many different things. It is precisely this iconic quality that makes Kahlo such an intriguing figure of popular culture. Her image symbolizes a wide variety of personas and subtexts.

Central to these notions of iconicity and popular culture are the concepts of reflection and image. Marshall Fishwick conceives the icon as an ". . . admired artifact, [an]external expression of internal convictions, everyday things that make every day meaningful" (1). If this is the case, an icon mirrors back to us the minute details of everyday life. By concentrating on the importance of the icon, we are encouraged to refocus our attention on the everyday things that we take for granted. This is especially true for gender and Kahlo's interpretations of it. The majority of Kahlo's works are self-portraits. She obsessed over her own image and how it appeared at different stages of her life. She used her self-portraits to remind her lovers not to forget her (*Self-Portrait, 1926* and *Self-*

Portrait, 1937), she used them to communicate her anger (*Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair, 1940*), and she used them as a homage to those who had helped her (*Self-Portrait with the Portrait of Doctor Farill, 1951*). What occurs in Kahlo's self-portraits is in reality a double reflection: the reflection that she sees in the mirror and paints, and the reflection of her circumstances and emotions. The mirror and its reflections are of great importance in understanding Kahlo's work and her status as an icon.

As a sick young woman Kahlo was accompanied by a mirror that her mother placed above her bed so that she would at least have herself for company. Throughout much of her life as an invalid, the mirror was her companion, and in several of her paintings the mirror reflects back to Kahlo, and by extension to us, a questioning of gender. In each of the self-portraits painted during the decade of the 40s, Kahlo appears with a shadow of a mustache on her upper lip. In many of the paintings, Kahlo also appears with lipstick, jewelry, and even with *tehuana* headdresses. By mixing these traditional male and female characteristics, Kahlo merges the categories that separate the sexes.

The mirror also works to reinforce the dividing line between the sexes by highlighting the differences that typically mark one as male or female in society. The mirror, which is fundamental in the artwork of Kahlo, also functions in some very useful ways as it applies to the concept of identity and gender in a more general sense. First, the mirror at its most simplistic level is a tool that allows one the opportunity to study his/her outward appearance. However, another

important consequence of the mirror is that the object reflected back to the viewer is always an inverted image. The image is almost the same, but slightly different because it is the opposite for an external observer. Finally, the other intriguing concept of the mirror is its use in gender studies as a speculum. The speculum is a tool often used in gynecological examinations, which allows the physician to check the inner female sexual anatomy. Luce Irigaray has formulated her own, at one time controversial, theory about how the speculum relates to feminist/feminine studies. Irigaray notes that the speculum is a concave mirror that concentrates light so that the physician can examine more easily the inner genitalia. It is also an instrument to:

> *dilate* the lips, the orifices, the walls, so that the eye can penetrate the *interior*. So, that the eye can enter, to see, notably with speculative intent. Woman having been misinterpreted, forgotten, variously frozen in show-cases, rolled up in metaphors, buried beneath carefully stylized figures, raised up in different idealities, would now become the "object" to be investigated, to be explicitly granted consideration, and thereby, by deed of title, included in theory. (144-45)

Seen in this way, the mirror or speculum is a tool for exploring female sexuality and including it as a viable subject for investigation. For Irigaray, the concave mirror or "burning mirror" highlights how humans react to light defensively, choosing instead the mimesis or "re-semblance" of the thing instead of the true vision. Even though as Irigaray explains, the concave mirror with a horizontal

generatrix does not affect the usual coordinates of vision, humans deny these qualities as they apply to themselves. Irigaray also notes that if the concave mirror has a vertical generatrix the image is reflected as upside down (149-50). Irigaray challenges the traditional Lacanian mirror stage with her concept of the concave mirror, in that she emphasizes what is not readily visible. The concave mirror subverts the phallocentric system and the easily seen erection by concentrating on the inner, female sexuality (Forte 260). The mirror then is a powerful tool for understanding gender and identity because of its focus on image and reflection.

A mirror appears in several of the theatrical pieces and, as we have seen, as a part of the life and artwork of Kahlo. Especially notable is Enrique Mijares's treatment of the mirror in his work *Arbol de la esperanza* (1995). The mirror is a constant presence on the stage, forcing Frida to confront herself at almost every turn. There are essentially three main characters in this piece: Frida, Diego, and La Muerte. The action consists mostly of the most difficult moments of Frida's life: her struggles with death, her drug and alcohol addiction, her amputations, her divorce and other challenges. These scenes run together with no apparent divisions or chronological approach, thereby giving the audience an overall picture of the environment of suffering and crises that she endured. Mijares states on the title page of his manuscript that this play revolves around "Frida Kahlo en la poética de la creación. . . . ." The stage directions indicate: "Un gran espejo de pie [que] parece perseguir todo el tiempo a Frida,

como obligándola de tanto en tanto a mirarse en él, a conversar con su reflejo, a dialogar consigo misma" (1). As a result, the mirror and its reflection foist the issue of identity upon Kahlo and the audience from the first moment. The opening scene has Frida seated, wearing a man's suit, and frantically cutting her hair. Mijares instructs in the stage directions: " El enorme espejo la refleja rabiosa, desesperada" (2). This scene is a reference to her painting *Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair*. Painted just after her divorce from Diego was finalized, Frida again cut her hair as she did after she discovered the affair between her sister Cristina and Diego (Herrera, *Frida* 285). The use by Mijares of the intertext of the painting serves first and foremost to highlight the theme of betrayal, but it also suggests the slippery concept of identity as one of the main concerns of the play. In this painting, in her life and in the theatrical scene, Kahlo struggled with her self-perception after her split with Diego. It is important to remember that previously, Kahlo depended on her marriage to Diego as an anchor during her physical torments, leaning on Diego for financial and emotional comfort. During their estrangement, Kahlo compelled herself to move out and take an apartment on her own, as well as to earn a living by painting and selling her creations. She now had to begin to forge a new identity separate from her role as wife and lover of Diego Rivera.

Along with constructing a new identity by separating herself from Rivera, Kahlo herself suggested a questioning of gender and the roles that she played in her life. This questioning of roles is emphasized in Mijares's play. Gina

McDaniel Tarver envisions the message of the self-portrait with short hair as, " . a reminder that she can be 'masculine' as well as feminine, that she can be strong in a *macho* way" (13). McDaniel Tarver also favors the idea that this portrait was a kind of message to the world that she could withstand physical and emotional pain, and by emphasizing her "masculine" side in times of crisis and pain she could convey this message to others (13). The fact that Kahlo donned a man's suit and cut her hair in a "boyishly" short style highlights this crossing of sexual divisions that occurs later on in their relationship. Later in the text, Kahlo bathes Diego as he comments: "¡No entiendo por qué tuviste que cortarte los bigotes de Zapata que tanto me gustan! ¡Rápate cuanto quieras el cabello, pero no vuelvas a rasurarte los bigotes!" (3). Frida replies: "En cambio de tu pecho hay que decir, que si hubieras desembarcado en la isla gobernada por Safo, no te hubieran ejecutado las guerreras. ¡Tus maravillosos senos te darían el derecho de admisión!" (3). In this example Mijares challenges our notions of sexuality by inverting our traditional visions of gender with Frida's and Diego's physical appearances.

Returning to the initial scene of the play, the mirror is a key element in the equation of gender because the theater audience and the viewer of the painting receive an "inverted" vision, a "mirror reflection" of the stereotypes of maleness/femaleness. Figuratively speaking, the painting and the scenes by Mijares mirror back to us the arbitrary nature of our roles by inverting the normal image. In the opening scene, it is the same face of Frida, only slightly different

with a boyish haircut, the reverse of Frida. Furthermore, the fact that this part is being *played* by Frida in the self-portrait and in the first scene of the play heightens the ultimate performativity of sexual roles in general. Additionally, both Kahlo and Mijares appear to understand that by projecting the reflection onto the viewer, they are really making him/her take stock of his/her own real life situations. What does being male or female represent for Frida? What does it mean at the end of the twentieth century when Mijares is writing *Arbol de la esperanza*?

Mijares later points to the roles that society has developed for males and females when Kahlo defines her marriage to Rivera. At first, Kahlo declares: "Ser la esposa de Diego es lo más maravilloso del mundo ... (Ríe): Una tiene que permitirle que juegue al matrimonio con otras mujeres" (6). However, as she moves across the stage to the center, the mirror "que ha quedado junto a ella" prompts her to reassess the comment:

> No sabes lo triste que es mi vida con Diego. Nunca me he podido acostumbrar a sus amores . . . . dice que el sexo es como la micción, o cualquier otra necesidad fisiológica, y que no comprende por qué la gente lo toma tan en serio. En cambio él sí es celoso conmigo en su doble criterio de gran macho. (6)

Through Frida's confession to the mirror, Mijares again makes the dichotomy of male/female apparent. The change from the stylized description of the marriage at the beginning to a totally opposite portrayal and inclusion of a double-standard

echoes the inversion that appears in the opening scene. The two descriptions of Frida's relationship with Diego also mimic the inversion that often occurs in a reflection—they are mirror images.

In Mijares's work gender is a role one plays which has certain established behaviors. In the particular case presented here, the Mexican *machista* stereotypes are being fleshed out between Diego and Frida. Mijares has Kahlo represent these stereotypes in front of a mirror, and thus makes the mirror in the play a tool for self-examination. During a later scene, the character Frida speaks directly of her self-examination and confronts herself in the mirror. Arguing with Diego over whether she is too ill to continue painting, Frida shoots back at Diego: "¡No estoy enferma! Sólo estoy destrozada,"(6) and later continues "¡Soy feliz de vivir mientras tengo la capacidad de pintar! Me retrato a mí misma porque paso mucho tiempo sola. (Ríe dolorosamente): Y porque soy el motivo que mejor conozco" (6). Kahlo is said to have made a similar statement in real life on many different accounts when asked why she painted herself with such frequency. What is significant for this study and for understanding Kahlo's popularity in plays like that of Mijares is that Kahlo emphasizes the female gaze as an alternative way of conceiving one's self. Kahlo seems to have understood what the feminists at the close of century are trying to convey; that is, that females are not always defined in opposition to or by males. By providing us with an alternative view, Kahlo takes a definition about the experience of being female from the female perspective that she knows best. In this way, her stance

supports what those like Irigaray and her colleagues are demanding: a positioning of the woman as speaking subject (Forte 260). In this case, the mirror as speculum seems most appropriate since Kahlo uses it to define herself.

There is much evidence to support the use of the mirror as a speculum in Kahlo's work, for most often her works are quite "sexual" in nature. They feature her as the main subject, and she is able to "speak" about herself in ways considered unorthodox in Mexican society during the first half of the twentieth century. Often, Kahlo's artwork presents her body, or parts of it, exposed before the viewer in a frank and direct manner. One example already discussed is the painting *Henry Ford Hospital*. However, even though Kahlo shows us her nude body, we do not see her body as a object for pleasure. Instead, Kahlo most frequently creates an "unattractive" body that is bleeding, swollen, cracked or scarred. She paints for us her own vision of her body, that is not the typical nude created for the delight of the male's eye in a phallocentric society. There is no "beauty" in the traditional sense, in that Kahlo does not present to us a pink, rounded and flawless "woman." Rather, her body is seen as a reproductive organism tied to its very real functions and cycles or as a wounded specimen for study.

In her work *Frida and the Abortion* from 1932, Kahlo explores her own theories about the female body. A nude Frida occupies the center of the lithograph surrounded by images of dividing cells, a fetus, a garden nourished from the blood (her miscarriage) that drips down her inner thigh, and a palette.

The body depicted here is not for the pleasure of the viewer, but instead represents a different view of sexuality from the perspective of a woman. The body in the lithograph is tied to a greater life cycle, as we witness the stages of pregnancy that ultimately ended in a hemorrhage. After her miscarriage, Kahlo requested medical books to study pictures of fetuses at various stages of development (Herrera, *Frida* 142). Her approach to her own body is clinical and poetic at the same time. She speaks to us through her sexuality, and her examination of the self mimics that inner examination by the physician and the speculum. Another painting that reflects her efforts to conceive the female body in an alternative way is *Roots*. Again, Kahlo examines and paints herself, but here, she defines her sexuality and her body in very different terms. In *Roots*, Kahlo's body merges with nature in an intimate way as her body is converted into plant-like roots that begin to grow into the ground. From a mystic womb a green vine emerges and spreads into the rocky ground around her (Herrera, *Frida* 315). Herrera argues that Frida's "wish for fertility transformed itself into an almost religious belief that everything under the sun was intimately linked and that she could partake in the flow of the universe. . . . In *Roots*, it is Frida who nourishes nature by giving birth to a vine" (Herrera, *Frida* 315). Here, as in the lithograph, Kahlo uses the feminine figure to suggest a potentially powerful life force that emanates from women. The female body is defined in an alternate manner since it is linked to a greater, universal power that transcends that of

man. In this way, Kahlo provides her public with another way of seeing women and their bodies as powerful and real.

Mijares has cleverly taken this angle of Kahlo's work and exploited it to highlight the performative nature of the body and of gender. Both Kahlo and Mijares understand that the body is a marker for identity and that in both her performance(s) and art, Kahlo used her body as weapon for challenging sexual stereotypes and roles. As Jeanie Forte notes, women's performance art is always about positioning the female body as a subject in direct opposition to the patriarchal text (260-61). By using the mirror to invert, reflect and study herself, Kahlo was able to redefine herself as subject in her own unique system. She used her body to rewrite the roles for identity. She was able to perform a different role that afforded her power and autonomy. Instead of the female body existing somewhere outside the system, female performance art allows the female body to foreground the gendering of culture and the repressive system of representation (Forte 261). As Forte notes, woman's performance art allows the artist "the possibility for frustrating fetishistic practices and asserting an alternative viewing practice" (261). As if to confirm this frustration of the fetishistic practice, just after Frida argues with Diego in the Mijares play, the stage directions state: "[Ella] hace retroceder la silla, toma distancia, se impulsa, arremete contra el espejo y pasa através de él, destruyéndolo" (6). After destroying the mirror, Kahlo says matter-of-factly: "Sé que no hay nada detrás; si lo hubiera, yo lo vería" (6). There is nothing behind the image constantly

projected through the centuries of the female body. Mijares is keenly aware of the performance that Kahlo displays in her artwork and through the mirror he is able to connect her theories of the body to issues of identity that concern the theater public at the end of the millennium. By representing other discourses or texts, Kahlo, as portrayed by Mijares, challenges the typical process for identification and she becomes a cultural icon.

The exploration of gender, sexuality and identity is also a topic of concern in the film version of Kahlo's life: *Frida: Naturaleza viva*. Paul Leduc and José Joaquín Blanco's collaboration from 1992 deals with many of the same issues as the play by Mijares. There is an emphasis on Frida's interaction with herself in several mirrors, and a more explicit attempt to bring to the fore the hybridization of sexual roles that Kahlo developed. This film is unique in that its approach to recreating the life of Kahlo consists of a series of scenes that contain, in most cases, no dialogue. The scenes appear out of chronological order, as if someone were shuffling through a haphazard collection of "live" photographs taken at different moments of Kahlo's life. In this way, Leduc and Blanco mimic the scenes that Kahlo (re)created on the canvas about herself through their silent scenes and filmic stills that feature her at particular periods of her life.

Our first glimpse of the actor that plays Frida is in a mirror that hangs above her bed. Two scenes later, she sits before a mirror totally dressed except for her chest that is reflected in the mirror. She paints herself, comparing her real breasts with the reflection and with the painting. The scene ends with Diego

placing a prehispanic necklace around her neck. The scene simultaneously confirms and rejects our notions of the female body. On the one hand, the painting reflects what female eyes see. To reinforce that it is Kahlo who perceives and manipulates her own body, the screenplay directions state that: "Frida se contempla el pecho, se lo acaricia, lo toma de 'modelo'" (13). By actually physically manipulating her own body, the actor conveys that it is she/Frida who is in control of her physical body and its image, as well as of how and what that body experiences. However, Diego's present of the necklace topples this affirmation of agency and control by relegating her to the status of object. According to Claudine Herrmann, society is concerned with convincing women that they are special and unique by adorning them with things such as perfume, by exaggerating the importance of their smiles, hair, and by tolerating their eccentric ways simply as a way of covering up the fact that they are inter/exchangeable (60-61). This is the case in the relationship between Frida and Diego as portrayed by Leduc and Blanco. By filming this scene in front of the mirror, Leduc and Blanco force the issue of self-identity in a subtle way. In fact, this scene in reality sets up a later confrontation between the couple when Diego arrives with yet another necklace only to compensate for the fact that he has been (exchanging her by) having an affair with Frida's sister, Cristina. This first example sets up the theme of identity which the characters manipulate throughout the rest of the film.

The manipulation of identity surfaces again, several scenes later. In episode fourteen, Frida and Diego are seen in bed together in sexual union, and later Frida appears in bed alone with sheets covered in blood. In the following scene Frida awakens abruptly to find herself reflected in the mirror above her bed. Turning quickly to avoid herself, she is confronted with her reflection in a mirror at the side of her bed. With her back to the side mirror, Frida tries to calm herself with a cigarette. In the scene sixteen, Frida appears as a child. She is dressed in masculine clothing, with her hair pulled back, and she is seen drawing a mustache similar to the one that Chaplin wore. The montage, or accumulation of these scenes for the viewer, suggests a continual questioning of sexual roles throughout the life of Kahlo. The scene that precedes the one with the mirrors undoubtedly places Kahlo in the typical female lover's role. By showing her after the act, in a bed covered with blood, Leduc and Blanco remind the viewer of paintings like *Henry Ford Hospital*, where Kahlo suffered from a failed pregnancy. This image further reinforces the "typical" maternal image that we associate with the female body. However, scene sixteen shatters the motherly female image by presenting us with a polar opposite: Frida dressed as a young man. By grouping these scenes around Frida's inescapable confrontation in the mirror, Leduc and Blanco foreground the unstable limits between gender that Kahlo personified. Her gender-bending through cross-dressing, destabilized the established societal norms that controlled and separated the behavior of men and women. Likewise, by dressing as a man, Kahlo as portrayed in this film

demonstrated the arbitrary nature of our "costumes" and what they represent. Lucy Fischer points out in her study about film, motherhood and genre that often in a patriarchal society, women's behavior requires as much of a masquerade and performance as that of drag (169). Consequently, by fluctuating between the binary images of male and female, Kahlo undermines the dichotomous system. The mirrors in scene fifteen bridge the divide between the poles of sexual difference allowing Kahlo and the viewer to study each gender and its inverted, or "mirror image." The fact that Kahlo occupies both extremes and the point in between is significant for it highlights the different angles and perspectives that go together to make a complete picture. There is no longer a fixed point for viewing identity, but rather a multitude of perspectives from which it can be perceived.

The other clear example of alternative views in the film is the inclusion of Kahlo's bisexuality. Interestingly enough, most of the plays avoid this topic completely, but by including it in this film, Leduc and Blanco emphasize the many roles that Kahlo was able to craft for herself. Her bisexuality also challenges a fixed notion of gendered behavior, and thereby rejects any dominant discourse that society might offer about sexual roles. Throughout the first half of the film, the viewer witnesses Kahlo's trysts with Leon Trotsky, and with a photographer who is unnamed (most likely Nikolas Murray). The viewer also observes her relationship with Diego. However, the film also captures a brief kiss between Frida and another woman.[6] Again, this scene confounds the

traditional boundaries for gender in an innovative way. The scene takes place in the kitchen of Frida's house while the two women are preparing food. Traditionally, the kitchen typifies the concept of *hogar* and is a feminine space. According to the division of labor based on the sexes, the woman's labor is in the home, and specifically in the kitchen, the domestic sphere, whereas men normally work(ed) outside the home. This division of labor and of space is part of the heterosexual-patriarchal system that developed over centuries. By choosing to place the lesbian kiss in the kitchen, Leduc and Blanco refute the heterosexual discourse on two fronts: first, by having a love scene between two women, and second, by having it take place in the domestic sphere. This challenge to traditional roles is further complicated by the clothing that Frida and her lover wear. The manuscript states that Frida appears in her "traje de Mao," and that her lover is wearing an "amplia falda de los cincuenta" (71). On the one hand, Frida's costume is that of the male Communist Chinese leader, which connotes a socialist structure where all gendered divisions of labor have been greatly reduced and unisex clothing was mandated. However, her lover's skirt from the fifties suggests a very gendered society that exaggerated the female form through fashions that padded bras and padded hips in the style of Marilyn Monroe. The fifties-style skirt also implies a society where the work force was male-dominated. As a result, the film, through its purposeful confusion of sexual roles and implications, reminds the viewer of the performance-oriented society in which he/she lives and how those performances relate to gender and identity.

Furthermore, Leduc and Blanco utilize the space and the costumes to demonstrate how performance in life and in the performing arts share many of the same characteristics. Finally, this film evokes the popular contemporary euphemism "alternative lifestyle" by including lesbian sexuality in the film. Consequently, Leduc and Blanco link Kahlo to audiences at the close of the millennium because she represents the breakdown of traditional, all-encompassing discourse into a multitude of discourses.

Written later in the decade of the 90s, Alberto Castillo's play *El espíritu de la pintora* (1997) also enters into the dialogue concerning gender and the portrayal of sexuality. The action of this play conflates the past and the present by having the spirit of Frida Kahlo inhabit the body of a 27 year-old man named Pedro from a well-to-do family in Mexico. Lorena, the young man's sister, discovers Pedro dressed in her indigenous skirts and clothing at night and suggests to their mother that he is a transvestite. After further investigation, the mother and daughter realize that Pedro paints, speaks, and holds the same ideals as Frida Kahlo. A struggle ensues between the mother, Bety, who wishes to exploit the unusual occurrence for fame and fortune, and Lorena, a failed "artist," who hopes to lure the spirit into her own body. Not only does this piece demonstrate, on an obvious level through cross-dressing, the questioning of gender, but it also attacks the cultural and historical stereotypes about gender in Mexico. This play is also noteworthy for its discussion of politics. Through the

use of the Kahlo icon, Castillo traces the influence of Mexico's Revolutionary politics in modern Mexico.

By intertwining gender and Mexican politics, Castillo makes some profound comments about the Mexican identity in the late 90s. Jean Franco draws on Octavio Paz's work in *El laberinto de la soledad* to suggest that as a result of the legend about "La Malinche" (the woman who personified simultaneously the rape of the indigenous people and the act of treason that offered them up as victims to the Spaniards) the problem of identity is a constant in Mexican culture (131). However, Franco makes it clear that the question of identity centers around the male, and that women became the allegory for the territory over which the quest for male national identity passed (131). As a result, from the moment that Mexico began to experience its own autonomy, and even before that time, the problem of national identity surfaced repeatedly. This quest for national identity is doubly complicated in the case of women who were excluded from the process of formulating a definition. Furthermore, during the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1917 the promise of social transformation was associated with virility. Franco states:

> The Revolution with its promise of social transformation encouraged a Messianic spirit that transformed mere human beings into supermen and constituted a discourse that associated virility with social transformation in a way that marginalized women at the very moment when they were, supposedly, liberated. (102)

Consequently, the use of the Malinche myth and the male-centered discourses of the Revolution reinforced and entrenched the paternal, *machista* culture in Mexico. Castillo takes issue with the notions about *machismo* in Mexican culture in his work *El espíritu de la pintora* by playing with the arbitrary lines that divide a sexist society. As feminist politics have shown through women's performances, the act of rewriting the body by using a new "text" that does not correspond to the patriarchal "text" constitutes a political act (Forte 254). In this performance the use of a man's body to house the spirit of Kahlo is a direct rewriting of the traditional texts that govern society. That a man can behave like a woman and wear women's clothing and yet still be a man is startling for many who see the sexes at totally opposite ends of the spectrum. Furthermore, the gender baggage that the Kahlo icon carries with it is a further complication of the division between "being" male and female. There is a double negation of the patriarchal text in this case: first, as we have seen in previous examples of Kahlo's own artwork, clothing and lifestyle, and second, by Pedro who becomes the vessel for Kahlo's spirit.

Castillo goes on to poke fun at the male-centered Mexican culture through the comments of Pedro's mother who has bought into the stereotypes. Just after Bety has heard from Lorena about how Pedro dresses as a woman, she confronts him about being a *travesti*. Pedro responds with surprise: "¿Yo?. . . .Pero si me he tirado a la mitad de las viejas de la escuela" (68). Bety, relieved, answers: "Pedro ¡no hables así! Bueno, sí habla así, en el fondo me encanta

saber que mi hijo es todo un hombre" (68). Neither Bety nor Pedro is comfortable with behaviors that stray from the norm. Later, sitting in the living room alone, Bety laments: "Y si [Pedro] sale como en esas obras de teatro y me dice: Mamá, soy homosexual y tengo un amante. ¡No, no lo soportaría! Ay, Dios, cuando menos que no me salga loca y le dé hasta por cambiarse el nombre, no, Petra es un nombre horrible. . ." (70). Although, these scenes are played with humor, the truth is quite raw: sexuality in a *machista* and patriarchal society is not negotiable. In another humorous scene, Bety tries to reason her way out of the uncomfortable situation by embracing the "masculine" side of Kahlo as a justification for Pedro's behavior. Trying to persuade Pedro to leave the *bigotito de Cantinflas*, Bety reasons with him as her appetite for fame grows: "Pero si es de lo más masculino que hay. . . Además para que te lo sepas, por ahí se comenta que a Frida le gustaban las mujeres, así que no tienes por qué sentirte humillado. Ay, no me había dado cuenta, por eso te escogió a ti y no a Lorena. . ." (79). Even in the midst of a confusing struggle for what this hybridization of genders that Pedro/Frida represent(s), Bety tries to cling to the old definitions about gender and identity. Bety totally negates the feminine presence, and instead focuses on the male identity, even though her son's body is the conductor for Kahlo's spirit. In this play the male is the territory over which the quest for identity takes place, which consequently reverses the traditional conception of the Mexican search for identity. Furthermore, Castillo empowers females in the process for social transformation at the end of the millennium because in this

work the spirit of Frida Kahlo returns to address problems similar to those of the Revolution.

At a press conference that Bety has arranged, the spirit of Kahlo enters the body of Pedro and relates the reason for her return: "Quiero que sepan por qué estoy aquí. He vuelto porque quiero conocer al subcomandante Marcos y participar activamente en el Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional" (84). With this statement, Kahlo, as portrayed by Castillo's play, links the past to the present and proves to be a powerful icon by bridging the gap between the beginning and end of the century. Kahlo was a staunch supporter of the peasant class in Mexico. By the end of her life she was a Communist activist, and was even buried with a red flag bearing the hammer and the sickle. She kept photographs of Communist leaders in pictures by her bedside, and she even had an affair with Trotsky. Throughout her life, she and Rivera attended rallies and meetings aimed at honoring the precepts of Communism and helping the working class. Many of her paintings reinforce these socialist discourses.[7] It is also significant that Kahlo felt that she and modern Mexico had been born together (Herrera, *Frida* 4). Kahlo changed her real birthdate of July 6, 1907, to the year 1910 which coincided with the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution (Herrera, *Frida* 4). In fact, Kahlo claims to have witnessed fighting between the Zapatista peasants and the Carrancistas, and says that her family helped the wounded and hungry Zapatistas (Herrera, *Frida* 11). As a result, it no surprise that Castillo has chosen the figure of Kahlo to speak about the contemporary uprising in Chiapas

in the 90s, which was led by peasants and militants who demanded more rights and economic autonomy for their impoverished region. At one point in the dramatic action, Bety comments to Lorena that she and her Communist ideas are outdated and that there will be no revolution other than the artistic one she is planning with Pedro/Frida (83). However, slightly later as we have seen, the press conference refutes this idea completely. Castillo appears to be making the point that the Revolution has not ended and that all the goals have not been accomplished. Likewise, by having the spirit of Kahlo in the body of Pedro spearhead the public battle in favor of the Zapatistas' cause, Castillo makes the quest for national identity a female, as well as male, concern. In this way, by including women as active participants and leaders, Castillo shows the evolution of the ideas of the Revolution.

The other salient point of the Castillo play is the attack he launches against the consumer culture that permeates almost every society in the globalized market-place of the world at the end of the twentieth century. At several points in the dramatic text, Castillo points to the marketability of the Kahlo image. In particular, the treatment that Bety shows toward her son reveals her insistence on capitalizing on the money that the artwork and renown will bring. Bety decides to sell the "reproductions" of paintings that Pedro/Frida paints, she holds a press conference, and at the end of the play she tracks Pedro down after his escape with Lorena and takes him to the United States to be auctioned off as if he/she were a product. This commerce in the Kahlo figure is

important at the end of the century because it represents the same struggle for national identity that was taking place in the 1920s and 1930s. At the beginning of the century, Mexico was faced with the task of staking out a national identity, as its own historical roots demanded, to counteract the lure of capitalism and technology found in the United States (Shaefer 6). That same task is still present at the end of the century, and even more so perhaps, with the increased pressures of global politics and economic policies such as NAFTA.

In the final scene of the play, Bety tracks Pedro and Lorena down in the jungle through the use of a cellular phone, and announces that she and Pedro are going to New York. When Pedro asks if he is to be sold, Lorena blurts out: "Sí, hermanito, te va a vender y probablemente te compre Ross Perot, o Madonna" (90). Lorena's statement is certainly sarcastic and critical, but it is also quite profound if one considers the relationship between Mexico and the United States at the close of the century. It is evident that Kahlo and her artwork were used by Mexicans both as ambassador and as a protest against the ever-increasing economic and political ties between the two countries. Bergman-Carton has concluded that Kahlo was a key image in the 1990 exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of art that featured the exhibition "Mexico: Splendors of Thirty Centuries"(451n). This exhibition was enormously important because it preceded the visit by President Salinas de Gortari to the United States by two weeks. The Mexican artwork was used by both countries as an effort to reinvent the image of Mexico as a sophisticated and culturally rich country just before the

economic summit between Presidents Bush and Salinas where they were to discuss the free-trade pact (Bergman-Carton 451n). Bergman-Carton also reveals that Kahlo's self-portraits were mass-produced in the form of posters, buttons and billboards and thus became the "new face of Mexico" (451n). Castillo responds to this use of Kahlo's image and the selling off of the Mexican heritage and autonomy when he ends the play with an auction and the sale of Pedro/Frida. This reading is possible because Kahlo's art work has been declared part of the national patrimony, and consequently, by putting her image up for sale it is as if Mexico were selling off pieces of itself.[8]

However, Kahlo's image was also used as a protest against the pacts between the United States and Mexico. Franco explains that in 1990 after the summit between Presidents Salinas and Bush, a number of middle-class women dressed in *tehuana* clothing could be seen on the streets protesting the discussions (26). This appropriation of Kahlo and her image by both sides illustrates the multiple meanings that she has come to represent and at the same time it strengthens her status as a cultural icon.

Kahlo's multiple meanings are not limited only to the country of Mexico, however. The Uruguayan playwright Rafael Romano has written about Kahlo. In the United States, Joanne Pottlitzer wrote *Paper Wings: A Theatre Piece about the Life and Art of Frida Kahlo* (1992); Hillary Blecher, Migdalia Cruz, and Robert X. Rodríguez collaborated on the musical *Frida: The Story of Frida Kahlo* (1993). Her appeal has been gaining in popularity after the publication of

the Herrera biography and the exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. A recent work to include Kahlo as its focus is the play *Frida* by the Argentine writer Ricardo Halac. The first version was performed in São Paulo, Brazil in 1996; however, a later version premiered in Buenos Aires in January of 1999.[9] As has been shown with other plays, Kahlo appeals to dramatists and audiences because of her proto-feminist stances and her crossing of genders. However, Halac's play has a very clear focus on the political aspects that governed Kahlo's life, as well as the suffering that she endured as a result of her illnesses and accident. It is the political element in this play that connects the Kahlo icon with Argentina and Mexico because it accentuates similarities between the national developments of the two countries. Furthermore, the visions that haunt Frida and submit her to terrible psychological torture allow Halac the opportunity to explore the consequences of civil war and to draw parallels between Mexico and Argentina. As a result, in Halac's play Kahlo em-bodies the suffering and healing that Argentina and Mexico endured as a result of wars. In this way, Kahlo's broken body is a metaphor for the scars left on the Mexican and Argentine bodies-politic.

Kahlo represents the Mexican Revolution and the (continuing) efforts of the Mexican nation to define itself after the traumatic after-effects of war and social upheaval. The Mexican process for self-definition in terms of nationality parallels that of Argentina during the decades of the 80s and the 90s. From 1976 to 1982, Argentina experienced a frightening period of "National

Reorganization" put into place by a military dictatorship. *La guerra sucia*, or *El proceso*, as it is known in Argentina, represents a time of torture, political repression, the "disappearances" of more than 30,000 so-called *subversivos*, and a general atmosphere of crisis that ultimately culminated in the war between Argentina and Great Britain over the Malvinas/Falkland Islands. Unlike the Mexican Revolution, which was fought "above ground," the Argentine war was a silent one waged against its own citizens in "underground" torture chambers. However, in both cases the wars were fought within the confines of the countries' borders, and involved dictatorships, followed by an effort to forge a new identity and political landscape. As a result, the use of Kahlo's life in an Argentine play makes sense as one begins to analyze social circumstances of both countries more deeply.

In her cultural study on disease and metaphor, Susan Sontag demonstrates how tuberculosis and cancer have been used as symbols that carry very distinct meanings throughout the centuries.[10] Both illnesses have come to have important behavioral and political connotations over time. Sontag states that, "Illnesses have always been used as metaphors to enliven charges that a society was corrupt or unjust" (72). This was clearly the case in Argentina during the Dirty War, when the military Junta removed the "rotten" and "diseased" elements of society in order to promote a new social order.[11] Sontag also notes that the illness metaphor is quite powerful in a political context as well:

> Order is the oldest concern of political philosophy, and if it is plausible to compare the polis to an organism, then it is plausible to compare civil disorder to an illness. The classical formulations which analogize a political disorder to an illness--from Plato to, say, Hobbes--presuppose the classical medicine (and political) idea of balance. Illness comes from an imbalance. (76-77)

The use of the infirm body of Kahlo, in this context, works as a perfect metaphor for the Argentine social body as it moves from a period of imbalance toward balance at the close of the 90s. The mutilated body reproduced in so many of Kahlo's paintings reverberates strongly in a country that witnessed repeated attacks on the bodies of so many who were killed and tortured. Schaefer insists that, "The suffering image, or [Kahlo's] body as the icon for suffering, is narcissistic in its self-examination and exhibition, yet it is also cathartic in its public display of self-affirmation" (16). These two qualities of self-examination and catharsis characterize the search for closure and identity that are taking place not only in the Kahlo's artwork, but in Argentina, as well.

Even though Halac's play does not directly make the connection between the recent politics in Argentina and the illnesses suffered by Kahlo, many of the themes reflect issues that concern the Argentine public in the aftermath of the political turmoil of past decades. In this way, at some level it appears that the Argentine public relates to many of the same crises that Kahlo, and by extension the Mexican people, endured. At the end of the play, the character Frida supports

this premise when she speaks to her paintings before her exhibition and says: "Vayan por el mundo. Y si alguien quiere reflejarse en mi dolor. . .déjenlo. Tiene derecho. . ." (40). This piece of dialogue illustrates the truly iconic quality that Kahlo embodies, and Halac captures the perfect symmetry between the *dolor* of Kahlo and that suffered by the Argentine public. As a result, there is a subtle historical-political undertone that permeates the entire play.

In the Halac play there is a strong emphasis on the mutilated body that Kahlo is obliged to contemplate daily. Conscious of her destroyed body, Kahlo asks Diego if he prefers her sister Cristina to her because: "Tiene la piel sin cicatrices y los huesos todos en su lugar. . . "(7). Later, in the play when Diego and Frida reconcile after their divorce, Frida stipulates that they will have no physical contact. Again, Frida refers to her scarred body: "Ya sé que voy a ser tu amante eterna. . . . Pero ya no puedo desvestirme delante de tus ojos. Mi cuerpo desnudo me da vergüenza. Estoy encogida. Recuperé la timidez de la adolescencia. Cada día estoy más mutilada" (23). All of this attention to the mutilated body that persists in the daily life of Kahlo provides an eerie reminder of the many bodies that suffered at the hands of torturers. Kahlo's destroyed body is a metaphor for the Argentine nation that lives with the scars caused by the military dictatorship that ruled with violence and torture. This same culture of violence can be seen within the Mexican society that nurtured Kahlo's artistic expression.

Most biographers point to the painting *A Few Small Nips* (1935) as a prime example of the violence in Mexican popular art and culture that influenced Kahlo. Many feel that Kahlo's work was derived from the style popularized by José Guadalupe Posada in his gruesome prints. Posada often used scenes from ghastly accidents, murders and other violent acts for his prints and sold them to the illiterate for pennies (Lowe 83). Often, these scenes dealt with events from the Mexican Revolution. Kahlo revealed to her friend Raquel Tibol:

> During the Tragic Decade [the Mexican Revolution] my mother would open the balcony windows on the Allende Street side and welcome the zapatistas [followers of Emiliano Zapata]. She'd attend to their wounds and give the hungry thick corn tortillas . . .I was seven at the time of the Tragic Decade, and I saw with my own eyes the peasant struggle of Zapata against the carrancistas [followers of Venustiano Carrancista]. The clear and precise emotion I remember about the Mexican Revolution made me join the Young Communists at the age of thirteen, but in 1914 the bullets began to hiss; . . . . There was propaganda for Zapata in the Friday markets of Coyoacán in the form of ballads illustrated by José Guadalupe Posada, and the cost one centavo. . . . I remember a wounded carrancista running toward his post beside the Coyoacán river, and a zapatista crouching with a bullet wound in his leg . . . ." (cited in Tibol 30-31)

In both Posada's work and the painting by Kahlo there is a kind of macabre humor about the violence being shown (Lowe 85). It is a popularized version of a horrific act, sold for profit, and at the same time a condemnation of the subject depicted. However, the most intriguing aspect is the connection between these artists and the violence associated with the Revolution. The mutilated body in the artwork by Posada, the mutilated bodies that Kahlo painted, and Kahlo's own mutilated body become referents for the bloody violence during the Mexican Revolution. Consequently, the use of the Kahlo figure, a Mexican icon associated with the Revolution, and the insistence on the broken body theme in the Halac play offer a subtle, yet powerful connection with the Dirty War waged in Argentina. Perhaps the most telling scenario in the Halac play mingles these two images in a more concrete way by intertwining them. Toward the middle of the play, Diego begins to speak about how the Mexican Revolution anticipated the Russian Revolution, how he paints Mexican history, and how the revolution is also an act of love. However, directly after this speech, the crash of the streetcar that caused Frida's injuries can be heard, and the character Frida recites: "Fractura de las tercera y cuarta vértebras lumbares, tres fracturas de pelvis, once en el pie derecho, luxación del codo izquierdo, herida profunda en el abdomen producida por una barra de hierro que. . ." (17). The sequencing of these two discourses on politics and infirm bodies reinforces the interconnectedness, not only of illness and politics, but also of the Kahlo icon with the wars waged in Mexico and Argentina.

The similarities between the two periods following the battles in Mexico and Argentina are more significant than might be imagined at first glance. As is well-known, Kahlo's and Rivera's passion was the fight for the peasant class in Mexico. For years in Mexico, there was a long struggle for the rights of peasants, and by the 1920s land and labor reforms were being put into effect, the power of the Catholic Church was lessened, and Mexicans turned to their native culture for inspiration instead of importing fashions and ideals from Europe. Playing a key part in this movement, Kahlo and Rivera embraced socialist/communist politics that theoretically spoke of a society that could provide for everyone equally. The two artists gave monetary and public support to efforts that aided the plight of the underprivileged in Mexico. These were many of the same ideals that had prevailed in the Peronist and post-Peronist governments of Argentina, and it was against these very platforms that the military dictatorship of the late 70s moved. The right-wing dictatorship hoped to establish total control and wipe out all policies that the Perons had put in place for the *descamisados*. The return to power of the Peronist Party after the Dirty War in Argentina parallels the post-Revolution period in Mexico that is associated with the politics of Kahlo and Rivera. Halac's work plays with some of these interactions between the two countries in a subtle way. Frida's opening lines in the play describe key moments in her life and in her philosophy, and at one point she explains the reason for her political stance: "el profundo odio que sentí cuando vi cómo trabajan los campesinos en México . Comprendí que

mientras haya hombres que reciban un trato así, es imposible que la humanidad sea feliz" (2). Clearly, these lines demonstrate the strong commitment to carrying out the ideals for equality set forth in the fight of the Revolution. Later, Diego characterizes Frida as "el angel de los pobres" in one of his paintings (5). At another point much later in the text, Frida and Diego both shout: "¡No va a haber más pobres!" in response to the criticism that María Félix gives them about living in their own world (27). Each of these lines sets up the strong political views of Kahlo and Rivera, and reflect the time period in which they lived. However, the direct bridge between Kahlo's politics and those of Argentina comes almost at the end of the play in a comment made by María Félix. Upon learning that Diego is not leaving Frida to be with her, María Félix confronts Frida and reveals:

> No estás para batallas. . . pero igual ganaste. No sonrías. . . Cuando estuve en Buenos Aires y conocí a Eva . . . a ella también le rodeaba la muerte; a pesar de eso me hizo sus confidencias: Para que él fuese alguien. . . le tuvo que dar todo. . .hasta su propia vida. Ahí te veo. Es sorprendente cómo me los recuerdas. (37)

In this scene, although María recognizes the similarities between Eva and Frida in the arena of love and sacrifice for the career of a mate, it is impossible to ignore the social-political similarities that also exist. In each of these famous women's lives there existed a strong commitment to the pursuit of their own course in politics. In Eva Perón's case, she established a political group for

women in the Peronist party and founded an organization to aid the poor through the distribution of goods, services and monetary donations. Eva Perón used her political power as the wife of General Juan Perón to forge her own campaign for socialist politics in Argentina. Similarly, Kahlo used her own talents and the fame associated with being the wife of Diego Rivera to bring awareness to feminist issues and her Marxist ideals. As we have seen, she painted toward the end of her life with the goal of serving the Communist party. She participated in rallies, such as the one in 1954 against CIA participation in the overthrow of Guatemala's leftist president, that left her so ill that she was unable to recover. Even on her deathbed, she made a show of her political ideals in the Palace of Fine Arts with the Communist flag draped over her coffin against the wishes of the Mexican government (Herrera, *Frida* 429, 434). Consequently, by highlighting the similarities between these two important female icons, Halac associates the periods of transition in Mexico and Argentina through some of the political and social aspirations that these two women embodied. The period of transition after the Dirty War in Argentina with the return to power of the Peronist Party (though it is a much more centrist party in its present state) reminds the public of many of the original tenets that the party and the Peróns represented. Many of these political and social stances have much in common with the period in Mexico following the Revolution. In this way, the Kahlo icon works as a perfect metaphor for the Argentine experience at the end of the 90s.

The many different examples of dramatic pieces about Kahlo's life, her artwork, and her politics, demonstrate how she represents a variety of issues that concern Latin American audiences and others around the world at the close of the century. Kahlo herself forged an identity that was multifaceted and that appropriated many different "personalities" during her own lifetime. She created performances on the canvas and in her real life through the use of doubles, costumes, and suffering, among other techniques. Kahlo created her own mythic persona to represent her unique style and almost unbelievable crises and traumas. As a result, the line between the public and private Kahlo, between the creator and created, between the subject and object becomes blurred. This blurring of life and performance seems especially true with regard to her relationship with Diego Rivera. Consequently, Kahlo herself is an *a priori* metatheatrical frame for any sort of dramatic piece that might include her. These metatheatrical qualities make Kahlo an excellent vehicle for speaking about other sorts of inherent performances such as gender or martyrdom. Kahlo is an important cultural icon because, as we have seen through the performances by her and of her, it is possible to represent aspects of culture such as Mexican politics, Argentine politics, feminist politics, and gender politics. Furthermore, Kahlo's "cultural specificity" can be extended and amplified to include other countries such as Uruguay, Argentina, and even the United States. Kahlo's image can be manipulated to represent the past as well as the future. It speaks of Marxists, as well as capitalist, consumer societies, and crosses back and forth over borders

between genders and nations. The texts that Kahlo represents are varied, and the story of her life reveals to the theater-going masses at the end of the twentieth century many of the shifting cultural identities that we experience through border-crossings, global economies, technology and the breakdown of colonial legacies.

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[1] The most recent addition is *Frida Kahlo, Autorretrato* by Mary Paz Gómez Pruneda in Felipe Galvan's anthology *Teatro, Mujer y País* (2000).
[2] Argentine writer Cristina Escofet has also written a piece that is a cross between fiction and monologue about Kahlo titled *A través de Frida*. Escofet's work was read by Ana María Casó, and shown in video form during the Latin American Theatre Today Conference, March 31, 1999 at the University of Kansas.
[3] See pages 94-95 in Raquel Tibol's book *Frida Kahlo: An Open Life*, and page 68 in Malka Drucker's book *Frida Kahlo*.
[4] Compadre, Compinche and Comanche signify "pal" in Spanish.
[5] See *The Wounded Table* where Kahlo represents herself as the ultimate corpse: Christ, or the painting *Suicide of Dorothy Hale* where she projects her own contemplation of suicide onto her friend's experience, or paintings such as *The Little Deer* or *Tree of Hope*.
[6] The film *Frida: Naturaleza Viva* also includes in scene 58 erotic touching between Frida and her female nurse (76).
[7] See works such as *The Nightmare of War and and the Dream of Peace*, *The Bus*, and many of the entries from her diary during the years 1952-53.
[8] Many of these same themes can be found in the 1990 play *The Child Diego: Dreaming on a Sunday*, by Carlos Morton. Frida Kahlo enters as a secondary character as Diego's historical mural comes to life highlighting the struggles that Mexico has dealt with from the time of the

Spanish invasion through the 1968 student massacre at Tlatelolco. Morton's play shares its title with the manuscript by Maritza Núñez, *Sueños de una tarde dominical* written in 1999.
[9] Halac's play about Kahlo was published in a version by Corregidor (2000), along with the play *Metejón, guarda con el tango*, and appears with the title *Frida, la pasión*.
[10] Claudia Schaefer makes a similar connection between Sontag's work, Kahlo's illnesses, and Mexico in her first chapter in *Textured Lives* (Tucson and London: The University of Arizona Press, 1992).
[11] For a more complete discussion, see Diana Taylor's *Disappearing Acts*.

The Living Dead: Mythical Performances and Carlos Gardel

In much the same way that Frida Kahlo made performance an integral part of her craft, Carlos Gardel, the famous tango singer of the 20s and 30s, also performed as part of his public and private life, in his songs, on the movie screen and in publicity. In fact, Gardel's career offers the theater crowd of the late twentieth century an array of public and private performances as material for dramatic works. The star quality and playboy images that Gardel fashioned for himself made him a legend during the 20s and 30s in the River Plate area. What is truly significant, however, is his staying power. Gardel's popularity has become the stuff of legends in Argentina and Uruguay. His unique style and expression have also found their way into other countries at the close of the twentieth century. Over 60 years after his death Gardel continues to capture the attention of dramatists and audiences alike. In fact, the search for plays written in the last three decades about Gardel proves difficult, as new works keep appearing on a frequent basis. Although Argentina has traditionally generated the greatest number of works that include Gardel, more and more often playwrights are using the Gardelian icon to speak about issues in other parts of the Hispanic world. In this way, Gardel is becoming a transnational figure, crossing cultural and political boundaries in Latin America and even Spain.[1] It is precisely the polyvalent and charismatic quality that makes Gardel an attractive figure, but more importantly, the flexibility that his multiple images provide makes him the ideal dramatic character.

Gardel's ability to mask his true identity and perform the role of the superstar tango singer provides dramatists an inherent metatheatricality on which to base their metaphors for other types of performances enacted in both private and public forums. Dramatists writing in the years subsequent to Gardel's death have found that the persona adopted by Gardel provides an ideal example of how traditional artistic performance can be transferred to daily life, and how in turn, nontraditional, antitheatrical acts can be construed as performance. These two approaches to performance coalesce perfectly in the figure of Gardel. Consequently, through the use of theatrical and filmic texts dramatists and directors explore through Gardel and the tango a variety of performed identities in the River Plate region and beyond: by comparing past and present national myths; in demonstrating the possibility for finding openings for expression in censored societies; by examining the effects of dictatorships; by articulating culture through performance and showing the bridge between exiled groups, their homeland and foreign lands; and in observing the transition into post-dictatorship through the comparison of past and present ideals.

It must also be noted that in some cases the playwrights utilize the tango alone to serve as a marker for these performances without invoking directly the figure of Gardel. These texts which focus on the tango in general have been included because they refer to Gardel indirectly. Gardel was instrumental in moving the tango from a lowly art form into an acceptable form of social expression, and he spearheaded the change of the tango from a purely

instrumental song into one that included lyrics. Therefore any texts which focus on the tango as an indicator of the performance of cultural transition necessarily recall the influence of Gardel, and have been included on that basis. The manipulation of the tango and Gardel's performances of its cultural nuances provide dramatists working in the twentieth-century malleable symbols for demonstrating the interplay between traditional theater and antitheatrical performances that occur(red) in public art, life and demonstrations.

Theatricality is an inherent quality in Gardel, and the links between his life and performance are quite strong. Throughout his career, Gardel fostered various public and private images. His persona is an artistic creation just as much as are his musical recordings and film appearances. Even Gardel's real identity is a much discussed and disputed question in Argentina and Uruguay. Gardel himself was responsible for this confusion because of his own comments and the documents that he left behind. Blas Matamoro records many of these discrepancies, including the highly contested arguments over the singer's true citizenship, in his investigation of Gardel's life. On many occasions, Gardel announced to the press that he was born in Uruguay. His passport and Argentine *Libreta de Enrolamiento* record that he is a native of Tacuarembó, born on December 11, 1887 (Matamoro 13). Likewise, in 1920 Gardel also declared himself to be Uruguayan at the *Registro de Extranjeros* in Buenos Aires (Matamoro 13). After his death, however, questions have surfaced about

whether or not Gardel was, in fact, French. Gardel once stated that he was born in Toulouse on December 11, 1890 (Matamoro 14).

Not only is his nationality a complete confusion, but his birth year is as well. The situation becomes more complicated in 1932 when Gardel and a group of friends celebrated his 49th birthday in Paris. At his celebration, Gardel revealed that his "real" birth year was 1883 (Matamoro 14). Gardel worked very hard at concealing his true identity and was constantly in the process of reinventing himself. Gardel's flexible images point to a definition of identity as a shifting concept that floats across time and countries and even continents. His identity is manipulable and malleable, and infinitely adaptable due to its changeability. His persona in its very essence represents a variety of texts.

Adding to the instability of Gardel's age and nationality are questions about his lineage. In a French document Gardel also attests to the fact that he was born Charles Romuald Gardes, son of Berthe Gardes who settled first in Uruguay and later in Buenos Aires (Matamoro 17-18). However, Matamoro points out that this relation has never been proved definitively. According to other popular myths, Gardel was the product of an illicit love affair between Berthe Gardes and a French nobleman. Alternatively, the Uruguayan journalist, Erasmo Silva Cabrera, offers yet another version and maintains that he was the son of Coronel Carlos Escayola and Manuela Bentos de Mora (Matamoro 17-18). Bentos de Mora was not the legal wife of the Coronel and the date given for

Gardel's birth in this version of the story is November 21, 1881 in Tacuarembó (Matamoro 17-18).

These disputes over Gardel's identity add to his mythic stature as an enduring icon. The complexity is heightened when he becomes linked with Argentina through his association with the tango. It is curious that, even though most of the scenarios do not place Gardel's birth in Argentina, he is seen almost exclusively as one of the most recognizable icons of that country. Identity is, as Gardel demonstrates, a very slippery concept; Gardel realized that identity is an image that one can manipulate to suit a particular audience. Likewise, performance is equally as malleable as identity since no two performances can be recreated in exactly the same way. Performance can be repeated and similar, but never identical. In much the same way as an icon, performance functions as the visual, living narrative (the images) of a text that can be represented in myriad ways. As a result, identity, icon and performance all draw from the same foundational framework. Intertwined in the figure of Gardel, identity, icon and performance serve to highlight the theatrical nature of this particular performer's career and lifestyle. These three concepts reoccur with frequency in the Gardelian myth and are the reason that his persona is so often invoked in theatrical pieces. As a result, identity, icon, and performance are the frames that allow one access to the metatheatrical figure of Gardel.

In a metatheatrical way, Gardel's life was one performance on top of another and within another. Not only did Gardel perform in his private life, but

his public life also added another dimension to the already inherent performances that permeated his life. Gardel spent his life on the stage singing for audiences. As a result his performances became layered. Gardel created a persona, performed it in an exaggerated version on the stage as the famous singer, added to those performances the monologues that his music contained, and finally transposed his songs to the silver screen in movie scripts. Performance was a way of life for Gardel. Always alert to the need to project a star image, Gardel was preoccupied with his physical appearance and took great pains to maintain it. As Donald notes, "[Gardel] dressed well, ate well and for all outward expressions had 'money to burn'" (*The Argentine Tango*... 155). Almost every photograph of Gardel shows him impeccably dressed in a tuxedo or a fine suit, with his hair slicked back and a winning smile. These publicity images are significant when one recalls Gardel's humble origins. His dark complexion and poor neighborhood are forever linked in the public's minds through his nickname: the "Morocho del Abasto." The working class origin represented a stark contrast to the image that graced the world's finest stages. Consequently, Gardel represented a vertical shift in status and identity through his star performance as a singing sensation and actor. His appearance and performances convince the public of his upward mobility as he played the role of the upper class, public figure. As Marta Savigliano points out: "[Gardel's] lustrous hair, combed tightly backwards, suggests his readiness for a dive into the waters of glory and simultaneously shows a careful, oily preparation for a smooth slip, an inadvertent

or welcomed penetration into a higher class" (64). Castro also notes that Gardel "won the admiration of those who aspired to 'hacer la América' in Argentina. He demonstrated that one could go from 'rags to riches.' If he could do it so could any *porteño* Juan Nadie" (*The Argentine Tango*... 156). In other words, Gardel was able to transform his original identity as a possible foreigner from a working class, single-parent home into a tango idol through his public persona.

The performances that Gardel cultivated in his career and life were also part of the primary roles he played in his films. Castro suggests that Gardel played the part of the *macho* in his films by carefully controlling his weight in order to be a ladies' man, and by singing about love affairs gone wrong (*The Argentine Tango*... 147-48). Additionally, the parts that Gardel played reinforced the notion of upward mobility. Through characters such as Julio Argüelles in *El día que me quieras*, Gardel "performed the traditional bourgeois role of a wealthy man saving a woman from poverty. But as 'himself,' Gardel demonstrated to his viewers that moving up was possible, since (through the tango) he had done it" (Savigliano 66). As a result it is impossible to know where one performance started and the other ended because they mutually reinforced one another, blurring the line between reality and fiction.

A similar interaction can be seen with the lyrics of the tangos that Gardel immortalized and his performances in films and in life. In fact, Gardel marked a pivotal moment in the development of the tango. The evolution in the audience and style of tango echoed the changes that Gardel effected in his own life. The

evolution of the tango is an ambiguous one. Many suggest that its roots are in black music introduced into the Rioplatense area through slavery and immigration. This suggestion is what gives rise to the chain of associations: "Tango-eroticism-roots-sexuality-primitiveness-blacks" (Savigliano 32). The sexual-erotic nature of the tango made it part of the masculine underworld as it continued to develop. Some maintain that the dance was simply too risqué for women and that men alone danced the tango. However, in a masculinist, machista society this practice could not and did not continue for long. The next group included in the tango's embrace was prostitutes. Donna Guy notes that:

> mixed tango dancing evolved in the bordellos and music halls in the waterfront areas of Buenos Aires and Montevideo, Uruguay, from the 1860s to the 1930s. Based on rhythms and dancing styles of African, Spanish, and Italian origins, the tango often served as a prelude to commercial sex. (142)

In the bordellos and cabarets, men from all levels of society mingled with prostitutes. As one might expect, so-called "decent" women were excluded from this form of entertainment.

In her studies, Guy investigates how the tango was transformed into *tangomania* in Parisian nightclubs between 1910 and 1920 (145). During this period, tango became slower due to new instruments and more sexually explicit as a result of the slower tempos (Guy 145-46).[2] Drawing on its fame in Paris, the tango became popular in some areas of the United States. According to Guy, the

reaction of those spectators in the United States who wanted to participate in the new dance craze was to sanitize and stylize it (Guy 146). The same thing occurred in Argentina with the middle and upper classes who began to hire tango orchestras and have them play at socially acceptable establishments (Guy 146). The vogue for tango in Argentina arose from the interest shown in Paris nightclubs, and only then was it "imported" back into Argentina for the middle and upper classes. It appears that the interest shown abroad helped transform the formerly graceless and vulgar dance into a socially acceptable entertainment for "decent" society members. Guy also notes that the tango became linked to expensive evening attire in Paris, and that Argentine magazines such as *Caras y Caretas* began to publish articles and photographs depicting tango fashions (146-47). The change in attire from everyday (or even gaucho) to formal helped change the tango's image at home. In this way, the tango evolved into a curious mixture of lower class origins and upper class fame. Instead of a purely plebeian activity, tango became exotic. Imported once into France and back into Argentina, tango's exoticism was changed into a desire for the foreign, instead of simply being a taboo. The crossing of national borders, in turn, led to a crossing over from the perverse to the acceptable, and from the lower to the upper classes.

According to Guy's research, Gardel was instrumental in this crossover of the tango. The publication of tango sheet music aided in the transition of the tango from the dance-stage, also know as *La Guardia Vieja* to the *Guardia Nueva*, where the tango's emphasis was on lyrics. According to Guy, Gardel was

responsible for the great popularity in the *tango-canción* (147). The tango, previously, had just been instrumental music to which couples could dance. However, in 1917 when Carlos Gardel recorded *Mi noche triste* the first *tango-canción*, written by Pascual Contursi, the tango craze was transformed forever. From that time on, "1917 is given as the beginning of the tango as a song and Carlos Gardel was the chief interpreter of the tango in this form" (Castro, *Popular Culture*. . . 145). The emphasis on lyrics had the consequence of further sanitizing the tango's wild past and making it a passive, spectator activity (Guy 147). Gardel's performances only added to this spectatorship. Furthermore, *Mi noche triste* later became part of an Argentine play, making it even more of a spectator-oriented entertainment (Collier qtd. by Guy 147). As a result, the similarities between Gardel and the tango are striking to say the least. In both cases, through performance, Gardel and the tango came to represent completely different images than those with which they were originally associated. Gardel and the tango made the climb up the social ladder with help of clothing and glamorized packaging. They were both, perhaps, imports in one way or another, and yet they are associated in collective memory almost solely with one country: Argentina. Gardel and the tango are both icons that have come to represent very different ends of the social spectrum over time. This journey over borders was not complete, however, for the tango and Gardel also began again to move across new barriers, symbolizing the shifting power of society in the River Plate region and the experience of exile.

Gardel and the tango are perfectly suited to represent Argentina if one considers socio-historical movements in the area throughout the century. Perhaps that is why they have been so readily adopted as iconic markers of Argentineness. The product of various waves of immigration from Europe during the first part of the century, Argentina was seen in the eyes of many as the land of opportunity. It was the stage on which many planned to achieve their wildest dreams, become wealthy, and live more fully. From roughly 1880-1930, immigrants from Italy, Spain, and other countries arrived hoping to "hacer la América" and return to their native lands as prosperous retirees. For the majority of the immigrants these hopes of someday going home remained unfulfilled. The immigrant experience became a popular theme in the theatrical world, and works reflecting the hopes and disappointments of the population soon dominated the stage. According to Luis Ordaz, there is a close connection between the tango and the *sainete* form that became significant in Argentine culture and in theater. These two forms of artistic expression captured the experience of the immigrants through the use of popular culture (Ordaz, *Inmigración, escena nacional*... 70-71). Likewise, the *sainete* many times incorporated tango music in its productions. The *sainete* often focused on the problems of immigration and life in a new country. This is significant because out of the sainete form, originally imported from Spain, grew the particularly Argentine style of theater known as the *grotesco-criollo*.

There are many links between what occurred in the theater, in music and in the general cultural atmosphere of the 20s and 30s in the River Plate. The connections between theater, music and Gardel demonstrate the attitudes shaped by the immigrant experience, and these attitudes spawned genres and symbols that reflect the social context of the period. After Armando Discépolo's premiere of *Mateo* in 1923, the *grotesco-criollo* form began to compete with the *sainete* in theater. The tango and the *grotesco-criollo* form developed around the same period and share the same pessimistic view of the world. Traditionally, the protagonist in grotesque plays "no sólo <<se siente vivir>> sino que, a la vez, <<se ve vivir>> y, [que] en un momento dado, la confrontación que se produce desencadena y adensa el conflicto interior del personaje" (Ordaz, *Aproximación*... 44). The addition of the *criollo* element makes the setting and characteristics more specific to Argentina (Ordaz, *Aproximación*... 44). The *grotesco-criollo* also harbored much of the same content and social criticism present in the *sainete-porteño* (Ordaz, *Aproximación*... 44). It is interesting to note that the *grotesco-criollo* shared almost the same years of popularity as Gardel. The period of the *grotesco-ciollo* began in 1923 and ended in 1934 with Armando Discépolo's *Relojera*. Gardel's career began in 1917 and ended with his death in an airplane accident in 1935, the dates that also mark the beginning and end of the *Guardia mueva* period in tango. As a result, collective memory in the second half of the century associates the two artistic forms (the *grotesco-criollo* and the tango) with Gardel in some unique ways.

Gardel's profile dovetails perfectly with that of the tango (and Argentina) because both symbols have the capacity to represent opposite ideologies simultaneously. While on the one hand the tango represented a rise in status and an international recognition, it was also associated with the stagnation of a man in a world without hope. Most often, the tango told the story of man betrayed by a woman, unable to free himself from the lonely, unmarried life. Eduardo P. Archetti notes that in the tango:

> A constant topic is women who abandon men. These texts portray a sad man remembering his lost happiness. In all cases the listeners (readers) are confronted with a couple living together without being married. They have no children and the woman is always leaving the house. In literal terms, she is "stepping out" into the open world. In contrast the image of a man passing through an identity crisis, unable to control the situation, is melancholically reiterated. The way he speaks about sadness, nostalgia, the loss of happiness, and the fear of loneliness is sincere and passionate. (210).

Other texts are about *milonguitas*, women who refused the traditional roles of wife and mother to become their own masters. Often these *milonguitas* were poor women who escaped to the cabaret for freedom, and they ended up breaking men's hearts (Archetti 201-02). A few tangos dealt with political or social themes, but the vast majority were about a nostalgic view of love gone wrong. The three main roles for men in the tango were comprised of the rich lover

(bacán), the elegant seducer, ready to fight other men when necessary (compadrito), or the romantic lover (Archetti 204). Women were either seen as seducing, social climbing *milonguitas*, independent lover, or as the idealized mother figure (Archetti 205). It was a nostalgic, pessimistic worldview that was represented in the tango; a world where a masculine narrator told the story of love lost and his longing for the past. Gardel personified this sort of lifestyle perfectly: "Gardel's life was one where he was born out of wedlock, had no family, no wife, no children and which ended tragically. Given the *porteño* world view, Gardel was an ideal figure" (Castro, "Popular Culture as a Source. . ." 156). Gardel also played the role of the man caught in the circumstances of fate through his songs:

Fifty-two of Gardel's tangos dealt with the present and, of these, 39 were a negative view. Thirty-eight tangos were in a perspective of looking back from the present to a past which for the most part was also negative (29 out of 38). Man was caught in a time frame of past, present and future which was seen pessimistically and over which one had no control (Castro, "Popular Culture as a Source. . ." 156). Alienation and nostalgia permeated many of the tango lyrics and much of Gardel's performance as the tango king.

These same themes of negativity and loss were a prominent feature of the *grotesco-criollo*. Centering on the experience of the immigrant population, the *grotesco-criollo* often showed the failures and misery in which the foreigners frequently found themselves. Many times *cocoliche* and *lunfardo* elements of

language were introduced into the dialogue, in much the same way as they were in tango lyrics, representing the mixture of language and people in the city of Buenos Aires. The plot frequently revolved around the failures of an immigrant family to overcome language barriers, poverty and other hardships they encountered in Argentina. The *grotesco-criollo* was a form of theater, based on Argentine popular culture during the decades of the 20s and 30s, where life was often difficult and many wondered whether they might have fared better in their native lands. There was a constant comparison between the past and the present, where many of the characters were overwhelmed by circumstances beyond their control. In this way, the tango and the *grotesco-criollo* shared similar themes and visions of Argentina during the first half of the century.

In music, theater and everyday life, looking back seemed to be an idiosyncrasy of the Argentine population. The need to look back even occured in the second half of the century. The nostalgic *porteño* view was a popular theme in plays that were written and produced in the second half of the century. Pessimism and harking back to the past were themes that spanned the century, but arose from different causes. At the beginning of the century people looked back to overcome alienation and out of a longing "to go home." On the other hand, during the second half of the century Roberto Cossa and others used the frame of the tango, Carlos Gardel and the *grotesco-criollo* to contrast an idealized past with a crumbling present and uncertain future.

A striking example of a play that uses the tango for a comparison between the past and the present is the Cossa play entitled *La ñata contra el libro* from 1966.[3] Although, Gardel is not explicitly mentioned in the play, the use of the tango as a marker of transition between two distinct periods of time recalls the changes effected by Gardel. Likewise, the emphasis on the writing of lyrics implicitly links Cossa's play with Gardel and the new era he ushered in with the *Guardia nueva*. The title of Cossa's play makes reference to the Santos-Discépolo tango *La ñata contra el vidrio* (Ordaz, *Inmigración, escena nacional*... 123). In this work a young, Jewish man named David Belmes is participating in a tango contest at Gotán. The prize is a million pesos which he hopes to use for a *bulín*,[4] but that he says is for "research" at the university. Throughout the play, David struggles to find an appropriate topic for his tango lyrics. It seems that every line he composes has already been written. In his first lines of the play, David muses to himself: "Por ser bueno me pusiste a la miseria, me dejaste en la palmera, me afanaste hasta el color." ¡Lástima que ya esté escrito! Es de Manzi. . .No, de Discépolo. . .¡Qué lindo si no estuviera compuesto! Lo gano seguro. . . .Primero hay que encontrar un tema. ¿Qué puede ser? (Pausa.) ¡Qué, con todo lo que se escribió ya! (Cossa 9-10)

The past is idealized as the perfect combination of musical notes and lyrics in the tangos that David is unable to free himself from as he struggles to compose. The tango is an anachronism for David. He decides that even the *barrios* have become too similar and he has been deprived of the privilege of

living in San Telmo, the site traditionally associated with the tango in Buenos Aires. Without an intimate knowledge of the neighborhood, he is unable to write about it. David then turns to his mother as an inspiration, but decides that she cannot be the topic because she is still married and the song must be about a widow. Instead of the *Santa madre* figure that Gardel idealized, David's mother nags him continuously about his studies, about money, and about his comings and goings. She is nothing like the "image of a mother who is self-sacrificing [that] was so dear to porteño males who came from single parent families held together by mothers" (Castro, *The Argentine Tango*... 151-52). Even his "girlfriend," Rita, is not worthy of being immortalized in a tango. She is a prostitute-like character who shares none of the romantic illusions that David has for their "relationship." He laments that even though she is like the *milonguita,* he does not know her well enough to write about her: "Hay que conocer bien a las mujeres para escribir un tango" (Cossa 16). He simply does not have enough experience. Finally, when even his more experienced friend, Cacho, is unable to suggest a topic David reveals that he wants the money for a *bulín*. However, Cacho explains that he will not be able to take part in this dream either because he is no longer going to be a bachelor after his marriage to Marta in 15 days. David complains: "¿Y todos los proyectos que teníamos? ¿Te acordás que la íbamos a correr siempre juntos?" (Cossa 19). Cacho replies: "Yo ya estoy cansado de todo esto, rusito. Ahora quiero vivir tranquilo, tener una casa, una

mujer" (Cossa 19). Cacho wants exactly the life that was always shunned in the tango.

Consequently, the tango no longer functioned in the year 1966 according to its representation in this play. The contrast between the first half of the century and the second becomes more apparent with every turn that David makes. The past is idealized and no longer accessible to those in the present. As hard as he tries, David is no longer able to return to the golden memories and glamorized images of a romanticized past presented in the tango. The year 1966, when this play was published, marks an important moment in Argentine history, for it is the beginning of almost two decades of violent and traumatic episodes until 1983. The tango and its associations with transition (its own historical evolution from low to high class and the changes made by Gardel's interpretation of it) make it an ideal symbol for discussing the shifting political climate of Argentina in the mid 60s. In this way the tango becomes a metaphor for discussing changing political currents in Argentina. Carlos Alberto Floria and César A. García Belsunce explain that:

> Entre 1966 y las elecciones de 1983, que señalaron el comienzo de la transición hacia la democracia constitucional, pueden distinguirse tres etapas: la primera, recorrida por un régimen militar con tres gobiernos sucesivos, entre 1966 y 1973; la segunda, ocupada por el intervalo constitucional de los gobiernos peronistas entre 1973 y 1976, y la tercera, la del retorno a un régimen militar con varios gobiernos que se sucedieron

> entre 1976 y 1982, denominado por sus autores Proceso de Reorganización Nacional y conocido en expresión ceñida como "el Proceso." (vol. II 450)

The year 1966 marked the beginning of a period of instability in Argentina, and the beginning of autocratic military rule after the "golpe de estado" affected by the *Junta militar* in charge of the government. This government was able to garner support from various sectors of society in order to carry out its objectives: "El golpe tuvo el apoyo de las fuerzas armadas como sostén del protagonista principal, de buena parte de los dirigentes sindicales y de sectores significativos de poder económico. Era una 'alianza objetiva' de los tres, con la marginación de los partidos políticos" (Floria, Belsunce 454). As a result of the nasty split between Peronists and non-Peronist supporters, Argentina found itself on precarious ground from 1955-66, this being the result of the growing political climate of crisis since 1930 (Floria, Belsunce 431). The year 1930 saw the overthrow of Yrigoyen, elected by a popular movement, by Uriburu, who favored fascism and military control, and who later paved the way for the rise to power of Juan Perón. The tango *Yira. . . Yira* recorded by Gardel commemorates the loss of the popular, liberal government of Yrigoyen and the sense of frustration felt by much of the working class when his government crumbled:

> Cuando la suerte, que es grela,
> fayando y fayando
> te largue parao;

cuando estés bien en la vía,

sin rumbo, desesperao;

cuando no tengas ni fe

ni yerba de ayer

secándose al sol;

cuando rajés los tamangos

buscando ese manso

que te haga morfar,

la indiferencia del mundo

que es sordo y es mudo

recién sentirás.

[When luck, which is a woman,

and is always lacking, always lacking,

has left you cold;

when you think all is well,

you find yourself aimless and desperate

when you have nothing, not even faith

nor yesterday's yerba mate

drying in the sun;

when you wear out your shoes

searching for those few coins

> so that you can get a little to eat,
>
> now you will feel the indifference of the world
>
> which is also deaf and dumb.] (qtd. from "Popular Culture as a Source..." Castro 146)

As a result, from the year 1930 until 1966, the tango became more and more idealized due to the national political difficulties that Argentina suffered. The decade of the 20s represented the glamorized prosperity that Gardel and the tango symbolized, and this nostalgic past was invoked as a way of dealing with a problematic "present." Unfortunately, David and his Argentine contemporaries in Cossa's play are unable to recreate the past due to the turmoil that has been building in the interim decades. There are no new lyrics that fit the current situation. The old stereotypes are outdated and do not function in the context of the 60s in Argentina. There is no longer the same possibility for upward mobility in the tango as there was before. In a consistently more militarized and conservative society, the possibility for a rise to power of those from the lower classes seems more and more remote. Consequently, Cossa's interpretation of the tango in *La ñata contra el libro* serves to show the discrepancies between the first and second halves of the century. In Cossa's work the tango is further identified as a tool of comparison showing the interplay between the traditional staging of a performance (Cossa's text) and the performance of national identity seen in the character David. The protagonist, David, like Gardel uses the tango to highlight national characteristics. However, unlike Gardel, who demonstrated the

link between the rich and poor, David is unable to bridge the gap between two extremes; in his case they are the past and the present.

The second play in which Cossa explores the influence of the tango is perhaps his most recognized, *La nona* from 1977. The intimate connection between the *grotesco-criollo* style and the tango is exploited and inverted in *La nona* to show the effects of a society out of control (or under too much control, as one might argue). Specifically, *La nona* presents a situation where the eroticism of the past and the optimism for economic success, as Gardel personified them, are seen in stark contrast to the repression and economic pessimism of the present represented by the family in the play. Cossa's *La nona* is the story of an immigrant family in Argentina that struggles to make ends meet in a tight economy. The family's problems are further complicated because two members drain the resources without ever contributing. The son Chichi tells the family that he spends his time composing music in his room, but in reality, he lazily passes the day without working. He schemes his way out of working, even when the family's disposable income begins to evaporate more rapidly than it can be produced. The other member that strains the family's precarious situation is the grandmother, la nona. The grandmother has a voracious appetite and literally eats her family out of their house. Unable to cope, the family tries to poison the grandmother, but she outlives them all, inverting the normal progression of generations.

As Roberto Previdi Froelich contends in a convincing essay, Cossa's appropriation of the grotesque in a different socio-historical context has the effect of demythifying past discourses. Froelich also argues that Cossa purposely deforms the traditional ideology of "hacer la América" to show the problems inherent in the new political ideology. The false myth that the Nona represents is the ideology of the *Proyecto Liberal,* and by showing a person who is, in fact, consuming her own offspring, Cossa destroys the official dream. The recontextualization of the ideology through la nona and the inclusion of Chicho ultimately demonstrate the falsity of the new ideology through aggression and evasion, respectively (Froelich 133-38).

However, at the same time, Cossa's *neogrotesco* style works in exactly the opposite manner, for it shows just how far the Argentine family has strayed from the past. In Cossa's vision there is no room for the eroticism of the past and no possibility for the successful social climbing that Gardel and the tango achieved. In fact, the use of the *neogrotesco* elevates an obsolete past to mythic proportions when tango writers flourished and immigrant families still had hopes of success. In *La nona*, dark humor uncovers the sad and desperate truth that there is no hope for survival in Argentina during the 70s. The comparison between the dream and the reality in Discépolo's *grotesco-criollo* is replaced by failure and the knowledge that there is no escape from the present. La nona becomes a monster, instead of the traditional grandmotherly figure, Chicho is unable/ unwilling to compose any music, and the family perishes in the end.

This view contrasts sharply with the erotic image of the past and the possibility for upward mobility personified in Gardel and the tango. Thus, by extracting the grotesque style and importing it into the decade of the 70s, Cossa draws on the associations of the decade of the 20s to strike a sharp and jarring contrast with the latter half of the 70s. As a result, the past at least harbored the possibility for an escape through dreams, and a glamorous image, thereby making it a much more attractive alternative to the "present" ideology criticized by Cossa through *La nona*. Consequently, the past develops into a mythical memory of what should have been.

In *No hay que llorar*, Cossa's next play that includes the tango as part of its dramatic message, the tune "Caminito" serves as a warning for how horribly the situation had gone awry in Argentina. Performed in 1979, *No hay que llorar* examined the politics of Argentina superimposed onto a middle-class family's birthday celebration. The action revolves around the birthday of the mother figure in the play, because the date implies both a beginning of a new life and the return to the past when that event occurred. This bi-directional movement parallels the development of the tango. Specifically, in this case, the tango and the birthday serve to remind the public of the "path" to destruction that the Argentine nation was following during the latter half of 70s.

Cossa highlights the unsavory elements associated with the tango to draw a connection between the present and future of the Argentine nation and its political and social practices. The children of la madre have gathered to surprise

her with a birthday party. Overcome with emotion she begins to have trouble breathing and a doctor must be called to the scene. While the mother rests in her bedroom their conversation displays their pettiness and greed. One brother hopes to cash in on the good fortune of another family member by asking for a loan. Another brother and his wife begin to dream about taking over the apartment of the mother who will not be able protest because of her illness. Others begin to fight over control of the apartment, even suggesting that it be sold for the cash it would bring. Finally, the decorum disintegrates completely when they find the deeds and titles to the mother's land. The group is overjoyed at "their" good fortune, because now they will all be rich. When their mother finally emerges from the bedroom, the children collectively and purposely overwhelm her with food, drink, presents, and song until she begins to suffocate. Even when she protests: "Me sofoco. . . Me falta aire. . .," the party continues until her last words are heard amidst "Feliz Cumpleaños": "Me muero. . .me muero" (Cossa 78-79). The celebration quickly turns into a scene of torture. The song takes on a sinister tone at the end as it grows into "una forma histérica, gritada" overshadowing the mother's slow and painful death (Cossa 79).

Seen as a microcosm of the torture and greed exemplified during "El Proceso," the family demonstrates the cruelty and ambivalence inflicted on and ignored by the Argentine nation. The tango "Caminito" echoes through the last scenes of the play as a warning. In the scene just before the entrance of the mother and her rendition of the tango, the group of siblings and spouses is

overcome with the anticipation of gaining this newfound wealth. Their discussion, however, completely breaks down into a display of erotic emotions. They begin to eat the sandwiches that are on the table and the stage directions state that: "al principio es un acto inconsciente, pero poco a poco se irá transformando en una comida sensual, violenta y desagradable" (Cossa 65-66). A few moments later, Graciela exclaims: "¡Toda la guita del mundo!," and the directions note that she lets out a cry and then begins to dance (Cossa 66). The group encourages her, but she offers a pathetic rendition of the tango, ending it with a misstep and fall. A few lines later, Ester states simply and powerfully: "Puta. . .carajo. . .culo. . .teta. . ." (Cossa 66). This focus on the erotic with the commingling of dance steps suggests to the public that the tango is about to make its appearance. Cossa employs the unattractive and original image of the tango as a bordello dance to convey his criticism of the greedy and animalistic practices exercised under the so-called Process of National Reorganization. The family, and by extension the Nation, participate and become victims of the seedy and seductive pull of money and power. The mother sings out her plea for help through the tango, thereby demonstrating that there is the possibility for movement in another direction. In other words, there is another "caminito" and the tango can take on another meaning as it did in the past. For the mother and Cossa, the nation must choose either to continue being led down the path to ruin or choose the direction that leads to a higher ground. The tango symbolizes the duality of performance: first, on stage as Graciela and Ester demonstrate visually

for the audience in a traditional sense, and second, the nontraditional performance of politics on the national stage of Argentine, as the mother and her children demonstrate figuratively. As with Cossa's previous plays, *No hay que llorar* recalls the transitional phases of the past through its direct use of the tango and the indirect reference to the mythic figure of Gardel.

One year later in 1980, Cossa published his third play dealing with the theme of the tango, *El viejo criado*. In an interview with Sharon Magnarelli, Cossa explained that:

> En *El viejo criado* funcionan sobre todo los mitos de los porteños. Ahí es, por ejemplo, donde el fenómeno del peronismo y sus hitos históricos se entroncan con este mundo irreal que viven estos personajes, porque yo creo que el argentino es una persona que tiene una visión irreal de su país. . . . Durante años creyó vivir en un país lleno de posibilidades y está dando cuenta o ya se ha dado cuenta que vive en un país de segunda categoría. . . .en *El viejo criado* aparece este mundo mítico y esa vieja nostalgia, algo que siempre pudo haber sido y que nunca fue." (56-57)

The links between Peronism, the tango and Gardel are even more intertwined than Cossa suggests in his interview about the play, for they go beyond the level of myth. In 1975, the Argentine Senate under Perón's third wife, and then president, María Isabella Perón, named Gardel as an "archetype of the tango" and defined him as "an authentic national expression" on the 40th anniversary of his death (Castro, "Popular Culture as a Source…" 133). The document also notes,

in no uncertain terms, that Perón and the tango were associated: "Conductor de un pueblo, líder de movimiento de justicia social de liberación, hombre de paz, destino de maestro de multitudes. . .Perón también sabía de tango" (qtd. by Castro, "Popular Culture as a Source..." 133). As Castro points out, Gardel, and by extension, Perón were the true "argentinos." As a result the "appearances" of both Gardel and Perón in *El viejo criado* are not coincidental and act as a gauge for the passage of time and the identity of the Argentine population.

Throughout the play, two friends sit in a bar that represents the past: "'imagen' que los porteños conservan de lo que pudo haber sido un bar de ese tipo hace cincuenta años atrás" (Cossa 13). The friends, Alsina and Balmaceda, are complete opposites (an intellectual and a rough, burly man). They play cards, tell stories and comment on the changing times while waiting for a bus to take Balmaceda to visit his brother (a bus he never takes). Sirens wail in the background suggesting ominous activities in the street and a police state throughout the play. There are numerous references to the Perón government that coincide with the entrance of a character named Carlitos, who is described in the stage directions as a "caricatura. . .de un cantor de tangos del año 20," and a prostitute named Ivonne (Cossa 23). Directly after Carlitos enters the scene, Alsina and Balmaceda notice that crowds have gathered in the street. Balmaceda explains that they have gathered to "pedir que lo larguen al coronel" and describes him as "Ese. . .que ayudaba a los pobres" (Cossa 23). Though he is not named directly, audiences would recognize the references to the "coronel" as

Perón, whose platform included much social aid to the poor and disenfranchised. By placing these two mythical figures side by side, so to speak, Cossa establishes an important link between Gardel and Perón and the visions that they represent(ed). The presence of the prostitute figure is also key to understanding the undertones of this play and the political implications that it carries.

The co-mingling of Gardel, Perón and prostitution in the play is paramount in understanding Cossa's argument about the decline of prosperity and the repression of personal freedom under the dictatorship. After the death in 1935 of Gardel, Argentina slid into a period of extreme conservatism. Bordellos were closed as part of the Law of Social Prophylaxis, and with them died much of the nightlife that was popularized through the tango. The ban on legalized prostitution was put into effect in 1936, very soon after the death of Gardel. Guy notes that: "An Argentine cultural critic suggested that the ban on legalized prostitution, rather than the 1935 death of Carlos Gardel, marked the end of the golden era of Argentine popular culture"[5] (183). Actually, they go hand-in-hand in closing out an era of eroticism and sensuality in Argentine popular culture. The pressure for the ban had been building all through the decade of the 20s as mandatory medical testing of prostitutes and anti- bordello campaigns were waged. However, by the 1950s the tide had begun to turn again in the other direction. Concerned with the possibility of "perverse activities" by a male population that had been deprived of a commercialized outlet for sex, Perón and his government in December 1954 authorized the re-opening of bordellos and

legalized prostitution (Guy 180). Consequently, the juxtaposition of references to Peronism with the entrance of Gardel and a prostitute in Cossa's play suggests a return to the eroticism and the nostalgia associated with the decade of the 20s. It is curious that while prostitution is normally considered a low and vulgar occupation, it was perceived of as a way to defend the Argentine family and nation through the institutionalization of medically supervised bordellos under Perón's leadership. Again, just as with the tango, prostitution crossed the bridge from being an indecent practice to a safe "defense" against homosexuality and amorality. Cossa's play conveys this change of face when the two characters Alsina and Balmaceda undergo a transformation from unwilling participants in a sexual experience with Ivonne to sexually-excited "Johns." Once Ivonne reveals that she slept with Gardel on one occasion in Paris, the two men cannot keep their eyes or their hands off her as the directions make clear: "Balmaceda y Alsina quedan extasiados mirando a Ivonne" (Cossa 33). Later the stage directions state that: "Alsina y Balmaceda acarician a Ivonne. . ." (Cossa 34). After that, the two men take turns disappearing with Ivonne into the magic zone to have sex with her. Carlitos acts as her "pimp" offering her to the two men. The discussion again returns to the nostalgia of the decadent era as Balmaceda and Carlitos speak of the wealth under Perón:

> CARLITOS: Entre paréntesis... A mí me dijeron... ¿Es cierto que los pasillos del Banco Central están llenos de oro?
>
> BALMACEDA: Cierto.

CARLITOS: ¿Y que este coronel que está ahora lo va a repartir?

BALMACEDA: Ya empezó a repartirlo. (Cossa 35-36)

However, as the character Carlitos comes to demonstrate, not everything is prosperous. During the course of the play, Carlitos constantly struggles with the inability to produce his own tango, a common theme in Argentine plays of the latter half of the century. Trapped in his own image of what the past stood for, Carlitos attempts to model his life after the tango. As Francisco Jarque Andrés details in his analysis of *El viejo criado*, the tango becomes an intertext and a metatheatrical device for the characters' actions. Even sections of tango lyrics become part of the dialogue, and this structure acts as a way of solidifying the actions/reactions of the characters through the use of a set discourse, as well as reinforcing the mythical as real (Jarque Andrés 471). The result is a demythification of the Gardel legend through the creation of distance (Jarque Andrés 473). This becomes clear when Carlitos "returns" again, announcing that he has finally been able to compose his tango and complete his life's work. Carlitos exclaims: "Escuchen: 'Percanta que me amuraste / en lo mejor de mi vida /dejándome el alma herida / y espinas en el corazón /sabiendo que me querías / que vos eras mi alegría. . .' ¿Qué les pasa? No resisten la temática" (Cossa 59). Alsina replies candidly: "Ese tango ya se escribió, Carlitos" (Cossa 59). Again, as in *La ñata contra el libro* the tango fails in the context of the "present" dictatorship. The public at this point becomes aware of the political implications and the passage of time since only a few pages later, Balmaceda

triumphantly reveals that: "somos campeones del mundo" (Cossa 62). Balmaceda refers to the 1978 World Cup Soccer match that Argentina hosted as a way of distracting attention from the political turmoil and tortures that were causing bad publicity for the nation. This passage of time, as well as the failure of the tango, call attention to yet another sway in public opinion and popular culture.

The soccer match is a coded reference to the political repression of the dictatorship, and allows Cossa to juxtapose the eroticism symbolized in the tango with the context in 1978. The same shifts between liberal and conservative political practices of the 20s and 30s can be found between the 50s and the 70s. Under the military dictatorship the return to social conservatism again found itself in vogue as it was in the mid 30s. The right-wing military Junta advocated strict moral and social codes of behavior. Floria and Belsunce report that some of the objectives of the Junta were the following:

> concreción de "una soberanía política basada en el accionar de instituciones revitalizadas," "vigencia de los valores de la moral cristiana, de la tradición nacional y de la dignidad de ser argentino," y de la seguridad nacional erradicando la subversión y las causas que favorecían su existencia. (477)

The "reorganization" included strict censorship of the press and restricted social behavior, with an emphasis on right-wing conservative practices. In this political atmosphere the tango became anachronistic. Neither the bawdy nightlife nor the

possibility for social mobility were conceivable when the suggestion of political crackdown is looming with sirens wailing in the background. This rejection of the mythical past is solidified through the character of Ivonne. In the closing moments of the play, it is revealed that Ivonne has shunned her past as a prostitute and has transformed herself into part of the middle class. Carlitos recounts the events of his life after he left the bar to Alsina and Balmaceda, including the last time that he saw Ivonne:

> CARLITOS: Hace un año...a las tres de la tarde...yo meditando por la zona bancaria....Y en medio de esa multitud, de pronto siento una carcajada inconfundible.
>
> ALSINA: ¡Ivonne!
>
> CARLITOS: Ivonne.
>
> ALSINA: Hecha una mendiga. (Carlitos niega.)
>
> BALMACEDA: Hecha una bacana.
>
> CARLITOS: (Niega con la cabeza.) Ivonne del brazo de un jefe de despacho de la Municipalidad, haciendo cola para renovar un plazo fijo. Ivonne se había hecho de clase media. (Cossa 58)

Unable to participate in the new conservatism under the dictatorship, Ivonne is forced to change her ways, to "reorganize." Thus, as Cossa points out in his interview, the myths that the Argentine population has been nurturing throughout the last century are confronted with the reality of the country's situation. With the elimination of the Perón government and any hope of its return, the exotic,

erotic, nostalgic view of the past withers in the framework of Cossa's play. The inclusion of the tango figure, the prostitute and the references to Perón work in concert to show the swings in Argentine popular culture from liberal to conservative policies and their intermingling.

In 1981, Cossa continues with the tango theme in his work *Gris de ausencia*, a play that appeared as part of the *Teatro Abierto* series of protest against the dictatorship. *Gris de ausencia* is a brief work that explores the same nostalgia for the past but from the perspective of those who are exiled. The action is played out in Rome, where a family runs a restaurant. The family struggles with its precarious position as eternal immigrants, first to Argentina and then back to Italy, and for some younger members of the family, to other countries. The "Abuelo" continues to sing the lyrics from the tango *Canzoneta* throughout the play: "Canzoneta gri de ausenchia... cruel malón de pena vieca, escondida en la sombra de mi alcohol... ¡Soñé Tarento... con chien regreso. Pero sico aquí en la Boca donde yoro mi concoca..." (Cossa 71). Theirs is an obsession with the theme of returning. As the tango *Canzoneta* demonstrates, the original desire is to return to Italy, the same dream shared by many immigrants. However, Cossa reverses the traditional tango theme to criticize the position that many Argentines found themselves in due to the political struggles in their country during the late 70s and early 80s. Though the characters never mention the reason that they have left Buenos Aires, the fact that they are unable to return is a recurring topic of conversation. Given the period in which this play was

written, it seems safe to assume that they left for political reasons. As the Abuelo continues to ask: "¿Cuándo vamo a volver a Buenosaria, Chilo?" (Cossa 71, 76), the audience is reminded of the new type of immigration their country has come to represent. *Volver* in the new context of the dictatorship means a return to the mythical, nostalgic Argentina of the 20s where the tango, though a sad and lonely message, also held the possibility of hope for the poor, working immigrants. The characters hope to return to the less restricted atmosphere of the erotic life under the popular government of the past. The tango again is the vehicle that Cossa maneuvers to show movement across space and time in Argentina's socio-political development throughout the last century.

Another contributor to the *Teatro Abierto* movement of resistance was Carlos Gorostiza. His work *El acompañamiento* (1981) also utilizes the icon of Carlos Gardel to speak out against the military dictatorship. In many ways, the Gardel icon was turned into a palimpsest by authors such as Gorostiza in order to allow an overlapping of different texts, time periods and messages. The concept of the palimpsest likewise allowed the audience to discern the messages that lay between the lines in a period when the government's censorship, though not officially applied to the theatrical arts, silenced many voices of protest through fear tactics. A palimpsest is understood to be "a written document, typically on vellum or parchment, that has been written upon several times, often with remnants of earlier, imperfectly erased writing still visible. Remnants [of which] are a major source for the recovery of lost literary works of classical antiquity"

(*The American Heritage Dictionary* 894). Applying and adapting this definition to fit the Gardel phenomenon is no stretch, because Gardel's life was composed of myriad "texts" that he was himself constantly re-scripting. As is apparent from the anecdotes and the documents that he left behind, Gardel authored a confusing plot of personal histories that contradict and overlap each other. By "writing over" the (auto)biography of Gardel's life with the story in *El acompañamiento* of an Argentine tango aficionado trapped in the political context of 1981, there is the possibility for the recuperation of past ideals. Likewise the appearance of anterior texts also permits the author to use the space between the official lines of dialogue to protest the policies of the military government. In this way, the Gardel icon opens a space for regaining the power stripped away from the average Argentine citizen during the late 70s and early 80s. While *El acompañamiento* can be read as a dismal commentary on the entrapment, paranoia and ultimate failure of Argentina to deal with the crisis that overtook the nation it can also be conceived of as a powerful message for the possibility of transformation.

In Gorostiza's *El acompañamiento*, the action centers on two (three, if one counts the mythic figure of Gardel) characters, Tuco and Sebastián who discuss the progression of their lives while waiting for a nonexistent musical accompaniment to arrive. At the beginning of the act, Tuco is locked in his room singing along with Gardel's recording of *Viejo Smoking* when Sebastián arrives. Tuco announces he is returning to his passion of singing with the help of Mingo,

his friend, and also explains that he has isolated himself in his room in order to avoid denouncing his family as crazy:

> ¿Sabés cuándo empecé a darme cuenta de que estaban rayeti? Cuando empecé a ensayar y les tuve que contar lo de Mingo y la televisión. Claro; vieron que no iba a laburar, y entonces... ¿Sabés lo que me dijeron? Que el Mingo me estaba tomando el pelo. Y Gracielita me dijo otra cosa: que me estaba jodiendo, me dijo. Jodiendo. ¿Te parece que ésa es manera de hablar para una chica?" (120)

With obvious paranoia, Tuco exhibits many of the feelings of average Argentine citizens trapped in their own homes/country during this period. In a time when families feared being denounced for subversive behavior, the line between sanity and insanity was blurred. Often times, those who were simply thought to be participating or socializing with those who participated in subversive activities were captured and tortured; it was difficult to distinguish between normal and abnormal behavior. Within the restrictive confines of his room, Tuco formulates his plan of trying to convince Sebastián that he is sane and the time has come to make his adolescent dreams come true:

> TUCO: . . .¿Te acordás cómo esperábamos el sábado?
>
> SEBASTIAN: Sí. Cómo no me voy a recordar? No llegaba nunca el sábado. Je.

TUCO: . . .¿Te acordás cuando llegaba? La siestita, el mate... y a la tardecita el bañito con agua de colonia, la afeitada... la pilcha y ¡zaz!... al café.

SEBASTIAN: Y a la noche... la milonga.

TUCO: Sí. Y después de la milonga... otra vez el café. Y hasta que no empezaba aclarar no parábamos, ¿te acordás? Meta tango y tango y blablablá. . . .Ja. Cómo hablábamos, eh. No parábamos. Cuántos sueños, cuántos...

SEBASTIAN: Bueno... Pero todo aquello ya pasó. Qué le vamos a hacer. Ahora la vida es distinta. Nosotros somos distintos. (121)

However, Tuco emphatically rejects this last statement of Sebastián's replying that he (Sebastian) realized his goal of owning a nightclub, whereas Tuco's dream is still unfulfilled. By returning to the past and reincarnating the Gardel image, Tuco is able to open a space within the suffocating political atmosphere of the military dictatorship and retrieve the past and his dreams. Tuco announces that his new artistic name is "Carlos Bolívar." He explains that Carlos is in honor of "el Morocho," and that Bolívar is for San Martín, to avoid any sort of "lío" the latter name might cause. By adopting the names of these two figures, Tuco revives the struggle for freedom and the liberal policies of past eras, specifically, independence. The histories that these two figures connote can be seen through the lines of dialogue that Tuco and Sebastian speak, and they function in much the same way as the poorly erased lines that appear on

parchment in a palimpsest. In this way, even though the military government tried to alter the political state of the nation by blotting out the images of past policies, literally rubbing out those who did not conform, the mythical past can be seen through the official lines. Metaphorically speaking then, by glimpsing the "previous texts" in the space between the official lines affords the audience the chance to read and remember the uncensored messages that preceded the dictatorship.

It is helpful to understand the opening up of an unofficial space through the reenactment of the Gardel legacy in the context of Joseph Roach's theory of performance as restorative behavior that allows memory to function as imagination. According to Roach, performance permits figures and events from the past to continue to live on through actors. However, as he notes:

> The paradox of the restorative behavior resides in the phenomenon of repetition itself: no action or sequence of actions may be performed exactly the same way twice; they must be reinvented or recreated at each appearance. In this improvisatorial behavioral space, memory reveals itself as imagination. (Roach 29)

If this is the case, as I believe it to be, the performance of Gardel that takes place in *El acompañamiento* is a part that allows Tuco some agency in a society that otherwise has refused to acknowledge complete personal liberty. By repeating and thereby reinventing himself as Gardel, Tuco carves out a space for possible changes each time he performs Gardel. This small possibility for change through

memory is a powerful message for the Argentine public at the time, especially in the context of *Teatro Abierto*. The idea of performance and memory blend in the passage taken from the middle section of the play where Tuco explains to Sebastián the specifics of his fantasy and what he wants:

> Guitarras como las de Gardel. Pero como el Gardel de antes. No el de las películas. El de antes. El Morocho. El verdadero Morocho. ¿Te acordás? En aquella época, cuando canté en el club... decían que yo me parecía al morocho. ¿Te acordás? (Sonríe y pone cara de Gardel). (123)

A few moments later, Tuco draws out of an old suitcase a tuxedo jacket that he has been saving, and as he tries it on the stage directions state that: "le queda estrechísimo, se estira el peinado y sonríe como Gardel" (Gorostiza 123). These initial performances culminate in the final scene where Sebastián finally begins to buy into the fantasy: "¡Sos un cantor fenómeno! ¡Como Gardel! ¡Cantás mejor que nunca! ¡Y te parecés! ¡Claro que te parecés, Tuco!" (Gorostiza 128). The play ends with Tuco singing the tango *Viejo smoking*, and the stage directions note that Tuco: "Pone cara con sonrisa de Gardel, y prepara su ademán" (Gorostiza 128). Through his re-enactment, Tuco at the same time revives the past and invents a new past as well as a new future. Roach's theory works well in the context of this play because he states: "Like performance, memory operates as both quotation and invention, an improvisation on borrowed themes, with claims on the future as well as the past" (33). The memory of Gardel, with all of its varied connotations as well as the adolescent pasts of Tuco

and Sebastián, are forged into a performance of memory that is at the same time a repetition of old values, but also a way of generating a different future full of possibilities for invention and creation based on memorable images from the past, like Gardel.

Also of extreme importance in Roach's theory is a concept that he borrows from Pierre Nora, specifically the term *lieu de mémoire*. In explaining this term, Nora and by extension, Roach, claim that this space of memory has the dual purpose of appearing to be frozen in time, while really it is constantly changing and reinventing itself. Nora writes:

> For if we accept that the most fundamental purpose of the *lieu de mémoire* is to stop time, to block the work of forgetting, to establish a state of things, to immortalize death, to materialize the immaterial--just as if gold were the only memory of money--all this in order to capture a maximum of meaning with the fewest signs, it is also clear that *lieux de mémoire* only exist because of their capacity for metamorphosis, and endless recycling of their meaning and an unpredictable proliferation of their ramifications. (19, qtd. by Roach 180)

This particular kind space can be seen in two distinct ways in *El acompañamiento*. First, it is in the theoretical and abstract place that exists as the unofficial space between dialogue and political policy, as in the case of the metaphor of the palimpsest. However, the space also exists more tangibly in the room of the house where Tuco has confined himself while hatching his plan to

become a singer. This site functions simultaneously as a space of memory and resurrection of the dead (Gardel, hopes, and dreams) and as an innovative "room" for change. One might say that it is a "room for maneuvering" to recast Ross Chambers' well-known phrase.[6] Consequently, the message of *El acompañamiento* that exists in the images, between the lines and spaces, in the dialogue and around it, and above all in the memory of the characters and the audience, is a highly subversive one given the year it was performed. The fact that the musical *acompañamiento* fails to appear simply furthers the idea that any possibility can be created and improvised through memory and performance. This is quite clear at the end when Sebastián begins to "play" "Triiin, triiin, triiin..." and accompany Tuco as he sings *Viejo smoking* (Gorostiza 128). As a result, the spaces that are opened through the re-enactment of Gardel allow the characters and the audience a chance to conceive of the possibility for freedom from censorship and repression.

Many of the same themes of political repression exist in plays about Gardel written outside of Argentina.[7] Two examples of these kinds of plays are *El día que me quieras* de José Ignacio Cabrujas de Venezuela, y *Matatangos* de Marco Antonio de la Parra de Chile. The point in common between de la Parra's work and that of Cabrujas is the experience of dictatorship, also a main focus in the previous Argentine plays. For Cabrujas, the action revolves around the dictatorship of General Juan Vicente Gómez in Venezuela that began in1908 and ended in 1935. In *Matatangos*, de la Parra concentrates on the effects of the

Pinochet dictatorship that lasted from 1973 to 1989. Neither of these texts makes direct references to the dictatorships, but rather they use indirect techniques and the figure of Gardel to decipher the political myths created by the two governments that ruled by force. Specifically, the myths that surrounded Gardel in popular culture and memory serve as metaphors for the public façades that these two dictatorships manufactured and performed for their national audiences. In his analysis, Oscar Díaz-Ortiz explores the manner in which the Argentine oligarchy manipulated Gardel's star power for their commercial endeavors, using him as a sort of ambassador and stereotype to "sell" their country to the international financial sector (45). Taking their cue from the Argentines, de la Parra and Cabrujas suggest through their use of fabricated images a similarity between the act of creating a fashionable public persona for sale to an insecure population, as in the case of Gardel, and the political façade that covered up repression and torture by the governments of Chile and Venezuela. Jacqueline E. Bixler supports this theory in her study of various plays written by de la Parra:

> It is precisely through his parodic treatment of kitsch that de la Parra draws connections between art, myth, popular culture and the historico-political reality of not just Argentina but all of Latin America, where myths are commonly used and abused to "sell" ideas and exert authority over the masses. (18)

In this way the concept of myth serves as a positive distraction for the population in the real setting of Chile, and in the play by de la Parra. The same can be said

for Cabrujas's work where Gardel is transformed into a vehicle for a hidden message of hope and change in an otherwise bleak political landscape during the political dictatorship. In his introduction to the collection of Cabrujas's work that contains *El día que me quieras*, Orlando Rodrígues entertains the same possibility for hope explaining that "la frustración planteada en esta obra, es, en cierta forma, la de un país, que encerrada en una dictadura de hacendado prepotente, buscaba trascendencia en pequeños hitos que rompieron lo cotidiano, con la secreta esperanza de cambios futuros" (8).

In each of these two works, the notion of performance is explored through the emphasis on Gardel's (and by extension each of the dictators') obsession with fashioning himself into an iconic figure of popular culture. In *Matatangos* this representation is carried out by three actors dressed like Gardel who adopt different roles such as Gardel himself, his mother, judges, lovers, and the public, among others, in order to speak about his life and the myths that surrounded him. At one point, actor Dos declares: "soy francés, se lo digo yo!" and with that statement the fragmentation of the myth into three distinct versions begins:

> UNO. Mi nombre es Carlos Romual Gardés, hijo de padre desconocido y de Berthe Gardés, planchadora, obrera francesa, militante de la juventud católica de Tolosa, nacido en una gala mañana de sol y nubes, acarreaso y en peligro a cono sur y que, por razones de mi profesión de artista consagrado y en peligro de muerte he adoptado y usado siempre el apellido Gardel y con este apellido soy co...

DOS. (Interrumpiendo).--Mi nombre es Carlos Gardel y nací en Tacuarembó en mil ochocientos noventa y fui adoptado por doña Berta Gardés que me recogió de un canasto de mimbre que flotaba en las aguas del río Pamarú, crecí en Uruguay para venirme luego por razones paranoicas de orden moral y patriótico y me...

TRES. (Interrumpiendo).--Mi nombre es Carloto Emilio Gardenia y nací en la gran capital federal de Buenos Aires, criado por el regazo protector de Bertolina Gardés, lavadora y cocinera francesa, contratada por el coronel Escayola, supliendo así un hijo de la primera caída por la borda del barco en que se vino de Francia y un hijo segundo, depositado en un canasto que se perdió flotando a la deriva tras las fiebres que asolaron Tacuarembó en mil ochocientos noventa y siete. (de la Parra 101-02)

The interchange between actors Uno, Dos and Tres is significant in that it underlines the creative act that produced Gardel's persona. As the fragmentation into three characters with three separate identities indicates, a character created within a theatrical piece is a fiction in much the same way that the superstar persona that Gardel fabricated over the years. The same can be said of the dictators as well because they attempted to cover their illegitimate and excessive (ab)use of authority through their position as the official heads of state. Additionally, the connection that Dos makes with the biblical history of Moses, who was also retrieved from a river in a basket, serves to elevate Gardel even more to mythical status.

The creation of multiple personas is also explored by Cabrujas in *El día que me quieras*. In this work, the nexus of the action is played out within the confines of a family divided over the decision of a sister who has chosen to accompany her lover to the Soviet Union in order to escape capitalism and the dictatorship. The impact that a visit from Gardel makes to the family (the nation) affects them profoundly. During the visit, in a conversation with Gardel, Elvira, one of the sisters, alludes to the multiplicity of identities when she explains:

> Estamos hablando del día de la rana peluda en 1902, cuando tú eras niño, y te llamabas Carlitos Escayola, en Tacuarembú, Valle Edén, Uruguay, después del nacimiento en Toulouse, calle del Cañón de Arcole, número 4, hijo de padre desconocido de Berta Gardés, planchadora. (Cabrujas 64)

In this scene between Elvira and Gardel, it appears that Elvira is giving Gardel another role to interpret. By telling Gardel a history that he should conceivably already know, Elvira transforms herself into an author within the play, creating yet another fictitious part for Gardel to play. However, this is not the only instance of characters creating roles for Gardel, because earlier in the text Elvira also explains to María Luisa that Gardel:

> Fue engendrado en Toulousse, sin partida de nacimiento posterior, de padre francés sospechoso y madre argentina decentísima. A los tres años, por un azar de destino llegó a Montevideo, y a los cinco, buscando mejores horizontes, se residenció en Buenos Aires donde le conocieron por el apodo de El Morocho. (Cabrujas 53)

In effect, Cabrujas plays with the notion of iconicity because in this case a character is constructing various images of Gardel. As a result, this work as well as *Matatangos* serve to emphasize the metatheatricality that formed part of Gardel's personality. The metatheatricality appears not only in the identities that Gardel assumed in order to create his public image, but also in the division of roles that the three actors in *Matatangos* interpret and in the various histories and parts imagined by Elvira, a protagonist/author in *El día que me quieras*. Consequently, the figure of Gardel frames the two works as a metatheatrical device and symbol that changes according to the context. This metatheatricality serves to highlight the performative nature of public figures in general and the dictators specifically. In politics, as well as in performance, the image of reality that is projected is not always an accurate one.

Aspects of metatheatricality exist in other sections of the plays if one considers the tango lyrics that are incorporated as part of the dialogue. In particular, both *Matatangos* and *El día que me quieras* borrow scenes or songs from films in which Gardel starred. Frequently, these tangos function as ministructures of the greater action of the play or as the theme of the individual scenes, and as such they become small theatrical works within the larger dramatic pieces. In all respects, the tangos emphasize the duality or multiplicity of truths, an integral part of both plays as seen through their metatheatricality and their quality as cultural icons.

The duality becomes immediately apparent in both *Matatangos* and *El día que me quieras* because both contain scenes where lyrics from the tango "El día que me quieras" or dialogue from the film of the same name appear as part of the staging of these two plays. In both cases, these scenes are interpelative and require the participation of the other characters. In particular, the second act of Cabrujas's play includes a scene as Gardel prepares to leave the Ancízar residence; Matilde y Plácido beg him for a song before he departs. In the scene, Gardel sings the first two strophes, and the third one which is normally recited, is done in the original style by Matilde y Plácido (Cabrujas 73-74). Consequently, the song forms part of the dialogue of the overall work, it also becomes a shared conversation between Gardel, Matilde and Plácido, and in a greater sense a dialogue between actor (singer) and the audience.

The interpelative song/dialogue occupies a crucial space in terms of the action of *El día que me quieras*, as well. In particular, María Luisa and her boyfriend, Pío, dream of another life in the Soviet Union where there is no separation of people into economic classes such as the bourgeois and the proletariat that surround them in Caracas. As a result, María Luisa and Pío live with the fantasy of a better life together in the world that Pío has created through his grandiose descriptions where the daily, ordinary problems of a materialist society do not exist. Pío exclaims at one moment: "He planificado...la posibilidad de marcharnos a la Unión de Repúblicas Socialistas Soviéticas, porque entre otras cosas quiero que mis hijos nazcan en la verdad proletaria, y no

en este basurero del imperialismo" (Cabrujas 27). The utopic world that Pío speaks of is conveyed through the lyrics of the tango sung by Gardel, "El día que me quieras." Specifically, the strophe recited by Matilde and Plácido captures the idyllic sentiments perfectly:

> El día que me quieras...no habrá más que armonías...será clara la aurora y alegre el manantial...traerá quieta la brisa rumor de melodía, y nos darán las fuentes su canto de cristal...El Día que me quieras, endulzará sus cuerdas el pájaro cantor...florecerá la vida...no existirá el dolor....
> (Cabrujas 74)

Within this strophe the concepts of "harmony," "dawn," "flourishing life," "non-existence of pain" describe a perfect world much like the beginning of a new way of life as described by Pío through his socialist rhetoric. The romantic musings of Gardel parallel the new life that the lovers project onto the Soviet Union. Consequently, the tango performed by Gardel functions as a small mimetic structure of the larger work in which various characters are invited to participate and resist the dictatorship.

A similar phenomenon occurs in *Matatangos*, as the dialogue from the film *El día que me quieras* is absorbed into the dramatic action. Specifically, on one occasion the characters Uno and Tres decide to kill Dos, who has assumed the role of Gardel, in order to immortalize him. Protesting, Dos attempts to forestall his murder arguing that he still has more feature films in which to star. Upon hearing this argument, Uno decides he will watch one of the films, so Dos

and Tres begin to represent the roles from the film version of *El día que me quieras*. These roles also contain the theme of social divisions in much the same way as the work by Cabrujas. In the film, Gardel plays the part of Julio Argüelles, a wealthy young man who falls madly in love with Margarita (Rosita Moreno), a woman from the lower classes. The character Margarita insists that their love should and cannot continue because they come from different social and economic spheres. However, Gardel/Julio replies, "Qué puede importarme todo eso si tú eres mi fortuna?..Cuando me quieras Margarita,...el día que me quieras, no habrá quién sea más rico que yo..." (de la Parra 142). The overwhelming message is that love can conquer all types of social barriers. As Savigliano suggests, the message is important if one considers again the importance of Gardel as a symbol for the spectators. Gardel represents the way in which one might improve his/her life. In her analysis, Savigliano proposes that the romanticism and popularity of the *tango canción* signified a new social mobility for the *tangueros* since they were considered socially acceptable by the middle and upper classes after their rebirth into Argentina (65). Savigliano explains that the inversion of classes that occurs in the film (Gardel as a young and wealthy protagonist) only serves to further emphasize the upward movement of Gardel, "the Morocho de Abasto," who gained fame and fortune, and the possible elevation of Margarita through her association with the famous *tanguero* (65-66).

The result is that this clip taken and reproduced from the film marks again the theme of the creation of a myth, and as such can be conceived of as a mini-structure of *Matatangos*. Throughout the play, Uno and Tres explore the process of mythification and de-mythification of Gardel. In fact, just after the performance of the scene from the film, Uno muses about the act of inventing the myth and comments, "Estás inventando todo un cliché...has transformado viejos cuentos de hadas en himnos populares, con su beso engominado" (de la Parra 142). The mythification of Gardel, as Savigliano proposes, carries with it the connotation of a better life through the tango. In another episode, de la Parra again plays with the notion of developing an attractive package to sell to the crowd. Tres in the role of the Doctor of surgery responds to questions about what he accomplished during the operation performed on Gardel stating, "Bien, yo busqué entre los cadáveres de la Morgue el brillo preciso, escogí dientes de gitano, labios de arzobispo, comisuras de señoritas fumadoras...tracé las incisiones secretas...y así concluí esa obra maestra" (de la Parra 136). These fragments of dialogue demonstrate the obvious theme of the construction of the myth of Gardel; however, they also represent the destruction of the myth when it is revealed that it is only a fabrication and not authentic. In this way, it is possible to conceive the scene from the film *El día que me quieras* as a metatheatrical technique that echoes the construction of a new myth created through the association of the tango/Gardel with upward social mobility.

Additionally, the deconstruction of the myth of Gardel points to the possibility for the destruction of the myth of Pinochet in Chile.

In a similar manner, the tango functions as a cultural icon in these two works. In *Matatangos* the characters define the tango in its most traditional state:

UNO. Recuerden, el tango es un baile dolido.

DOS. Afilado.

TRES. Sólo para criminales.

UNO. Para memorias con remordimientos.

DOS. Para hombres solos.

TRES. Una excusa para hacer movimiento la amargura.

UNO. Sabemos que la mujer que abrazamos se nos va. (de la Parra 149)

The definition of the tango corresponds to the stereotypical image of the song that flourished in the bordellos and peripheral zones of Buenos Aires and Montevideo.

However, in another moment the characters in *Matatangos* shift their concept of the tango to fit a more urban-centered view. In this way, the tango marks the evolution of the rioplatense community. The following demonstrates this change in identity with the help of Gardel:

DOS. El cantor del pueblo.

UNO. No, no, no me vengas con esas.

DOS. Yo canto el sentir del pueblo.

UNO. Carlitos, pará...

> DOS. A quién aplaude el público no es a Carlos Gardel, es al arte popular nuestro que, por una casualidad feliz, me ha tocado interpretar a mí. (de la Parra 129)

In the tango sung by Gardel, the Argentine public understood themselves to be accepted by the elite and the rest of the world in spite of their *criollo* or immigrant roots. Castro conceptualizes the experience in the following way:

> The Argentine elite, by rejecting its own past in its attempt to create a "Europe in America" through massive immigration and capital importation, created the bases for the marginality of the Creole and later immigrant masses. . . . While it is true that there have been popular or mass leaders. . .after the fall of each the masses were left amputated from the body politique. . . . In recent times Gardel has become a cultural symbol to fill a political leadership vacuum. . . In some ways, he represented a cultural security blanket to an isolated and insecure population. (*The Argentine Tango*... 132)

Thus, the immigrant masses adopted the tangos that Gardel immortalized and through this connection, the tango began to represent the urban cores of the rioplatense zone. Gardel and the tango represented not only the political elite as cultural ambassadors, but also symbolized the *pueblo*, at the level of the masses.

This association between the *pueblo* and the tango/Gardel is also visited in *El día que me quieras*. In a scene from the first act, Plácido observes that Gardel is, "Un hombre del pueblo" (Cabrujas 36). However, another scene

clearly exposes the link between Gardel, the tango, and the masses. In this scene Gardel visits the Ancízar home and the tangos that he sings during the visit become part of the collective memory of the household, and by extension the rest of those who come from the same social class that experienced his performance in Venezuela at the time. This connection carries such an impact that Elvira reveals to the rest of the members present: "Fue un once de julio de 1935 cuando llegó Carlos Gardel a esta casa y Elvira Ancízar dividió su vida en dos etapas o, mejor dicho, en dos movimientos, tan simples como antes y después..." (Cabrujas 52). The year that Gardel visited Venezuela is the same year that ended the dictatorship of General Gómez. As a result, the tango represents a unique community of immigrants that populated Buenos Aires, as well as representing the populations of Chile and Venezuela united by the common experience of dictatorship.

Through the multiplicity of images that Gardel engendered, the icon as a metaphor is the perfect connection for the specific situations that Cabrujas and de la Parra wished to describe in their own countries. Furthermore, the tango with its varied meanings adds to the metatheatrical aspects and structure of doubles in the plays. The images used for export to the world by Argentine elites, and those of comfort and upward mobility sold to the masses by movie and record producer, along with the playboy reputation that Gardel himself created, work in concert to suggest the use of propaganda in the Venezuelan and Chilean dictatorships. By constructing and destructing myths about Gardel, Cabrujas and

de la Parra explore parallels between Gardel's persona and the façades that the dictatorships projected in their own countries and worldwide. The crossover appeal of Gardel is readily apparent in these two works, and is a product of his constant need to reinvent himself and create new identities that appeal(ed) to many sectors of society. The same can be said of governments grasping at legitimacy in a climate of repression and torture. The interplay between these political situations is analogous to the creation of the Gardelian myth and the porteño culture in general. This will be especially true in the case of dictatorship and exile, where myths and cultural images are recycled, recreated, and reinvented confusing the issues of national, cultural and political identity.

The questions raised about the meaning of culture and identity are precisely the focus of another work that explores the myth of Gardel: Fernando Solanas's *Tangos: El exilio de Gardel* (1985). Directed by Solanas during his exile in France, the movie was begun in 1981 with funds collected from the *Centre National de la Cinématographie*, and L.P.A., Gaumont and Tercine (Suzana Pick 168). However, the project was abandoned when Solanas lost the right to CNC funding. Later, Solanas arranged a co-production between Argentina and France after the collapse of the military regime, with a subsidy granted to his company, Tercine, by the *Ministerio de Cultura*. The film is divided into four chapters or movements and mimics the style of the "European political films and the US dance-musical" as Kathleen Newman points out (245). The exiled Argentines (re)create a new expression called the *tanguedia* from the

scattered quotations sent to them on bar napkins and scraps of paper from Juan Uno, who still resides in Buenos Aires. The new artistic genre is a theatrical performance based on a mixture of tragedy, comedy, and of course, the tango with its various connotations. Newman suggests that this new formula is the model for the film and a parody at the same time, that highlights the political allegories of Peronism and its renovation. According to Newman, the inclusion of figures such as San Martín and Gardel in the film expresses the populism and militarism characteristic of Peronist politics, which thereby serve as markers of the incorporation of the political philosophy of the exiles into the redemocratization process that was characterized by a new kind of Peronism (246-48). The film and the *tanguedia* examine the displacement, attachment and nostalgia that the exiles experienced in France and in other countries during the period that forced them to flee from torture and political persecution. The film also touches on the theme of exile within Argentina, for a citizenry that endured a political and military attack by its own government. The reconstruction project of the military junta during the Dirty War exorcised the "subversive" elements of society and forced those who remained into conforming to a newly designed country, one that hardly resembled the Argentina of the past. As a result, most of the citizens who stayed also faced exile through censorship and the violent makeover that the country underwent. The questions posed about the meaning and durability of culture during this period are of supreme importance in the project launched by Solanas. In the context of exile, within and outside of

Argentina, the film begs the question of identity. What does identity mean for a nation that has experienced such political turmoil, and for those forced to rethink their definitions of self from outside/inside the boundaries of national culture? Through the concept of performance and the power of enunciation, Solanas's work demonstrates the ambiguity and uncertainty of the process of redemocratization facing the Argentine nation in the years following *El Proceso*.

The metaphor of the palimpsest functions in Gorostiza's play, *El acompañamiento,* as an alternative space allowing freedom of expression. A similar concept of cultural identity can be found in Homi Bhabha's work *The Location of Culture.* Bhabha also discusses the space of in-betweeness and its implications for articulating autonomy. In the context of colonialism and its legacy, as well as neo-colonialism, Bhabha envisions the meaning of culture as something that is created in the cultural interstices, the space between the borders that contain and restrain national/cultural identity. The "beyond," as he names the borderline work of culture, is in reality an intervening space that implicates the here and now (7). Therefore, art that deals with these issues does not merely "recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent 'in-between' space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present (Bhabha 7). The interstitial space that mediates the borders of culture is an important place of performance and the creation of identity through such performance(s). The inter-space is concerned with the present through its redefinition of the past. It is an active site of invention and

agency through the art of repetition, a recreation of self. Bhabha notes that the intermediate space between borders "introduces creative invention into existence. And one last time, there is a return to the performance of identity as iteration, the re-creation of the self in the world of travel, the resettlement of the borderline community of migration" (9).

The recuperation of cultural roots in a post-colonial or neo-colonial world presents many problems for the oppressed peoples. The tendency to fetishize and romanticize the past is ever present. For these reasons, Bhabha argues that in reality the symbols of culture have no fixity of meaning when one takes into consideration the in-between space described above. Taking a model derived from the study of linguistics, Bhabha describes the "Third Space" (his term) as the point in-between the subject of proposition and the subject of enunciation, which represents the cultural positionality, the discursive embeddedness, and its reference to a specific time and place. As a result, "the production of meaning requires that these two spaces be mobilized in the passage through a Third Space, which represents both the general conditions of language and the specific implication of the utterance in a performative and institutional strategy of which it cannot 'in itself' be conscious" (Bhabha 36). As a result, Bhabha finds that interpretation becomes ambivalent. The ambivalent nature is derived from a split between the subject of proposition, the subject of enunciation (which is really just a spatial construct) and the meaning of the utterance, which is neither one nor the other. Consequently, the split affects the temporality of the meaning,

destroying the "logics of synchronicity and evolution which traditionally authorize the subject of cultural knowledge" (Bhabha 36). Consequently, the so-called Third Space refutes the traditional logic of cultural symbols and meanings as stable signifiers of national identity since they belong instead to an open space/time. As Bhabha contends, "It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure the meaning and symbols of culture have no unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew" (37). If this is true, culture becomes a hybrid creation that is constantly evolving within and outside the national boundaries. It is an amalgamation of past and present incorporated, dissected, reappropriated, created and defined anew within ever-changing past discourses. The dialectical structures that so often dominate the definitions of culture are at the same time relevant and insufficient. The meaning of culture becomes simultaneously a translation, a transference and a transnational process. It is repetition and creation, past and present, all at the same time. It is the space of exile.

Tangos: El exilio de Gardel, also known as *Tangos: l'exil de Gardel*, and in its English version *Tangos: The Exile of Gardel* explores the process of cultural signification that Bhabha has observed in the post/neo-colonial era of the late 20th-century. Set in Paris, the film narrates the "in-between" life that the exiles experience as political refugees, struggling to define their lives in a new country while waiting for the fall of the dictatorship. Through mythic figures

like Gardel and cultural referents like the tango, Solanas explores the displacement that the exiles feel in Paris. Gardel and the tango function as metaphors for the transition that the characters must undertake to survive. Gardel crossed over the line that separated the rich and the poor and the tango crossed national borders, and in Solanas's film they are the images and sounds that characterize the experience of exile. In the film the characters are a part of neither the contemporary Argentine nation, nor are they really true participants in the French society that they now inhabit. They dwell in the uncertain world of letters, phone calls, memories, and performance. The hybridity of the exiles' experience is reflected even in Solanas's funding for the project, a co-production between France and Argentina. Solanas's film emphasizes the "in-betweeness" of the theme of exile from the very opening scene. The first images that the audience sees are scenes of Paris with tango music playing in the background. Two dancers tango to the music on a bridge over the river. The bridge is a key symbol in my interpretation of the film, since it represents the idea of the inter-space that Bhabha has developed. By beginning the film with the scene on the bridge, Solanas sets up the performative space that lies between Buenos Aires and Paris, the space of cultural definition that grows from the back and forth movements of the dancers between the two river banks separated by an ocean, between the past and the present. This space is even more historically loaded if one considers the evolution of the tango's success in France, and later in Argentina, or even the possible connections between France and Argentina

through Gardel's issues of nationality. The bridge, then, is the first visual clue that the spectator receives, and it functions as a metaphor for the dislocation and disjunctions that the gap between cultures produces for the exiles. It is the site for their enunciation of culture.

The same type of movement across/between boundaries is reflected back to the spectator in the language of the film. Throughout the work, the characters converse in French and porteño-style Spanish, often mixing the two in the same sentence. Released in the United States, the film appears with subtitles in English, adding to the *mélange* of languages and meanings. The use of two languages in the film presents the possibility of alienating certain members of the audience, to whom the "other" language is not accessible. The inability to understand mimics in a certain way the experience of the exiles, perhaps, but more importantly it destroys the dialectical structure that categorizes experience and expression into polar opposites. Instead, the mixture of the languages proposes a new space of expression that exists somewhere between the two extremes. The same concept is mirrored in the performance of the *tanguedia*: or part tango, part tragedy, part comedy. Solanas explains further that the film is a "combination of spectacle, music and stories" and a "synthesis of the arts" (Coco Fusco 59). The performance and the languages used to express it grow out of the "Third Space" of exile.

The other point of interest in terms of filmic language is the mixture of documentary footage and scripted footage. Solanas's original impulse to film

was sparked by the march in Paris in support of the missing Argentine artists, organized by the International Association for the Defense of Artists (AIDA) (Pick 168). The footage from the November 1981 rally is part of the documentary genre that David William Foster sees as an integral element in the films of the period of redemocratization in Argentina. Foster understands the significant use of documentalism or document-like re-creation of events as a way of "anchor[ing] a narrative in a specific socio-political reality in order to trigger allegorical associations in the spectators' interpretation of a film" (473). Allegory serves to show "how the personal is political" and how "characters, places, situations, and events have historical meaning beyond their immediate, personal signification" (Foster 472). The use of these two filmic languages again confuses the strict lines between reality and fiction, further resembling the experience that is real life. This is especially true for the exiles who live trapped between their lives in Paris, their memories, and news they receive from loved ones in Argentina. Again, the lives of the exiled Argentines occupy a space that falls somewhere between the divisions of Argentina/France, reality/fiction, personal/political, Spanish/French, documentary/scripted footage.

The space of exile is represented most clearly through the use of the tango. Tango, the soul and expression of the Argentine population, also falls victim to the strong arm of the dictatorship. Certain tangos, due to their populist nature and questionable content, were banned by the dictatorship (Timothy Barnard 453). The group of exiles performs these tangos in Paris where the

French population receives them with ambivalence. After a showing of the *tanguedia* to a group of French intellectuals, the exiles are told that it is "too Argentine" for French audiences. However, since the tangos have been banned, they are no longer part of contemporary Argentina either. The banned tangos remain somewhere in between. They are the cultural symbol of Argentina that has been cut loose, reinscribed into a new territory, and these tangos now represent the exiles for whom neither Argentina nor France can be home. The tango is no longer a marker only of the past and of the Argentine nation; it is now part of the rebellion against the dictatorship, and signifies the voyage "back" to Europe. The invention of the *tanguedia* demonstrates another shift in the tango's evolution. However, the tango still remains just outside of the French society's grasp. It is in exile. A parallel can be drawn between the fate of some of the tangos and that of the film itself. As Timothy Barnard notes, for many *Tangos* reflects too much of a "European art-house" look to be considered Argentine (452). However the success of Solanas's return and the movie in Argentina prove otherwise.[8] The film exists as a French-Argentine co-production, as a specifically Argentine movie, and also an international hit, winning the Special Jury Award at the 1985 Venice Film Festival. It belongs within national boundaries, but also thrives outside of and between the parameters of national culture. The censored tangos and *Tangos* occupy the interstitial space between cultures and fixed meanings.

The tango finds its ultimate transition within Solanas's film through the invention of the *tanguedia* in Paris, shuttling back and forth between countries and meanings, evolving into something completely new. Solanas also explores the theme of transition through Gardel and other famous historical personalities like Discépolo and San Martín. These three historical characters appear as paintings (except San Martín whose library some of the exiles visit) on the walls in Juan Dos's apartment. They are also visions that materialize before the eyes of the other characters and become transformed into part of the experience of exile. Cultural symbols such as these national heroes represent the interruption of the past in the present, and as a result they begin to stand for something new. By bringing historical discourses to the fore in a new context, and by addressing new audiences (Argentines changed by the Dirty War, and international audiences), the symbols become detached from their original meanings and begin to accumulate different definitions. As Solanas himself explains in an interview with Coco Fusco, the state of exile is one of openness:

> I. . . wanted to take the notion of an open-ended story to the limit. It was in my favor in this situation that exile is a state of openness. When you return to your country you feel like a foreigner, because the country is different and everyone has changed. Then you start to feel the need for the country you left behind. (59)

Consequently, the dislocation of the historical figures in France lends them a mythical and nostalgic quality. However, they are also transformed into icons of

exile because they represent the new experience of ostracism through their association with the yearning to return to the past exhibited by the Argentines who pay homage to their images. Solanas states that the figures appear as part of his attempt to "recover history and memory," (Fusco 59), but it seems their appearance is also a way of showing the spectrum of changes that has taken place between the past that they once represented and the present that grows out of the confusion between nostalgia, disappointment and persecution. Specifically, in the cases of Gardel and San Martín, the physical characteristics presented in the film support the changes that have taken place and the new images that they represent. In the case of San Martín, who appears before Gerardo, he is transformed into an elderly gentleman with white hair who commiserates with the scholar about the pitfalls of aging in a foreign country without any money. The description is far from the strong and valiant leader who fought for freedom against Spain that is so often captured in statues and history books. Likewise, Gardel states in his appearance a bit later that he no longer sings when he is asked to perform a song. The transformation of these two dynamic figures into men who experience human frailty is a striking contrast to their usual depiction. They are now associated with new characteristics; they have evolved into figures that represent the past at some level, but also they have a connection with the uncertainties and difficulties of the present. Instead of remaining as the photos, statues and paintings show them as never-changing images of popular culture, they age, and they change in Solanas's film.

As all of these examples from *Tangos* demonstrate, the Third Space that Bhabha develops is analogous to the experience of exile on several levels. However, what is significant about the Third Space is that it allows room for the articulation of a new autonomy. Being separated from the cultural constraints of time, space and the specificity of cultural meanings allows the events and expressions of exile a freedom not permitted under the dictatorship. The film emphasizes this liberty through the use of performance. The entire film revolves around the performance of the *tanguedia*, and the expression of a new kind of identity for the exiles that is neither here nor there, so to speak, but somewhere in-between. The Third Space of exile permits the group of Argentines, and Solanas, the opportunity to forge a new identity that grows out of the experience of transnationalism and a plurality of meanings. Released in 1985, the film emphasized the theme of pluralism that was very much on the minds of many in Argentina during the process of redemocratization. As Pick notes, "One of the primary elements of the process of re-democratization has been the insistence on political pluralism, a resolve carried into all fields of social activity and cultural practice" (*The Dialectical Wanderings of Exile* 60). As a result, the iteration and recreation of identity in the space of travel, the space of exile, the space in-between proves to be not only a recuperation of the past, but also the invention of a new present built out of the interruption of the past in the present. Both the tango and Gardel, for Solanas and the characters in his film, symbolize an Argentine cultural identity because of their historical connections with that

country. However, both the tango and Gardel experienced transitions in their own images and these changes can be seen in the creation of the new form of *tanguedia* and the transformation that the exiles undergo in France. The words "exile" and "Gardel" in the title of the film highlight the two central markers of identity for Argentines in the 70s and 80s and the shifts that the experience of exile and the figure of Gardel represent.

The same enunciation of identity can be seen in plays that follow the dictatorships in Argentina and Uruguay, by playwrights residing within the boundaries of these countries.[9] Ana María Magnabosco's award winning piece *Viejo smoking* (Uruguay, 1988)[10] and Carlos Pais's *Desfile de extrañas figuras* (Argentina, 1992)[11] both address questions of national identity in the newly formed democracies and the legacy of economic disaster inherited after the collapse of the dictatorships. Each of the plays focuses on sorting out the past and the implications of the aftermath of trauma in the daily lives of the protagonists of both Magnabosco's and Pais's works. Aside from the appearance of Gardel in each of these plays, the characteristic they both share is the narration of personal events from the past.

In each case, Gardel acts as a sort of spiritual guide who listens and supports the two female protagonists as they relate the pains and sufferings they have endured since his death in 1935. In *Viejo smoking* Gardel appears as a conjured image from the beyond who visits Chichí, an indigent woman living in the ruins of the once-grand Hotel Colón. He appears on the 24th of June, the

anniversary of his death, after Chichí finishes the ritual of placing on the table 24 candles, roses, and the tuxedo jacket that once belonged to Gardel, along with champagne. In *Desfile*, Gardel steps out of the portraits that are placed about the room of an aging and alcoholic star, Violeta Echangüey. In both of the plays, Gardel appears as a magical, angelic vision who comforts the two women nearing the ends of their lives. In *Viejo smoking* Gardel responds to Chichí almost entirely with lyrics from his famous tangos. These verses serve to calm and advise Chichí as she struggles with her difficult life as a poor, homeless, and uneducated woman in Montevideo. In *Desfile* one tango, *Soledad*, in particular, serves as a refrain throughout the play. The voice of Gardel singing this tango opens the play, and both of the main characters, Gardel and Violeta, later repeat portions of the tango. The line "hay un desfile de extrañas figuras" used for the title is converted into a type of *mantra* for Violeta as she confronts events from the past. The combination of the ghostly resurrection of Gardel, returning from the grave, together with the comforting verses that function as spiritual advice in much the same manner as Biblical verses or *mantras*, reinforces the iconicity of Gardel in the traditional sense of the concept. This particular characterization of Gardel echoes the medieval *milagros* stories that the disenfranchised elements of society looked to for comfort and safety through Biblical figures such as the Virgin Mary and other saints and martyrs. The most obvious allusion is, perhaps, to Christ. In both of the plays, Gardel is converted into a modern-day Christ figure. Suffering a horrible death at a young age, much like Christ, Gardel

reappears to his faithful followers to alleviate their suffering. He is treated by both of the protagonists as a sacred image who cannot be blasphemed against in any manner. For Chichí, the tuxedo jacket that forms part of the ritual ceremony is also a kind of holy relic, handed down from her dead mother. Chichí describes the pilgrimage-like visit that she made with her mother to Gardel's hotel room as a child:

> yo lo hice venir porque tengo una cosa suya...que sólo a usté ques el dueño se la puedo dar...(Va sacando, mientras habla, una bolsa que lleva atada al cuerpo.) ¿Ve? Primero mi madre y después yo...todos estos años...lo llevamo atado al cuerpo...Un smoking suyo, Mago, verdadero, verdadero, como que se lo afanamo a usté. ¡Ay! ¡Qué brutalidá! Perdonamé...Mi madre decía que usté no se enojó, porque usté era un *santo* porque otro que no fuera Gardel, la habría denunciado y la echaban del empleo y hasta presa iba. . . .Tá igualito, ¿vio? ¡Si lo habré cuidado! (Magnabosco 1036, my emphasis)

Worn close to the body, the jacket is similar to the medallions and crosses that many Christians wear as a symbol of their religion and as a tribute to Christ and other saints who comfort and protect them. The jacket, along with the altar that Chichí sets up to honor Gardel, contributes to the Christ-like characterization that Magnabosco utilizes throughout the play.

The allusions in *Desfile* are less obvious, but there still exist a few examples where Pais treats Gardel as a sacred and mythical figure. As Violeta

prepares to interview a person whom she believes to be a member of the press after much time away from playing the role of star, she struggles to find a topic of conversation that would be interesting to the interviewer and his readers. Her housekeeper, Beba, suggests that she tell about her experience with Gardel and their love affair:

> BEBA: Cuéntele lo de Gardel...eso les va a gustar...Lo de Gardel. (Al escuchar esto Gardel se pone nervioso y hace señas a Violeta que lo tranquiliza.)
>
> VIOLETA: Eso es un secreto.
>
> BEBA: Sería lo mejor.
>
> VIOLETA: De Gardel no voy a hablar. Nada. (Gardel agradece con una reverencia. Violeta le contesta y le sonríe.) No hay por que..." (Pais 25)

Although her love affair with Gardel might interest readers enormously, Violeta chooses not to reveal their "secret." To disclose details of their relationship would certainly conflict with the image of Gardel as the eternal playboy. To Violeta it appears as though this type of information would tarnish the "sacred" image of the heartthrob that persists in the minds of his fans, and she chooses to bury the information instead. For Violeta it would be akin to a secular kind of blasphemy to damage Gardel's star quality. The other episode where Gardel is portrayed as a saint-like figure is when Violeta confesses her human frailty--alcoholism. Gardel, like a saint or priest, listens to her sins and reassures her:

> Violeta: (Abandona a Gardel. Beba escucha solamente a Violeta.) Para destruirte a vos... hizo falta que se cayera un avión. Conmigo fue distinto... A mí sí me destruyeron los temblores. A mí sí. (Cambiando, a Beba.) Podría contarle eso. Olvidarme de Gardel, de Perón, de todos... De las monjitas también y contarle como temblaba... como me latía el corazón... como me corría un sudor frío. (A Gardel otra vez.) Puede ser que el tango sea una pasión de grelas, la bronca de la vida. Puede ser. (Camina hacia Gardel que la espera con los brazos abiertos.) (Va cantando muy bajito.) "Sus ojos... como el rencor..." (Se abrazan fuertemente.) Sos el único que puede entenderme. El único. (Pais 35)

In Gardel, Violeta finds compassion, comfort, and unconditional love. As Violeta points out, Gardel's death could only result from something powerful like an untimely plane crash, whereas her own death will most surely be from human vice.

It is no surprise that both Pais and Magnabosco revert to the figure of Christ as a prototype for their Gardel characters, given the circumstances that preceded the publication and staging of these two plays. Both authors developed these works in the years following the dictatorships in Argentina and Uruguay. Both countries felt an urgent need to redefine themselves both internally and to the outside world after suffering through years of repression. In returning to democracy, both Argentina and Uruguay faced questions about identity and what it meant to be Argentine or Uruguayan. The use of personal biographies in each

of these two plays appears to address the complex procedure of building a nation in the aftermath of crisis. This is especially the case if one considers Benedict Anderson's theory on the biography of nations:

> All profound changes in consciousness, by their very nature, bring with them characteristic amnesias. Out of such oblivions, in specific historical circumstances, spring narrative. After experiencing the physiological and emotional changes produced by puberty, it is impossible to "remember" the consciousness of childhood . . . . How strange it is to need another's help to learn that this naked baby in the yellowed photograph. . .is you. Out of this estrangement comes a conception of personhood, *identity* (yes, you and that naked baby are identical) which, because it can not be "remembered" must be narrated. (204)

Through an analogy to the human experience of maturation, Anderson likens the process of national identity and biography to the act of narration. Anderson also notes that the process is further complicated for nations, since it is difficult to determine the birth and/or death of a nation, so all narration begins from an "originary present" (205). The building of the nation's biography is similar to that of the human experience because memory and forgetting play such an integral and complicated part of the process. Imperfections in the process to record exactly the events and details of the past force individuals and nations to (re)create their own histories and memories of the past through narration. History and narration blend together to produce the concept of self and nation.

The extensive use of personal biography in both Magnabosco's and Pais's plays stems directly from the need to reconstruct the past after the "profound change in consciousness" caused by the loss of innocence under the dictatorships. The struggle against subversive individuals in Uruguay played out in a similar manner to that of Argentina. Under a right-wing military rule from 1973-1985, citizens considered dangerous to national stability were censored, disappeared and tortured, as they were in Argentina. Though this occurred in lesser numbers in Uruguay, the result was the same. Through state-sponsored terror tactics, both countries succeeded in traumatizing and altering profoundly the national consciousness and identity of their citizens. Through their plays, Magnabosco and Pais chronicle the coming of age of both nations, and their attempts to reconnect with a distant, more innocent past. In both cases, the innocence of the past is associated with Gardel, and a brighter future with the hope of a "second coming."

The plays go to great lengths to highlight the contrasts between the past and the present. Both plays feature decaying protagonists who recall former days of beauty and elegance. In *Viejo smoking* the main character, Chichí, lives in poverty. The stage directions indicate the set is to reflect this state of ruin in the following manner:

> La acción se desarrolla en una habitación del actual Hotel Colón. Su ambientación es ruinosa y en extremo miserable. Se supone la falta de luz eléctrica. Los "muebles" son una enorme pila de trapos, a manera de

cama, dos banquitos de restos de madera podrida, una pequeña mesa descalabrada, que tiene en lugar de una de las patas, el armazón de un enorme y antiguo paraguas. . . . (Magnabosco 1025)

During the entire play, Chichí is ashamed of her filth in the presence of Gardel. Homeless people waiting to steal her place surround her if she does not pay attention. From outside her room, shouting and menacing voices can be heard throughout her conversation with Gardel. The only friend who comes to visit Chichí, besides Gardel, is Vanesa who makes her living as a prostitute. The picture presented on stage is dismal, where the poor are portrayed as victims of the aftershock of the fall of the dictatorship and the effects of neo-liberal economic policies put into place with the new democratic government.

This dismal present is, however, juxtaposed with an elegant past. The innocence of Chichí's childhood and the luxurious setting of the Colón Hotel blend with the memory of Gardel as Chichí describes the hotel's former appearance. In a conversation with Gardel, Chichí narrates the past for Gardel and for the audience:

CHICHI: Se está acordando, ¿no?

GARDEL: ¡El Colón!

CHICHI: Sólo el rico podía venir acá. Aunque yo estuve... (Gardel, que sigue mirando techo, paredes, etcétera, se da vuelta con una sonrisa interrogativa.) Mi madre fue sirvienta de aquí. La última vez qué usté se quedó, todas se peleaban por limpiarle el cuarto. Tonce el patrón armó un

> sorteo... mire...fue más grande que sacarse la loteria... En este sitio está la cama, en este lugar ta el sofá, de seda amarillo... suavecito así... pa'pasarle la mano... y aquí... ¿se recuerda? Aquí mismo donde estoy yo parada... ¿Vio que linda? La mesita de cristal con florero... así... y el perfume... de las flores desas que usan los millonario. (Gardel sonríe, enciende un cigarillo, observando, a la vez que atento al relato de Chichí.) La cama es preciosa, ¿vio? Mi madre entró . . . . Ella me dijo: ¡Abrí los ojos, Chichí, que deste día no te vas a olvidar nunca! (Magnabosco 1032)

The two descriptions are in direct opposition to each other; the past and present appear to have no connection after the trauma of the dictatorship. However, through the story that Chichí relates, Gardel and the audience recognize the Colón as it once existed. The presence of Gardel is the thread that ties the two periods together. Gardel's return to the Colón is the key to recuperating the past and forging an identity. Curiously, as Anderson has pointed out, the past often begins in the present. The physical presence of Gardel suggests this in a very clear way, yet it is reinforced with the personal anecdote that Chichí shares with Gardel and the audience. Chichí's autobiographical information forms the basis of the (re)creation of the past. By telling her story to Gardel, a national iconic figure, Chichí links her history to the biography of the nation. In a period when citizens and politicians alike hoped to return to the democracy of the past, the need to "remember" the past through story telling can be seen as an important method of building identity.

The economic and political policies of the Batlle legacy, the Colorados party, who controlled the executive branch of the Uruguayan government from 1903 to 1958, is the model that is associated with the middle-class-based structure that provided most with opportunities for education, health-care and democratic values (Weinstein xv). This past is in direct opposition to the policies of the right-wing dictatorship and the problems that it created, even after its disappearance. The luxury of the past, embodied in Gardel and described by Chichí, contrasts sharply with the unemployment and disarray that pervade the national scene and the theatrical space described by Magnabosco in 1985. The present appears bleak; however, the enigmatic ending that Magnabosco stages for the nation and her protagonist offer some hope for Uruguay and the spectators. At the end of the play, Chichí falls into a drunken stupor and sleeps. The stage directions explain:

> Queda dormida. Gardel se acerca a tocarla. En toda la pieza no la ha tocado en ningún momento, ya que él representa la muerte, para Chichí. . . . Se oyen los acordes de "Adiós muchachos." Gardel le acaricia la cabeza, la toma en brazos y sale hacia la puerta. Se oscurece la escena, quedando sólo una luz suave que lo señala de espaldas, con la Chichí en los brazos. Con el fondo del tango, se oye lo siguiente:
>
> VOZ 1. ¿La mujer pá donde va?
>
> VOZ 2. Depósito municipal. No creo que alguien la reclame.

VOZ 1. Y con estos trapos ¿qué hacemo? ¡Mirá... acá hay un esmokin! ¿Podrá servir pa'algo?

VOZ 2. ¡Puras porquerías! ¡Prendeles fuego en la vereda! (1044)

And with the last exchange the light slowly fades to darkness. The ending filled with death and disdain for the revered relics of bygone days appears at first glance to be tremendously negative. However, if taken in the context of the Christ story that Magnobosco has set up throughout the entire play, the ending is hopeful. Gardel, functioning as the "savior-figure," relieves Chichí from her sufferings (physically carrying her when she is too weak) and from the difficult life that oppressed her. The message conveyed is one that offers hope for the believers, and ignorance and "damnation" for the non-believers. Meaning can be found in the past and a belief in the miracles of the mythic figures can be transformed into reality, if one is willing to believe and make the connection between the past and the present, between the baby in the photograph/birth of the nation, and the adult/the mature nation. The possibility for the "second coming" is ever present in Magnabosco's work, and by extension in the nation.

The use of the autobiography figures prominently in the work by Pais, as well, and carries with it a political message in a similar manner as that contained in *Viejo smoking*. In an exchange with Gardel, Violeta alludes to the theme of the biography:

VIOLETA: Las cosas lindas duran poco y... después sólo quedan los recuerdos. . . .La vida no es puro biógrafo, Carlitos, no. Los temblores

> cuando cantaba no eran puro biógrafo. Los recuerdos de Malena aquel día... no son puro biógrafo. Las figuras... que aparecen y desaparecen... no son biógrafo. Las sombras no son biógrafo.
>
> GARDEL: (Dando unos pasos.) En el biógrafo se llora... y se ríe... como en la vida. Igual. Mejor. Somos héroes... (Pais 36)

After they kiss passionately, Violeta announces that: "Esto sí es puro biógrafo..., "but Gardel muses about whether it took place in real life or in the biography. The questions raised by this conversation between the two characters point directly to the fine line that separates reality and fiction. The notion of biography, as these two characters from Pais's play suggest, harbors much of the same confusion that arises in the (re)construction of identity. The same uncertainty that plagues Gardel and Violeta haunts the Argentine nation in a very similar way. Again, as Anderson theorizes, identity is derived from the mixture of real events and the reconstruction/memory of those events through narration.

As Violeta struggles to compose herself and dress for the interview, the man whom she believes has been sent by the press arrives. Becoming more and more agitated as he waits to see Violeta, the character called generically, *Hombre,* begins to yell aggressively at Beba and demand the appearance of the "vieja." Through these exchanges, Beba realizes that he is a sinister reminder of the past that they have tried to forget. As the exchange between Beba and the man progresses, he reveals that he once visited the house in the past: "Estuve aquí ... hace años... pero... tengo buena memoria. En ese momento no se pudo...

Le tenían miedo a la vieja que era famosa... pero ahora... todo aquí... Todo, todo..." (Pais 53). In this moment, Beba knows that he has returned to victimize them again. Once Violeta enters, in a completely drunken state, the exchange becomes even more intense. Unaware of the man's identity, Violeta begins to speak of her daughter and how she has not seen her for many years because she is "abroad" and "unable to travel." This comment provokes a reaction in the man, leading to the confession of the true story of the fate that befell Malena, Violeta's daughter:

> VIOLETA: Muy linda chica mi hija... De carácter fuerte... como la madre. Como yo...
>
> HOMBRE: La tuve para mí. Era... para mí. Nunca se negaba... ni una sola palabra decía... Sólo me miraba... como si yo no existiera... Me despreciaba...
>
> VIOLETA: Seguro un día... se aparece... así de improviso. . . . (Pais 57)

Later, the man reveals that one day, he came back to find her missing. When Beba yells that he killed her, he responds: " No... Yo no. Ellos. Yo no. Vos te acordás... yo estaba ahí... parado en la puerta. Yo no hice nada..." (Pais 58). The man then proceeds to rob the two women of their possessions, including a photo of Malena, claiming that he needs the money for his children. When Violeta finally begins to reawaken from her inebriated state, she asks what is happening. Beba responds that nothing is happening and that she should go back to sleep: "Cierre los ojos... como siempre..." (Pais 60).

Through the personal stories of these three characters, the political situation of the *Proceso* years is displaced onto the family. Through the act of narrating the untimely disappearance and death of Malena, the trio is forced to "remember" at some level the past. Even Violeta who appears too drunk to realize what is happening asks Beba for forgiveness for not trying to impede the disappearance of Malena after Beba's comment about living with her "eyes closed." It takes the "help" of the man to begin to reconstruct the past that all three characters have repressed, drowned out with alcohol. Their identities are all incomplete without the admission of their knowledge about Malena. The familial situation in this respect is the metaphor for the Argentine nation forced to forget and pardon those who committed atrocities during the military rule. Struggling to define a new identity in the process of redemocratization, the confessions of Violeta, Beba and the man serve as a reminder that to "remember" the past is a crucial link in the development of individuals and the nation. Sweeping events from the past under the political rug of pardons in the case of Argentina, or numbing them with alcohol as Violeta attempts to do, does not erase them from a deeper level of consciousness. The "desfile de extrañas figuras" eventually must be dealt with and recalled as part of the development of the nation, as well as the emotional and social development of its citizens. The need to forget is juxtaposed in this equation with questions of guilt, in its varying degrees. Again, as in the play by Magnabosco, the past is also presented in opposition to the present. The dictatorship occupies the traumatic transitional

period between the nation's childhood and maturity. Gardel is the reminder of a former innocence. A symbol of love to Violeta, Gardel also becomes her refuge. At the end of the play as Violeta struggles with her guilt, Gardel cares for her:

> VIOLETA: (Apenas se escucha que canturrea.) "Alma... si tanto te han herido..." (Silencio.) "Malena... tiene penas... penas" (Silencio.) " ¿Por qué te niegas al... olvido... ?" (Silencio.) Vestido blanco... que sea hasta el fin...vestido blanco... (Silencio.) " Sus ojos son oscuros como... el olvido..." ¿Es oscuro el ... olvido?[12]
>
> GARDEL: Silencio.. Basta... (Se le acerca y trata de hacerla dormir como a un chico.) Silencio... Silencio... (Pais 61)

Again, as in the Magnabosco play, Gardel is the kind figure who reminds the characters, and by extension the (inter)national audience, of the once brilliant past. For Gardel, Violeta is still worthy of his affection, even with her emotional scars, physical imperfections and vices. The same can, perhaps, be said of the nation with its sordid political past. However, it seems clear that in Pais's play forgiveness can be granted, but it does not preclude forgetting. To remember and acknowledge the differing degrees of participation and culpability figures as an integral element in the process of pardoning the faults and (in)actions of the characters and the nation. As Violeta reminds the audience and Gardel at the end of the play: "La vida... no es... puro biógrafo" (Pais 62). In context with the rest of Pais's message, Violeta's statement should be taken as a warning that the past

can only be (re)written to a certain degree, and that the (re)construction process must take into account the reality as well as the fiction.

In both plays the ab/use of alcohol by the protagonists blurs the line between reality and fiction, making it difficult for the characters to distinguish between the past and the present. With their senses impaired, the characters struggle to regain their hold on reality. Dazed and confused, Chichí and Violeta represent their respective national populations. However, even though their drunken states prevent them from clearly distinguishing between time periods and reality and fiction, their drunkenesss allows them a special kind of access to the mythic figure of Gardel. As a result, the messages contained in both Magnabosco's and Pais's plays convey essentially positive attitudes for dealing with past aggressions and their solutions. Though the characters and their worlds are flawed, the insight and the possibility for creating a more promising future are always within reach.

By extension, the same can be said for Argentina and Uruguay. In this manner, the tango and Gardel come full circle in their journey through the latter part of the century, by again blending a curious mixture of pessimism and optimism. The dream to "hacer la América" is modified and country specific at the close of the century in these two plays. The struggle for liberal, democratic policies is again a compelling issue for countries to tackle. Like the tangos that Gardel popularized, the use of the tango lyrics in the plays at the end of the twentieth century expresses nostalgia for bygone days,[13] but in these latter plays

the focus is optimistic. Just as Gardel's performances were multi-layered with multiple meanings, so too are the plays that feature the tango and Gardelian characters. Finally, the exportation of the tango and Gardel is again a trend in vogue at the end of the twentieth century.[14] The many dichotomies contained within the performances that Gardel and dramatists have nurtured throughout the decades of the twentieth century allow the Gardel persona to live on even in death.

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[1] Part of the filmic trilogy by Carlos Saura that includes *Sevillanas* (1992) and *Flamenco* (1995), *Tango* (1997) is Saura's latest tribute to regional/national music and dance. A co-production between Argentina and Spain, Saura's film is mostly the story of a movie director and his break-up with one woman, and the subsequent affair that ensues with a younger female dancer acting in

his new movie. The movie within the movie is a dynamic musical-dance that pays tribute to the tango and at times touches on themes socio-historical themes such as the the waves of immigration that Argentina experienced a century ago and the recent dictatorship and its policy of torture.

[2] Guy explains that the introduction of a new German instrument, the *bandoneón*, in the 1890s accidently had the effect of slowing down the tempos and altering the tango. The new accordion made by Band Union Company caused musicians great trouble as they tried to keep up with traditional piano, flute, guitar and violin because of their insufficient skill with the instrument. Guy concludes that the tango changed from a lively tempo to a "slow, languorous, stylized erotic art form" because of the *bandoneón* and the limited technical ability of inexperienced musicians (145-46).

[3] The other play that surfaces the same year as Cossa's *La ñata contra el libro* is *Corazón de tango* by the Argentine author Juan Carlos Ghiano. This play is described by the author as a *tragicomedia*. For a more complete analysis see Nora Eidelburg's study in *Teatro experimental hispanoamericano, 1960-1980: La realidad social como manipulación.*

[4] A *bulín* is a small apartment often used as a lover's rendezvous, but it can also mean a place to live.

[5] "The closing of bordellos ended an era in our country. . . .Local art, realist and naturalist, was always inspired by daily life, the profligate life. . . .With the removal of the stimulus [i.e., the bordello], art was affected, and many artists. . .lost the source of their inspiration" (Tulio Carella qtd. by Guy 183).

[6] Chambers, Ross. *Room for Maneuver: Reading (the) Oppositional (in) Narrative*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1991.

[7] Other plays that are of possible interest are: *Gardel, uma lembrança* (1987, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil), by Manuel Puig, and *Bailemos ese tango* (1994, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic), by Franklin Domínguez. Puig's play is a musical melodrama originally written in Portuguese during his residency in Brazil. Domínguez's play is a romantic encounter on stage between two old dance partners who revive the past.

[8] Kathleen Newman notes that Solanas's film was released in 1985 in Argentina and benefitted from the success of the Oscar-winning film *La historia oficial* which along with *Hombre mirando al sudeste* helped focus attention on Argentine cinema and stories of the dictatorship (248). Newman suggests that the fame won in the international markets accounted for the renewed interest in Argentina for films by and about Argentines (248).

[9] Also of interest is the play *El chalé de Gardel* (Uruguay , 1985) by Víctor Manuel Leites. See Luis Ordaz's summary and analysis of the play in *Inmigración, escena nacional y figuraciones de la tanguería.*

[10] Winner of the Premio Florencio for the best work by a national author in 1988.

[11] Pais has also published a trilogy of plays with Americo Torchelli, *Trilogía teatro tango* (1997) that includes: *El hombrecito* (1988), *Pobre tipo* (1994), and *Muñeca brava* (1996). These plays were written at distinct times, but with the intention of publishing them in a trilogy. Describing the project Pais states: "tuviera como centro al ciudadano común, sus sueños, sus ansias de libertad, sus frustraciones cotidianas" (introduction by Pais and Torchelli, 7-8). The first play, *El hombrecito* deals with "un hombre urbano" who sings tangos and is in search of freedom. *Pobre tipo* is a musical comedy that tries to dispute the traditional negative, pessimistic view of the tango, by revealing its "real" purpose: a love song. Finally, *Muñeca brava* is a comedy about the poetry contained in the lyrics of the tango, and also explores the stereotypes of the *macho* and the woman who tries to exercise her own power.

[12] Of interest in this version of the tango, is the reversal of the traditional concept of the musical form as a forum for men to bemoan their abandonment by a heartless and independent woman. In Pais's play, Violeta, a mother, laments the disappearance of her daughter through a terroristic act. In this tango, a woman cries over the loss of another woman, but it is not a simple

abandonment, but rather a kidnapping that leaves her alone. Here, even the tango experiences a new identity at the close of the 20th century.

[13] As proof of the continued popularity that Gardel enjoys, the Uruguayan newspaper *El Observador*'s article "Un corto inédito de Gardel" from January 29, 2000, comments on the discovery of a roll of film that contains three cuts lasting approximately seven minutes of Gardel. The newspaper reports that the film has been valued at US$80,000, in spite of its brevity.

[14] The Uruguayan newspaper *El Observador* reports in the article titled "Inusual producto de exportación" from February 18, 2000, that a group named Malajunta Tango Producciones has developed a program to export performances of the tango into foreign markets. Created as a final project for a class on Foreign Commerce, the students inspired by their passion for the tango have designed a web page (planeta.i.com.uy/malajunta) to describe and offer their services on the world market.

The Argentine newspaper *El clarin* also reports on the exportation of the tango in their issue from January 23, 2000. In the article titled "Nacha Guevara's triunfa en España" Guevara's performance in the musical that won the title of Best Musical for 1999 in Argentina, *En el 2000 también (La vida en tiempo de tango)*, is a testimony to the staying power of the tango craze in Argentina and abroad.

Corpse and *Corpus*: Em-bodying Evita

Eva María (Ibarguren) Duarte de Perón's ascent from nobody to somebody is the stuff of legends. Her transformation from a poor, uneducated country girl into the elegant and powerful wife of the president of Argentina is the fairy tale that continues to fascinate Argentina and the world long after her death in 1952.[1] Perhaps most compelling is the legacy that Evita left. Her multifaceted image represents simultaneously all points on the moral spectrum, and she is both equally admired and despised. In the small 5'2" body that traveled from the pampas to Buenos Aires, to Europe and back, and through all sorts of political struggles rests the myth of a nation: it lives on in an embalmed body that defies time, resting in a mausoleum in the Recoleta Cemetery of Buenos Aires, or does it?

A great mystery for fans and critics alike, the true whereabouts of Evita's body continues to haunt the Argentine nation. The compelling stories of embalming, secret wax models, unmarked graves, and burials in Europe still provoke morbid curiosity in much of Argentina's population and beyond the Argentine borders. How could one woman and her body cause such scandal a half a century after her death? To answer this question it is necessary to understand the varying ideologies that Evita came to embody in her lifetime and beyond. Evita, her detractors, and her supporters all contributed to the fashioning of myths surrounding her life and work. These myths are often contradictory, and it is the combination of incongruous portrayals that most closely

characterizes the image that Evita created for herself. The public's opinion of Evita was the direct result of her own active participation in the creation of roles that were frequently oxymoronic. The duality that Evita perpetuated has made her an attractive figure for discussing the oppositional forces within Argentina. Both dramatists and citizens in Argentina and outside its borders recognized how Evita employed the slippery performance of identity and seized it as a metaphor for illuminating Argentina's uneasy performance of national politics. The concept of the double, or the stand-in, that Evita created through her roles provided the nation with an icon that they could worship during moments of turmoil, and she, in turn, came to represent the instability as well as its possible solution. Evita's use of fairy tales, religion and theatrical spectacle as intertextual frames functioned as the basis for the bodily representation that she enacted and that subsequent actors have undertaken.

For the masses, Evita was a Cinderella story come true. The most widely known version of the Cinderella tale, of which there are hundreds of variants, is the one by Charles Perrault. In this familiar plot the ill-treated young woman endures all kinds of suffering at the hands of her evil step-mother and sisters. Ultimately she wins the favor of the handsome prince and goes on to live a life of luxury, a narrative that can easily be applied to Evita. Born as an illegitimate child, Evita was forced to endure the indignities that came with her status as part of the *casa chica*. Several accounts of her life include the humiliating scene at her father's funeral where she, her mother, and brother and sisters were denied

entry into the service because they were the great-unkept secret in the small town of Los Toldos.[2] Later in life Evita reasserted herself and closely came to resemble the protagonist of the Cinderella tale. As Huang Mei points out, the protagonist of the Cinderella story takes an active role in her destiny by crying out her despair to a fairy godmother who provides her with a means of getting to the ball (4). In Evita's case, the godmother is actually a male named Agustín Magaldi, a traveling tango singer, and the ball is the great *porteño* city, Buenos Aires. The reports vary as to whether Evita seduced and manipulated Magaldi into taking her with him, or whether he simply allowed her to accompany him to the capital city. Once there, Evita struggled until she finally met her prince charming, Juan Perón, the soon-to-be president of the Argentine nation. After she and Perón solidified their relationship, Evita began her life as the "Cinderella" of Argentina where she had designer clothing, jewels, and a Swiss bank account that may have held as much as $700,000,000 (J.Taylor 68). Adorned in furs and surrounded by wealth, when speaking to her *descamisados* Evita adopted the role of Cinderella. The classic fairy tale served her well and bolstered popular faith in the Peronist rhetoric that promised equality and prosperity to the most disenfranchised of the population. In his introduction to *Fairy Tale as Myth* Jack Zipes maintains that:

> The classical fairy tale makes it appear that we are all part of a universal community with shared values and norms, that we are all striving for the same happiness, that there are certain dreams and wishes which are

> irrefutable, that a particular type of behavior will produce guaranteed results, like living happily ever after with lots of gold in a marvelous castle, *our* castle and fortress that will forever protect us from inimical and unpredictable forces of the outside world. (5)

After all, the dream came true for Evita, so why not believe that Peronism would reward all their hard work with riches? And yet, the fantasy was riddled with a great number of paradoxes: Evita's hatred of the wealthy and her luxurious lifestyle is perhaps the most obvious, but her use of the Cinderella myth carried its own internal conflict as well.

The paradox is inherent in the Cinderella story as it is presented by Perrault. Mei finds that Perrault Christianized the tale to disseminate the values practiced by the upper class society. Furthermore, Mei points out that while, "on the one hand, the heroine is praised for her humility, her patience and self-effacement;. . .on the other hand, all the vivid details [also] hint at a longing and plotting girl, one who is the necessary underside of the Christianized heroine" (2-5). The combination of positive and negative attributes continues to be attributed to Evita and makes her a figure full of possibilities for speculation and study. As the title of Julie Taylor's book *Eva Perón: The Myths of a Woman* suggests, varying images of the Argentine icon exist. Specifically, she refers to two opposite views: the Lady of Hope and the woman of the Black Myth (J. Taylor 86). Others like Joseph A. Page extend the collection of identities attributed to Evita to include Evita the Whore, the Power behind Perón, Evita the Nazi, the

Spiritual Mother of all Argentine Children, and the Guerrilla (1-46). The list is most likely endless, but what is certain is that Evita and her public made a deliberate attempt to fashion the dialectically opposed roles in order to make them compatible. Somehow, Evita was able to wear both positive and negative masks at the same time. Central to the performances that Evita enacted is the notion of body and how it is perceived in both of these roles. The accounts of Evita's physical appearance differ dramatically. Many secondary accounts characterize her as a self-serving climber who used her body to advance herself in *porteño* society by sleeping her way to the top. As one writer describes her, it is clear that her body becomes the object of much attention: "though often described as buxom, Eva, with her country girl's speech, her country girl's taste in clothes, and her heavy, adolescent calves and ankles, was not particularly striking when placed alongside the beauties of Buenos Aires" (Harbinson 29). However, even with her "heavy calves and ankles" Evita appeared in publicity shots, many of which were subsequently banned by the later military dictatorship for being too provocative, though in none of them does she appear nude. Others often refer to her lips as a defining characteristic by pointing out their supposed sexual aura: "She was the macho's ideal victim-woman—don't those red lips still speak to the Argentine macho of her reputed skill in fellatio?" (Naipaul 107). Harbinson also writes, "her painted lips spoke to many of the whore's experience at fellatio, her brown eyes had learned to flash with feigned sensuality, and her

body, now slimmed down by constant ruthless dieting, was seductive in tight-fitting clothes" (37).

However, Evita's body is also presented in completely opposite terms. Through her physical appearance, Evita created the image of a princess through her elegant clothing and dyed blonde hair piled high on top of her head. When the economy began to slip out of control and inflation climbed, Evita recognized the need to adapt her physical appearance. She began to sport a more severe look, with her hair pulled tightly back, and she even restricted her clothing to somber suits. Harbinson notes that the first editions of Evita's *La razón de mi vida* contain photographs of her in ballgowns and jewels, but these were pulled and replaced with more austere images of her in dark suits when the economy declined (118). Through her various costumes, Evita played the part of the Cinderella and the shrewd politician, consolidating the dual roles that she came to embody. Jack Zipes argues for the evolution of the myth into the fairy tale, explaining that the myth is really the story of the beginning of each particular culture and its Supernatural Beings, used later as an example for behavior by the general population. The fairy tale follows the appearance of the myth and becomes a "doublet," as Zipes terms it, to the myth. For Zipes this means that:

> From the beginning, individual imaginations were countering the codified myths of a tribe or society that celebrated the power of gods with other 'non-authoritative' tales of their own that called upon and transformed the supernatural into magical and mysterious forces which could change their

> lives. . . .[Myths, folktales, and fairy tales] seem to be invested with an extraordinary mystical power so that we collapse the distinctions and feel compelled to return to them time and again for counsel and guidance, for hope that there is some divine order and sense to a chaotic world. (3)

When the role of Santa Evita is added into the equation, the way in which myth and fairy tale characterize the multifaceted persona that Evita embodies becomes clearer. The religious implications of Evita's actions have not escaped the public, and many have pointed out the similarities between Evita and Christ: both died at age 33, both came from humble beginnings, and both loved and cared for the poor. If what Zipes proposes about the connection between myths and fairy tales is true, it is possible to see the Cinderella fairy tale as the "doublet" of the Christ story, one that has been secularized and appropriated by Evita and her admirers as a model for behavior, specifically the politics of Peronism. Evita modeled herself after Christ in her actions toward the poor, and after her death her followers connected her with the religious icon. Evita's performance of a Christ-like role was the first step which suggested to others that she could be transformed into an icon. Just as the body of Christ represented the salvation of all people, if they converted to Christianity, the body of Evita came to be seen as a symbol in the struggle for a more just society for those who converted to Peronism. Evita's embalmed body defied death's destruction and was resurrected by her followers. Her body came to represent, as Christ did, a struggle between two opposing factions. Instead of being between the forces of Good and Evil,

however, it was between rich and poor. The most glaring example of the tension that the body represented was seen during the 70s when guerrilla groups used the missing body of Evita as provocation for violence against the former president, General Aramburu. Desiring the return of Peronism, the guerrillas adopted Evita as their call to arms, and when her body could not be found in Argentina, they killed Aramburu and kept his body as a bargaining tool for her return, and ultimately the return of Peronism (Fraser and Navarro 185-87). The resurrection of Evita is a secular version that parallels that of Christ, and elevates her to the same saintly stature. By intertwining the fairy tale of Cinderella and the story of Christ, Evita and her "cult" of followers collapse the myth and the fairytale, thereby producing a particular model for Argentine behavior. Both Evita and her supporters played a hand in mythologizing her performances; Evita enacted the fairy tale and her followers helped perpetuate her new reading of the story by continuing to keep her at the center stage of Argentine politics. In this case the "Cinderella" is a mischievous mixture of Christianity and underhanded maneuvering, which highlight the new adaptation that Evita used to challenge the traditional structure of the accepted values of the society during her lifetime. These challenges to institutionalized behaviors were prolonged by Evita's supporters and repeated through their performances of the politics of Peronism and defiance through the 70s. In order to create change in the life of the nation, Evita needed to find a new story to transform the traditional myth into an

innovative fairy tale that would teach new values to a stagnant, patriarchal society.

Escaping her poor life, Eva completely remade herself into Evita. Upon arriving in Buenos Aires she began to look for work as an actress. Starring in radio programs and feature films, Evita began to hone her style and prepare herself for the ultimate role she would undertake as the powerful wife of the President.[3] As Page reports, the *telenovela* left its mark on Evita and she often incorporated the distinctive style of the radio programs in later years: "Many of her addresses as First Lady would incorporate melodramatic rhetoric (indeed, an author of radio dramas served for years as one of her speechwriters), and her own style of speaking and writing borrowed heavily from the genre" (6). Her career as an actress was just the first step in sketching out a public persona. In 1943, Eva secured the main role in the radio series *Heroines of History* where she played the Empress Josephine of France, Tsarina Alexandra and Catherine the Great of Russia, Elizabeth I of England, Madame Chiang Kai-shek, Lady Emma Hamilton (the mistress of Lord Horatio Nelson), Sarah Bernhardt, and Isadora Duncan (Page 7).

In that same year, 1943, Evita met Perón and assumed her next role at his side, first as mistress and then as wife of the fast-rising colonel. As Page suggests, "Life would soon imitate art" (7). Determined to carve out a new niche, Evita changed her name first to Duarte and then to Perón through marriage in 1945 and altered her birthdate so that instead of the actual date of May 7,

1919, the year read 1922 on a forged birth certificate.[4] As has been suggested, "marriage was like a fairy tale or the climax of a movie. Quite against all rational expectations, after much initial suffering and a surprising dénouement, she now found herself made new, the wife of a presidential candidate" (Fraser and Navarro 71). Her first of many roles was thus consolidated.

One of the strongest examples of Evita's attempts to carve out a public role for herself can be found in the widely popular *La razón de mi vida* which has been translated as *My Mission in Life*, and *Mi mensaje* translated as *My Message*. Though many argue that the works were not really written by Evita, but instead by ghostwriters, their claims about the true authorship are not a primary concern in this study, because Evita used the books as another campaign for self-promotion.[5] In effect, these texts became supporting scripts for Evita's public performances. Evita's approval of the books, and especially the vigorous sales, point to the potential for adding to an already salable image that she created through the years. On the third of November in 1951, as Evita entered the hospital, the manuscript of her auto/biography *La razón de mi vida* was on its way to the publishing house (Page 24). The main structure of the book is one of opposition, and the rhetorical strategies within it mimic this structure. As with the Cinderella story that Evita imitated, the theme of good versus evil is ever-present in Evita's attack on the upper classes, as well as in her own self-perception. As David William Foster notes, "Indeed, the dominant figure of diction in Eva Perón's book is the disjunctive formula 'not A, but [rather] B'"

(73). Foster also notes that within this same strategy, Evita develops dramatic roles that she uses to illustrate the dichotomous nature of her image. Foster explains that "One of the rhetorical ploys used by the narrator of *Razón* is to speak of dramatic roles and to oppose artificial theatricality with the authenticity of her spontaneous vitalism" (71). There is an inherent paradox in the characterization of Evita presented in *La razón de mi vida* because she consciously employed these dramatic roles, and therefore discounted any type of spontaneity. Evita was deliberately theatrical in her public appearances, in her clothing and even in the writings she used to propagate her agenda. Foster's comment about the biography strikes at the heart of the paradox inherent in performance; no two performances are identical, yet they are often repeated.

There is also a great deal of oppositionality inherent in the latter work, *Mi mensaje*, that appeared after her death in 1952. These two texts work in concert to shape Evita's presence in the collective memory of the Argentine public and the world. Evita's ability to combine both sides of the coin in her public persona, and use the same strategy to rail against certain sectors of society, is an integral element in her theatricality. The duality that she symbolizes not only allows for multiple interpretations of her significance, but also provides a rich canvas for exploration by those wishing to represent her on the stage. Likewise, Evita's dual dynamic also mimics the slippery nature of theater in general because theater is at once a reality and a representation of reality. Theatrical spectacle mirrors the incongruities of society and is therefore the perfect metaphor for

showing the parallels between Evita's inherent theatricality and the national politics staged in Argentina that later caused deep rifts between Peronists and non-Peronists. Again with Evita, as in the cases of Gardel and Frida, the creation of multiple roles allows for a liberal application of meanings, performances, and ideologies that these figures connote. However, what is unique about Evita was the extent of her manipulation of the public through texts where she describes the creation of her dual roles.

Specifically, in *La razón de mi vida* several passages point to the precise artistry with which Evita, and perhaps others, shaped her legacy through the marriage of opposite images. One of the sections of her (auto)biography states:

> A la doble personalidad de Perón debía corresponder una doble personalidad en mí: una, la de Eva Perón, mujer del Presidente, cuyo trabajo es sencillo y agradable, trabajo de los días de fiesta, de recibir honores, de funciones de gala; y la otra, la de Evita, mujer del Líder de un pueblo que ha depositado en él toda su fe, toda su esperanza y todo su amor. (88)

In the following chapter, (s)he goes on further to explain the opposing roles that she plays:

> No vaya a creerse por esto que digo que la tarea de Evita me resulte fácil....En cambio el papel de Eva Perón me parece fácil. Y no es extraño. ¿Acaso no resulta siempre más fácil representar un papel en el teatro que vivirlo en realidad?

> Y en mi caso lo cierto es que como Eva Perón represento un viejo papel que otras mujeres en todos los tiempos han vivido ya, pero como Evita vivo una realidad que tal vez ninguna mujer haya vivido en la historia de la humanidad. (94)

The decision to create performances is a conscious one on Eva's/Evita's part. However, as Foster correctly points out, only one of the performances is acknowledged. It must not be overlooked, however, that there is no clear dividing line between the authentic and the representation. Because Eva/Evita staged so many roles during her lifetime the constant overlapping makes her true identity elusive and multiple.

The two sides that are described in her auto/biography are even more pronounced in *Mi mensaje*. Evita again explains her motivation for all her work in terms of opposition: "I recognize only two words as the favored daughters of my heart: hate and love" (66). It is also clear that Evita recognized her role on the stage of national politics that she and Perón created during their years in the presidency. Evita even goes so far as to call the struggle between Peronism and anti-Peronistas a drama. Complaining about the lack of support from the military and the Church, Evita states:

> If there is one thing for which I reproach the military and clerical hierarchies, it is precisely their coldness and indifference before the drama of my people. Yes. I am not exaggerating. What is happening to our people is a drama, an authentic and extraordinary drama for the

> ownership of life…of happiness… of the pure and simple well being that my people have been dreaming about since the beginning of time. (59)

Consequently, it appears that Evita was aware of the drama that she was helping to create and had cast herself in one of the lead roles-- the courageous leader fighting for Good against Evil. The fact that she frames her fight for Peronist politics in these terms is significant because it furthers her image as the saintly figure that many have tried to put forth. In the section titled "Living with the People," Evita is characterized with much of the same description as Christ. The section begins:

> It is nice to live with the people. Feeling them close, suffering their pain, and rejoicing in the simple joy of their hearts. But none of all that can be if it hasn't previously been decided to…become one body with them, so that every pain, every sorrow and worry, and all the joy of the people is as if it were ours. (73)

Here her (the ghostwriter's?) use of the notion of "body" is of extreme importance, because just as the body of Christ has become a symbol for Christianity and the Kingdom of God, Evita's dying body becomes the symbol for Perón's "kingdom" in Argentina. Her wasted body serves as the metaphor for the suffering people she attended and becomes a public spectacle in death, just as the Bible reports Christ had done centuries before on the cross. The blending of the Cinderella story and the story of Christ provided Evita the perfect combination of secular and religious images. This mixture lent her a powerful

base from which she could impose her political ideology on the people, remake history, and challenge the myths of the nation and its birth created by the previous ruling oligarchies.

The idea of combining the secular and religious in government is not a new one. However, by intertwining the fairy tale of a royal princess with the story of the Son of God, Evita called upon a medieval notion of government. Ernst H. Kantorowicz explains in depth the evolution of political theology during the Medieval Age in his historical study of the notion of the "King's two bodies." According to Kantorowicz the intimate relation between the Church and State during the medieval period led to a great deal of mutual borrowing of policies and terminology. Through the years, the idea of the various types of *corpus* used by the Church and eventually the State evolved and changed. The terms *corpus Christi*, *corpus mysticum* and *corpus verum* underwent complex transformations and ultimately these changes became the basis for the distinctions between the Church, Christ and the body politic.[6] From these clarifications grew the notion of the two bodies of Christ, the actual physical one and the spiritual one manifested in the Church (Kantorowicz 198). In other words, as Kantorowicz explains, the division did not grow out of the two natures attributed to Christ--divine and human--but rather out of an attempt to distinguish between an individual body and a collective body (198). Kantorowicz maintains that this distinction was a purely sociological one (198): the "*corpus mysticum* came to be less and less mystical as time passed on, and came to mean simply the Church as

a body politic or, by transference, and body politic of the secular world" (Kantorowicz 206). This development of the various religious concepts is important in the secular realm as well, because it later became the basis for the precedent of the "King's two Bodies," a political practice that continues to shape many political structures around the world.

At the same time that these changes were taking place in the Church, political ideologies stemming from the revival of the writings by Aristotle were also coming into vogue. The notion of "body politic" appeared around the thirteenth century, and the term mystical body was soon applied to any *corpus morale et politicum* in the Aristotelian sense (Kantorowicz 210).[7] Eventually, the concept of the composite body and composite authority could be understood as the King with his council and parliament, and in the same terms as the pope as the head of the *corpus mysticum.* As a result, the governments of especially England and France began to borrow and combine Aristotelian concepts about political ideology and Christian theology to establish a structure for regal power. The hierarchy of the Church was adapted to fit the patriarchal structure of feudal monarchies where the king provides his subjects with land for farming and living, and protection in return for taxes.

The parallels between the feudal notion of the King's two Bodies and the Peronist government in Argentina are striking. And yet, although the superficial structure is similar the underlying motivations are quite subversive. Whereas the Medieval concepts of Church and State were developed around a patriarchal

structure that privileged male figures as the leaders, the Peronist government differed from this model quite significantly because of the powerful position that Evita occupied. Though the government officially favored Juan Perón as the real power of the Argentine nation, the unofficial position points to a distinctly different version where Evita wielded as much, perhaps more, power than her husband. Evita's subversive nature rests on the image that she created through official and unofficial propaganda about her own public persona, because she was able to maintain the front of the submissive wife, and at the same time become a "ruler" in her own right, with access to power, money, and most importantly, the people.

J. Taylor explains the unusual activity that Evita claimed as part of her duties as the new wife of President Perón: she pronounced herself First Lady of the Republic and began to deliver speeches alongside her husband (39). As might be expected, this bold act provoked severe criticism because no other wives of previous presidents had ever done so. However, in 1946 Evita managed to regain popularity and was crowned with the title of "Queen of Labor" by the sugar industry in Tucumán (J. Taylor 40). Later that same year, Evita strengthened her contact with the labor sector and was named First Worker of Argentina in July and Queen of Labor in November (J. Taylor 40). By 1947, Evita had bought the newspaper *Democracia* and a new title was added to the list of honors already received: Lady of Hope (J. Taylor 42). Through her speeches and efforts, Evita had accomplished the impossible. She had turned the

Argentine nation on its head and had garnered so much support that it was quite impossible to ignore her political clout. Interestingly enough, Evita had managed to promote herself as the "Queen" of the nation, under the guise of simply representing her husband. As the media carefully pointed out, she had become interchangeable with her husband: "The presence of Señora Perón always causes joy amongst the *descamisados* of the nation precisely because this presence is considered that of her husband" (*Democracia* 1 November 1946, qtd. by J. Taylor 91). By playing the role of the dutiful wife sent to represent her husband, Evita subversively continued to play Cinderella and eventually became "Queen" in the eyes of the nation. While Diana Taylor correctly argues that Evita performed her roles of wife and mother of the Nation within a binary system based on gendered divisions (*Disappearing Acts* 46-47), her ultimate accomplishment was to use this system to her advantage and remake it to suit her own purposes. What is remarkable is the subtlety with which Evita was able to stage her own coup, all the while catering to the *machista* stereotypes who surrounded her.

Perhaps one of her most significant acts of defiance within the system was the creation of the Feminist wing of the Peronist Party. In 1949, Evita restructured the Peronist Party after meeting with the Superior Council (J. Taylor 47). She created an independent branch for women to join the party and allowed female suffrage. Within four days of its formation, the members elected Evita as their president, solidifying her position as co-ruler of Argentina (J. Taylor 47).

As J. Taylor notes, this was a significant change for the political system in Argentina because the Feminist Branch contributed in the months following its inception female deputies, senators, and the first female congressional president (47). With the creation of the Feminist Branch of the Peronist Party, Evita was able to work within the political system and support her husband in a very public way. However, the implications of the new political wing of Peronism fundamentally altered the power structure in Argentina, allowing women access to the decision-making monopoly and thereby toppling the patriarchal norms of the oligarchy. Again, Evita presented an image based on dichotomies: outward support for Peronism and the patriarchal norms of the society and inward support for feminist policies and the dismantling of her husband's exclusive control over the politics of Argentina in her favor. In this way, Evita established herself as a powerful ruler, rivaling her husband's popularity. As the female counterpart to the president, Evita translated this role into an almost regal one. Consequently, the Medieval concept of the king as head of the body politic is translated into Evita's own twentieth century version where she presides over the nation in her various duties as "Queen," which became the natural extension of her Cinderella role.

Through the creation of the *Fundación Eva Perón* (the Eva Perón Foundation), Evita solidified her role as the benevolent ruler even further by administering aid to the poor. The Foundation became a legal entity in 1948 (J. Taylor 47). With this move, Evita literally laid the foundation for her

complementary role as the "Spiritual Mother of All Argentine Children," a title bestowed on her in April of the same year. Again, Evita set up a counter image of the patriarchal system that was based on the model of Christianity, where in this case a woman was the spiritual leader.[8] Employing the same norms of Christianity, Evita again was able to reverse the power structure and place herself at the top while she appeared to be working within the established system. In this way, Evita takes on the Christ story and makes it her own. By helping the poor and disenfranchised in Argentina and abroad, Evita proved her saintly image. Likewise, by becoming the Spiritual Mother of the Argentine children she paralleled the role of Christ as spiritual teacher to the world. As evidence of her commitment to the poor, by 1947 Evita was already shipping goods for charity abroad to post-war Europe. In 1948 she was working on a housing project in the province of Buenos Aires, had installed drinking water in Córdoba, and established her first Transitional Home for women immigrants from the interior (J. Taylor 47). Her deeds continued through the years and eventually began to take over the domain of public health and education initiatives. Evita created the Children's City, set up nurses' schools, housing for students, vacation colonies, clinics for sick children, hospitals, and schools (J. Taylor 49). In addition, the stories about Evita's personal distribution of goods are still legendary. Often working 14-18 hour days, Evita doled out money, medicine, houses, shoes, and even wedding dresses to the poor and earned her reputation as a saint. Some claim she is the Argentine Madonna, but I feel that her actions

much more closely resemble those of Christ, and her later apotheosis after her untimely death makes her more like his female counterpart. Her rule was divine, in perhaps both senses of the word. Here the parallel with Christ as the head of the Church, and the King as head of the State is collapsed into one position and altered to fit Evita's own agenda. Evita's body then becomes the physical, spiritual and political *corpus* of the Nation.

Nowhere is this integration of the sacred and the political *corpus* more apparent than in the spectacle surrounding her death. Evita's death was a monumental theatrical event for the Argentine nation that lasted for weeks. When news of her passing was announced, the city ground to a halt. Cinemas and theaters closed down, interrupting the movies and plays that were in progress; restaurants, bars and discotheques also closed immediately, leaving the city with an unusual silence (Fraser and Navarro 163). After initial preparations by her embalmer, Dr. Pedro Ara, Evita's body was put on display in the CGT headquarters for the public to view from July 27, 1952 until August 8 of that same year (J. Taylor 64-65). Mourners lined up for 35 blocks while they waited to pay their respects (J. Taylor 65). On August 9 a procession then carried her body to the National Congress, and two days later, Evita's body was transported by gun carriage to the Central Obrera (J. Taylor 65). This last procession was quite elaborate with police patrols, 35 men and ten women dressed symbolically as *descamisados* who pulled the carriage. Cadets from military academies, along with students from the Student City that Evita had created and nurses from her

Foundation, accompanied the body (J. Taylor 65-66). Many erected altars to their dead saint and continued to pray to her, and numerous funeral ceremonies were conducted in her honor throughout the country (J. Taylor 66). Others report that the government suspended all official activities for two days, flags were flown at half mast for ten days, and the CGT declared a two day strike for all but the most essential industries. A month of compulsory observation of mourning meant mourning clothes were to be worn by all members of the CGT (Fraser and Navarro 164).

During the first weekend after her death, iconographic images of Evita could be seen all over Buenos Aires. Gigantic photographs of Evita were plastered on buildings and billboards at major intersections throughout the city. On a screen at the obelisk a movie describing all of her accomplishments ran continuously (Fraser and Navarro 165). At night there were even processions of people carrying lighted torches in the streets (Fraser and Navarro 165). Evita's image was projected everywhere, and her death threw the country into a deep and collective mourning. Many participated in the ritual of her death by standing in line to see her body, some created their own religious ceremonies and prayed to her as they might pray to the saints in church, and others took to the streets in processions. Her death became a national theatrical event staged by the people.

Evita's death became a focal point for the entire Argentine nation for several weeks, and continued to be important in the decades that followed for a complicated set of reasons. As Peter Metcalf and Richard Huntington explain:

"the issue of death throws into relief the most important cultural values by which people live their lives and evaluate their experiences. Life becomes transparent against the background of death, and fundamental social and cultural issues are revealed" (25). This seems to be especially true in the life and death of Evita. Her death immediately became a political and theatrical spectacle. In many cultures the funeral rites for kings and rulers take on grand theatrical elements and become public theater, and in 1952 Argentina was no exception. The lavish process of embalming, the extended period of mourning and the public displays of grief for Evita certainly qualify as this sort of public theater that Metcalf and Huntington propose. These grandiose funeral rites play an important role in the political stability of the country. According to Metcalf and Huntington, the funeral serves to refocus attention on the center, and provides an opportunity for ritual display at a vulnerable moment of transition (140). In many cultures, the funeral process revolved around the cremation of the king's corpse. However, since a certain period was required for the drying of bones, the coronation of a new ruler often preceded the cremation. In this way, a certain continuity of the kingship was established in this waiting period. This treatment of the corpse also resulted in the creation of "royal relics that reinforced the centripetal tendencies of the kingdom" (Metcalf and Huntington 140-41). Though Evita was not cremated, the embalming and subsequent displays of her body parallel the same crucial refocusing of attention on the center (Peronism) while diverting would-be attempts to dislodge the political power built by the Peróns. As Metcalf and

Huntington maintain: "The carefully staged cremations of kings were a principal weapon by which their successors maintained or advanced their standing" (144). History shows that this was exactly the case for President Perón.

With the death of Evita, Juan Perón lost a crucial link in the Peronist political machine. On the fourth of June 1952 Perón assumed for the second time the Presidency of the government on the anniversary of the 1943 coup. Evita died on the 26th of July, only a few weeks later. This was a period of great instability in Argentina. In the fall of 1951, General Menéndez led a coup against Perón, and though it failed, it made evident the anti-Peronist sentiments that were present in certain sectors of the military (Floria and Belsunce 414). Also, news of the corruption inherent in the Peronist government began to leak out to the public. Carlos A. Floria and César A. García Belsunce mention as a prime example of the rampant corruption the "*affaire* Juan Duarte," Evita's brother who had become rich working in the government. He was later denounced by Perón and found dead, a reported suicide (415). The first lady of Argentina had been accused for some time of nepotism: she appointed her brother as the private secretary of the President, and her sisters and their husbands were appointed to posts as Inspector of Postal Savings, director of the National Normal School, national senator for the province of Buenos Aires, member of the Supreme Court, and head of customs for the port of Buenos Aires (J. Taylor 53). Some also point to Evita's extortionist practices requiring donations of money to her projects of social aid and to her own bank accounts under the threat of personal and financial

ruin. J. Taylor cites the closing of the Mu-Mu candy company and the Massone pharmaceutical laboratories as examples of Evita's hard-line political tactics for enforcing political compliance (48). Others might cite more examples, but it is clear that the great spectacle of death carried out on the stage of national politics masked the rumblings of anti-Peronist detractors and ensured a renewed respect for the now deceased and the President himself. Perón was able to stave off a rebellion for approximately three years after the death of his wife until September 1955 when the tide turned against him and the armed forces took over the government by force (Floria and Belsunce 428-30).

In reality Evita's body and its whereabouts actually kept the nation's attention for the next twenty years as citizens speculated on the return of the former president Perón from his exile in Spain along with that of his deceased wife's body. Many hoped Perón would again lead Argentina and return the country to stability. Along with the 70s renewed interest in Peronism, guerrilla fighters took interest in Evita again and began to use her as their symbol. As one guerrilla fighter's rhetoric demonstrates, Evita's symbolic quality was appreciated even two decades after her death:

> When we are discouraged, we draw our strength from Eva Perón. She is the example of the revolution; she is the revolutionary spirit. She exemplified personal force at the service of the revolution: the dedication to the process of change, to the accomplishment of a goal. In all this she is like *el che* Guevara. For us Evita is the spirit of the guerrilla. Juan

> Perón is the content of the resistance: we fight in order to bring back Perón, and we fight with many of his tactics. But we are fighting because of Evita—and for her." (qtd. from an interview by J. Taylor 128)

The recovery of her body became an important element of the Left's fight for resistance, and her cadaver was finally put to rest in Recoleta cemetery during the second presidency of Juan Perón in the early 70s, or so it is believed. The mystery and intrigue surrounding the disappearance and recovery of Evita's body is the main focus of Tomás Eloy Martínez's novel *Santa Evita* published in 1996, proof that the drama still lives on, even 44 years after her death, her political empire long since dismantled. Eloy Martínez's historical novel traces the twists and turns that Evita's body and its doubles encountered in the decades following her death. In his fictional account, which is based on historical facts, Eloy Martínez describes the journey that Evita's body made from the hands of Dr. Ara, her embalmer, to those of Coronel Koenig, and from there to the grave in Italy, and back to Argentina.[9] The audience keeps coming back for more.

As Peggy Phelan reminds us, in the theater the actor performs a necessary action by aiding our understanding of those concepts that are at the same time real and unreal. These are precisely the extreme sort of oppositions that surround Evita's contradictory images and make her such a difficult public persona to identify completely. Phelan explains:

> Within the arc of resemblance and mimesis that perspective inaugurates, the stand-in stands in for a real that, like God and the Other, forever

> eludes us. The point is not so much to 'find' the Other, but rather to play the drama in such a way that the stand-ins come to reveal that *the kernel of the drama of the Other is that the Other is always a stand-in.* (*Mourning Sex* 33)

This inherent metatheatricality of always *standing in* for something or someone else was the basis of Evita's public persona. She was the stand-in for Cinderella, for Christ, for Perón, always representing the *Other* for the Argentine nation, the other way of life, the other side of patriarchal power, the other side of good or evil. She was an elusive persona who embodied shifting meanings and perspectives.

Often the conflicting roies that Evita played in real life made it difficult to understand just what she represented for the public, and many times what she stood for changed quickly. The instability of Evita's personality is the target of the Argentine/French dramatist Copi's theatrical work *Eva Perón*. His work dates from 1970, and has recently been translated from French to Spanish. Copi, who was born Raúl Natalio Roque Damonte, escaped with his family to France during the Peronist period and lived in exile until 1955 when Perón was overthrown. His work offers a dark vision of the Peronist government, and most especially of Evita. The images presented are in fact so unflattering that his play caused a great deal of controversy. The debut on March 2, 1970 in the theater l'Epée de Bois scandalized the press to such a point that the newspaper Le Figaro printed that it was a "carnavalesque nightmare" and a "macabre masquerade"

(my translation, Monteleone 5-8). In addition to its wild success, the play also suffered a terrorist attack during one of its showings that left the theater badly damaged, although it caused no injuries (Monteleone 8). Due to the incendiary nature of the play, the Argentine government banned Copi from entering Argentina before 1984, more than a decade after the premiere of the play (Monteleone 8).

The play presents the last period of Evita's life, just before she succumbs to cancer. Copi presents a grotesque parody of the stereotypes that characterize Evita's legacy. She appears to swing from periods of lucidity to insanity in a matter of moments. At some moments her cruelty toward those surrounding her, including her own family members, is almost unbearable, but it is counter-balanced by moments of unexpected tenderness. Copi also presents an unflattering vision of Perón because he is characterized as an emasculated and bumbling leader who has lost his spark of inspiration. Perón rarely enters the dialogue and most often is only referenced by others, a technique that contributes even more to his lack of political presence. At the same time, Copi hints at various moments in the play of the possibility that Evita's death was only an invention, a farce for the public and even for her own family. Copi develops a bittersweet story that exposes Evita's dark side and plants doubt in the audience's mind as to whether or not she really "passed into immortality" (the famous line repeated in radio broadcasts every night at 8:25 to commemorate her death) in the same way that the public has always believed.[10]

From the initial scene of the play, which is reminiscent of the beginning of Alfred Jarry's *Ubu roi*, the character Evita shocks the audience when the first word she utters is "Mierda" (Copi 19).[11] A few lines later she rants with her mother as she searches desperately for her favorite gown:

> ¡Tengo cáncer! ¡Y estoy harta de las migrañas de Perón! ¡Un cáncer no se cura con aspirina! ¡Voy a morirme y a vos te importa un pito! ¡A nadie le importa! ¡Están esperando el momento en que yo reviente para heredarme! ¿Querés conocer el número de mi caja fuerte en Suiza? ¿eh, vieja zorra? ¡El número de mi caja fuerte no se lo doy a nadie! ¡Me voy a morir con él! ¡Vas a tener que ir a pedir limosna! ¡O a hacer la calle, como antes! ¡Anda a despertar a los demás! (Copi 22)

Eva and her mother continue to wrangle over the location of the key to the (in)famous Swiss bank account throughout the play. However, after exchanging ugly words throughout the play, Eva suddenly has a change of heart:

> Madre: ¿Vos me odiás, Evita?
>
> Evita: Yo no te odio. ¿Qué querés decir?
>
> Madre: Quiero decir que me odiás; lo sé. Pero hay muchas cosas que no pasan por mi culpa. A mí también tienen que comprenderme.
>
> Evita: ¿No te di siempre toda la plata que querías?
>
> Madre: Sí.
>
> Evita: Entonces, volvé a tu cuarto.

Madre: .... Sos la única cosa que quiero en el mundo. Lo de la caja fuerte y el número que me diste ¿era la verdad o era un chiste?

Evita: Era verdad, boluda. Andá a tu cuarto. (Copi 76-77)

In this way, Copi sets Evita up as a character riddled with incongruities that never quite come together. She is simultaneously good and evil, saint and sinner, weak and strong, a human being and a grotesque parody. The double layering of the intertext of Evita's multiple personas from her real life, and the split-personalities of the Evita character in Copi's play, evoke the concept of the stand-in, the ever-elusive Other that Phelan theorizes. Copi also understood the fundamental theatricality that Evita embodied and refers to it on several occasions, though he presents it in a negative light. At one point in the play, Evita declares that after her death: "quiero estar en la C.G.T.[12] y no en cualquier lado: en el *anfiteatro* más grande. ¡No quiero estar en un mausoleo!" (Copi, 52, emphasis added). Copi highlights the theatrical spectacle of Evita's death by having the character Evita suggest the use of an amphiteater as the site for displaying her dead body.

At another point in the play, Evita bestows her attention on her nurse and tells her to choose one of her gowns to keep. After making the young nurse try it on, Evita tells her: "Dejame apoyarme sobre vos...con este vestido es como si me apoyara sobre mí misma, sabés, me da menos vergüenza encontrarme en este estado" (Copi 78). The final reference that Evita makes to her own theatricality comes at the end of the play: "Hasta mi muerte, hasta *la puesta en escena* de mi

muerte debí hacerla completamente sola. Sola" (my italics, Copi 81). Ultimately, the overlapping theatricality of the real life Evita and the one that Copi creates in his play demonstrates how the metaphor of metatheater can be used to explain the performance of politics that occurred on the national stage of Argentina. Actors, theatrical characters and real people often represent familiar roles on conventional and nontraditional stages, and thereby give voice to new problems within the confines of familiar roles. Phelan is helpful in understanding how the theater functions as a tool for questioning national identity and uncovering the nation's agenda :

> All of our deepest questions are addressed to interlocutors who are not here, who cannot hear us....Theatre is the arena in which the form and fury of the question is most consistently staged. Characters on-stage stand in for primary others who are not there, and this is the reason why the heroes of Western modern theatre, Beckett, Genet, and Artaud, are so thoroughly 'theological' theatre makers. (*Mourning Sex* 32)

The frame of the Christ story that Evita modeled her actions after filled a certain void for the population of the 40s and the 50s in Argentina, namely, the concerns of class differences and power-struggles between factions of the society and even between the two sexes. The population turned to the stand-in figure that Eva staged of Christ and found a response for questions that have no real solution. This was again the case in 1970, another time of turmoil when the military dictatorships squelched civil liberties and political instability turned the country

on end with rumors of Perón's return. The stand-in character of Evita again represented the drama of the Argentine population's fears about what the outcome might be for the nation. Though Evita appears on stage, she is really not there anymore. She is only a representation and thus occupies the place of the unattainable Other. It is to this Other that the questions of her legacy and the future of Argentina are directed by Copi. By conjuring up her spirit in such an unattractive way, Copi struck a nerve and went much further than just presenting a parody of a famous figure.[13] This stirring of deeper fears and questions about fundamental aspects of the nation's consciousness provoked a strong reaction within the public, leading the Argentine officials to ban Copi's return to the nation for 14 years.

The other disturbing aspects of the play are the references to uncertainties about Evita's death that are sprinkled throughout the work. The first hint occurs when Evita and her mother are still arguing over the Swiss bank account number and her mother, exasperated over Evita's frenzied searching for her favorite dress, rails: "Y encima, ni siquiera está enferma. Es una de sus artimañas políticas" (Copi 31). Copi starts to plant suspicion about Evita's death and continues through the mother's voice later on when she states: "Te vi cambiar las ampollas. Dos veces te seguí a la noche y vi cómo cambiabas las ampollas del medicamento por no sé qué cosa. Así conmigo no hagas la comedia" (42). Evita further confuses the issue when she complains to Perón and one of the assistants named Ibiza, although neither one is present: "¡Me muero!....Perón está por

envenenarme. Puso veneno en las inyecciones....¡Quisieron operarme por mi cáncer de matriz, por mi cáncer de garganta, por mi cáncer de pelo, por mi cáncer de cerebro, por mi cáncer de culo! ¡Porque yo me cago en su gobierno de pelotudos!" (Copi 62-63). Here, the character Evita suggests that her sickness has only been an invention by those around her and the result of Perón's poisoning. Her "cancer" could have been any one of those kinds that she mentions above, but uterine cancer was chosen as the official cause. As the play draws to a close Evita again suggests that the cancer was just an invented story as she converses with Ibiza: "El cáncer fue idea tuya. No sé cómo explicarlo, pero lo del cáncer fue idea tuya. No es algo que hubiera inventado por mí misma, semejante enfermedad" (Copi 83). The last references to her immortality appear when Perón speaks at Evita's funeral. Perón proclaims in front of the assembled masses:

> Eva Perón no está muerta, está más viva que nunca. Hasta hoy la hemos amado; a partir de hoy adoraremos a Evita. Su imagen será reproducida hasta el infinito en pinturas y en estatuas para que su recuerdo permanezca vivo en cada escuela, en cada rincón de trabajo, en cada hogar....¡Eva Perón, señores, está más viva que nunca! (Copi 86-87)

This discourse by Perón parallels perfectly the concepts regarding royal effigies and the idea of the immortal king posited by Metcalf and Huntington. Perón's words are an appropriate funeral speech designed to keep the image of the deceased in the hearts and minds of the public forever. However, just before this

last speech, Copi plants the sinister possibility that Evita may not have died as believed. In the scene before Perón's farewell address to his wife, Ibiza and Evita stab the nurse whom Evita has allowed to dress up in her gown. After instructing Ibiza to bring her the nurse's cloak and her hat, Evita remarks: "No quiero correr el riesgo de ser reconocida" (Copi 83). Later, after Evita leaves the scene, Ibiza places the body of the nurse on top of one of the trunks of Evita's clothing, places a wig on her head, and leaves. In this context, Perón's speech about Evita's apparent ability to live on after death provides an ironic twist for the audience. Here, Copi sows the seeds of unrest as he plants the possibility for Evita's possible "second-coming" in this lifetime.[14]

The consistent use of the concept of the double in Copi's play has many implications for the Argentine nation and its view of history. Argentina is characterized by duality and it can be seen in the split between Peronists and non-Peronists, in shifts between military dictatorships and democracy, the rifts between the *descamisados* and the oligarchy, between the capital, Buenos Aires, and the rest of the country, and between the traditional notions of civilization and barbarism touted by Sarmiento. These divisions find their most palpable expression and exaggeration in the character Evita. The "second-coming," the Manichean personality of Evita, the real and the created Evita, the sick and healthy Evita, along with the myths about whether she is a saint or a sinner, all contribute to the parodic style present in Copi's work. By parodying the theatrical roles that Evita created, and ridiculing them to an extreme, Copi

provoked an extreme reaction in Argentine public because of the far-reaching implications of his critique of Evita.

The technique of parody allows Copi not only the chance to present unfavorable images of Evita, but it also provides a way of showing the differences between two eras in Argentina. Copi parodies Evita's excessive theatricality and the spectacle of performance that she enacted, and in this parodic presentation Copi shows the distance between the model and its double, between what was promised and what was actually fulfilled. Linda Hutcheon's definition of parody is helpful in understanding Copi's characterization of Evita:

> What I mean by parody…is *not* the ridiculing imitation of the standard theories and definitions that are rooted in eighteenth-century theories of wit….[but] as repetition with critical distance that allows ironic signaling of difference at the very heart of similarity. (26)

While it seems that ridicule is at the heart of Copi's play about Evita, his use of parody extends beyond the obvious grotesque behavior of the protagonist. Using postmodernity as her context, Hutcheon theorizes that parody permits viewers to revisit the past and establish a dialogue between past and present ideologies and social constructs (23). Though it is impossible to know fully the "ultimate objects" of the past, Hutcheon argues that postmodernity allows the foregrounding of historical, social and ideological circumstances as referents, so that the viewer might ultimately engage in a process of signification through recontextualization (24).

The dialogue that Copi initiates with the past by placing Evita into the context of the 70s further reinforces the theme of the double in several ways. As María Elena González Deluca explains in her study, Argentina has always been divided into two halves: the civilized and the barbaric as Sarmiento commented, the *pampas* and Buenos Aries and the rich and the poor. González Deluca notes that Evita's rise to power was the result of specific conditions in Argentina, the most important of which was the change in economy of the 1930s that saw the reduction in exportation of cattle and agricultural products and the rise of the industrial sector (197). The shifting of economic markets also brought a transformation of the urban and political landscapes of Argentina, attracting more workers to the cities and causing the rise of unionization. The workers became the single most powerful group in the Peronist Party. As a result, the divisions in the population between the elite and the *descamisados* reinforced the already existing colonial divisions between "civilized" Europe and the "barbaric" Americas that already plagued Argentina (197-98). By parodying the two sides of Evita, Copi recalls the divisions that made it possible for her rise to power. Furthermore, the insertion of Evita's story in the decade of the 70s provided audiences with the opportunity for examining the consequences of the Peróns' government. Not only does Copi regenerate the divisions between Peronists and anti-Peronists, but he also observes the situation from outside Argentina's borders, from Europe. Copi's exile provides a view from the other side, again recalling the complicated relation between Europe and Argentina. The parody of

Evita and the technique of reproducing doubles in Copi's work allowed him to enter into dialogue with Argentina's past. By suggesting a re-examination of the past through the possiblity of Evita's "second-coming" in the theater, Copi caused panic with audiences and with the authorities in Argentina. Although they would never be able to really "*know* her as an object of the past," the real danger was that they had not really known how to resolve the problems that she represented from the past.

A similar reincarnation of Evita happens in Osvaldo Guglielmino's play *Eva de América* published originally in 1983, and again as part of a collection in 1994. Where Copi's play presented a grotesque and demonic version of the Eva Perón story, Guglielmino's exalts her to mythic proportions. Guglielmino states in a prologue to his work: "En cuanto a la persona dramática, me decidí por utilizar la sugestión, la fuerza espiritual del personaje, sus motivaciones histórico-sociales y no la representación de su criatura humana" (7). Guglielmino explains that he bases this idea on a comment that Eva Perón once made about a film project to honor the work of San Martín where she believed the figure of the legendary leader should not appear because it would detract from his mystique (7). Guglielmino devised a unique vision of Eva Perón's life that encompasses different phases of Argentina's history. The play is composed of four acts and seven scenes, three of which occur in the final act.

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In six of the different time periods, Guglielmino focuses on episodes of aggression and imperialist attitudes requiring the common people of Argentina to

face the daunting task of survival. The first scene focuses on a *guerrero mapuche* named Llancamil who seeks guidance from Machi, a mapuche *hechicera*. Llancamil struggles to preserve his community from extinction and the invasion of the European colonizers. The next act begins with the opening verses of *Martín Fierro* sung by a *cantor*. Guglielmino centers this act on the lives of the *gauchos*. At first several unidentified voices complain about the loss of land, cattle, sheep, and homes, but later certain characters are identified by name as they gather to fight against the government that unjustly confiscated their land. The act ends with the addition of a female, Juana Carranza, who joins the gauchos in their fight against injustice. The third act opens with a *payador* who sings the song of the common people and their courage. After his song, *chacareros* complain of the *Empresa* from Buenos Aires that conspires to make their lives impossible by controlling the market and the wheat industry through dirty business practices. One man stands up to the *Empresa*; he is Juan Palavecino and the act ends with the workers setting fire to the wheat fields and shouting his name in rebellion. The final act takes place in the era of Gardel and the tango and begins with two *cafishios* discussing the problems of white slavery. In the early years of the twentieth century sex rings were a common problem in Argentina, and women were bought and sold to pimps as property. Following the conversation between the *cafishios*, Guglielmino introduces the theme of British imperialism. In this scene, a man, a woman and a character named Marucho (a poet and intellectual who has just arrived after a series of interviews) converse

about the visit of the Prince of Wales and English literature and the beef trade, essentially coming to the conclusion that they are lucky to be a "colony" of England.[15] This dialogue is followed by a scene about the period of immigration in Buenos Aires, where thousands of Europeans landed on the shores of Argentina hoping to find riches, but instead found a difficult life of poverty. Here, a woman and her husband break under the pressure of living in a *conventillo*, surrounded by filth, sickness and conditions that force their children to beg for food or go hungry. Though the man and his wife are originally from the interior of Argentina, and have come to work in the capital, their story is that of many immigrants and workers in Argentina at the turn of the century. Through all of these scenes Guglielmino presents a form of oppression that at least some part of the Argentine population has had to endure throughout its history.

Building throughout each of these acts is the act of resistance, and it finally reaches its climax in the voice of Eva Perón. The last words of the sick woman in the sixth vignette are "Algún día todo cambiará" (Guglielmino 51). These are also the words that the voice of Eva Perón uses to open the final scene of the final act. This final scene incorporates actual fragments taken from recorded speeches by Evita, as well as an actor's reading of the remaining fragments. Guglielmino explains in a footnote at the end of the play that excerpts were taken from *La razón de mi vida*, Raúl Scalabrini Ortiz's speech about October 17, and the poem "El ángel humilde" by Jorge Melazza Muttoni (62).

As the fragments are read, various sectors of the Argentine population that made up the group known as the *descamisados* begin to appear on stage and the directions state: "Eva Perón se vuelve a corporizar en cada uno de los personajes de los diferentes cuadros que irán diciendo individualmente los fragmentos del siguiente poema, salvo el de la última estrofa que dirán en conjunto" (Guglielmino 59). The very last line that they say in unison is the famous quote "¡Volveré y seré millones!"

In Guglielmino's play, the extreme personality conflicts that characterize Copi's play are absent, and yet the notion of Eva as "stand-in" for the nation certainly persists. There is only the most positive portrayal of Evita as a crusader for the rights of the downtrodden and as a savior of the Argentine nation. However, Guglielmino also addresses the same topic of immortality. Again, Phelan's theory is useful for understanding the structure of Guglielmino's play because as she notes:

> Western theatre is itself predicated on the belief that there is an audience, an other willing to be cast in the role of auditor. The 'act' at the heart of theatre making is a leap of faith that someone (that ideal spectator some call 'God') will indeed, see, hear, and love those brave enough to admit that this is the movement that keeps us from our deaths (or at least from permanently dark houses). The psychic problem raised by theatre is that it remains a perpetual rehearsal. The one for whom the theatre maker makes the piece never arrives for the performance. (*Mourning Sex* 31)

If this is true, Guglielmino's play sets up a dual structure that again reinforces the theatricality and performative nature of Evita's own persona in real life. Within the play, the characters and voices perform for their ideal spectator, Eva Perón, their savior who never really appears to them, but whose voice is heard only in the final moments of the play. Arriving as if she were the saint who had heard their cries, the voice of Eva Perón answers the anguished complaints that are expressed throughout the play. Within the context of the play, Evita is the ideal audience. The actors perpetually rehearse for Evita throughout different periods of time. This continual practicing had its real life echoes in the movements that continued in the 70s in Argentina when citizens campaigned for the return of Peronism.

In the outer structure of the play, the performances of all the characters, including Eva Perón, are directed toward another public, presumably an ideal one that will be receptive to Peronist rhetoric. As in the Copi play, this double structure mimics in many ways the performances that Evita herself enacted. The other important element in Guglielmino's play is Phelan's concept of theater as a perpetual rehearsal. This is crucial because Evita never really appears in the play. Evita is embodied in those different groups on stage in much the same way that she herself embodied many of the different ideologies, political and social, of the Argentine nation. The other actors stand in for Evita, replicating the stand-in personas that Evita created in her own lifetime. It is in this respect that Guglielmino's political rhetoric comes to life. Guglielmino suggests through the

concept of the ideal spectator and the embodiment of Evita that the audience technically occupies the same space as Evita, and therefore should become the next to embody her will. By standing in for Evita, the actors and by extension the audience are reminded that Evita now represents a concept that comes to life only through the actions of others. Guglielmino suggests through his play that we are now to take up the performance where Evita left off.

The mystery surrounding Evita continues to haunt and fascinate the world nearly 50 years after her death. On 6 August 2000, the Argentine newspaper *Clarín* included in its Sunday supplement an article by Norma Morandini titled "El último secreto de Eva Perón." The article is a combination of an interview with Nilda Quartucci (who claims she is the daughter of Eva Perón and the actor Pedro Quartucci) and information about letters left behind by Eva's priest Father Benítez. In a letter written to Blanca Duarte, one of Eva's sisters, Father Benítez speaks of "the secret" that caused Eva so much pain that she took it with her to the grave, revealing it only to the priest and her sisters. The letter, along with Nilda Quartucci's claim, suggests the possibility that Eva's secret was the birth of a child. Quartucci claims that her father confessed in 1997 that Eva gave birth in 1940 to a girl, Nilda, who was later raised by Quartucci and his wife. Pedro Quartucci alleged that Evita was told the child was stillborn, and that she did not know the child was alive until much later. DNA testing proves that Quartucci's wife, Felisa Bonorino, is not the genetic mother of Nilda. As a result Nilda Quartucci is asking for DNA testing to prove if Evita was really her birth

mother. According to the article, this secret that she took to her grave had a profound effect on Evita. This new information about the secret birth serves to reinforce Evita's iconicity and elevate her to mythic proportions. She continues to capture headlines, even occupying the front cover of a periodical supplement. The continual coverage of Evita's life for nearly half a century demonstrates her longevity and power as an icon of popular culture. We are reminded once again that Evita represented many roles at the same time, so many in fact that it is impossible to distinguish where reality becomes fiction. The same can also be said for Argentine politics and identity.

[1] Two examples of successful commercial endeavors are the musical production of *Evita* by Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber, which premiered in 1978, and the Hollywood movie *Evita* (1996) which provoked scandal because many did not want the provocative pop singer Madonna to play Evita. Both of these productions were very popular with audiences. See W. A. Harbinson's account of the connections between Evita and these subsequent representations of her in *Evita: Saint or Sinner* (1996).

[2] See W.A. Harbinson's *Evita: Saint or Sinner?* (1996), Alicia Dujovne Ortiz's *Eva Perón: biografía* (1995), Carmen Llorca's *Llamadme Evita* (1980), and Nicholas Fraser's and Marysa Navarro's *Evita: The Real Life of Eva Perón* (1996).
[3] For a complete list of her roles in radio and film see chapter five in Harbinson's *Evita: Saint or Sinner?*
[4] For a detailed account of the forgery and rewriting of the Ibarguren family history see pg. 69-71 in Fraser's and Navarro's *Evita: The Real Life of Eva Perón.*
[5] Graciela Michelotti-Cristóbal states in her article "Eva Perón: Mujer, personaje, mito" that *La Razón de Mi Vida* was written by Raúl Mende. According to Michelotti-Cristóbal, Mende was contracted by Perón to replace the original writer, Penella da Silva, a Spanish journalist. Da Silva was replaced because he showed too much interest in feminist aspects. Michelotti-Cristóbal also notes that the primary purpose of the novel was a tool of propaganda for Juan Perón, but really ended up as part of Evita's campaign for self-promotion (135).
[6]The *corpus Christi* was originally understood as the Church and later came to stand for the mystical body of Christ. Eventually the *corpus Christi* was combined with the *corpus mysticum*, the Eucharist.
These terms were reversed around the twelfth century. At this same point the Church began to assert itself as a political and legal organism, and its evolution paralleled the emergence of secular body politics. The other significant change that took place in the same period was the distinction that canonists began to make between the "*corpus verum* on the altar, the host, and the other, the collective *corpus mysticum*, the Church" (Kantorowicz 197-198).
[7] Also important was the concept of matrimony in Aristotelian theory, because it could be compared to a political government, where the man held power over his family, in much the same way that the King held power over his subjects, or God/Christ over their followers (Kantorowicz 217). Here, it becomes clear that religious and secular institutions began to overlap in significant ways. Specifically, the "body politic, mystic, or public of England was defined not by the king or head alone, but by the king together with council and parliament" (Kantorowicz 224). Just as the Church had divided the body of Christ into various opposing identities for the purpose of establishing a hierarchy for power, the governments of England and France quickly implemented the same foundation in order to set up the feudal system comprised of the king and his vassals.
[8] The notion of a woman as a spiritual leader can be found in the tradition of Marianismo in Latin America. Often the concept of social motherhood shaped much of the feminist thought of the early twentieth century. Many saw women as being morally superior to men and therefore thought they should be in charge of the morality of the nation. In this way, women were allowed to carve out a niche in the mostly patriarchal system of Christianity that excluded them from the upper echelons of power within the hierarchy of the Catholic Church.
[9] See Mario Vargas Llosa's article *Placeres de la Necrofilia* in *Antipodas*, vol. 8-9 (1996-97): 179-182.
[10] In July 1997, on the 45th anniversary of Evita's death Jesusa Rodríguez, along with Liliana Felipe and Tito Vasconcelos, presented *Güevita*, an adaptation of Copi's work written by Luis Usabiaga. The cabaret-style production was staged in the Teatro Experimental de Jalisco, under the auspices of El Centro de Estudios de Género at the Universidad de Guadalajara. I was unable to obtain a copy of the video recording of the performance, even after attempting to do so for six months. For a complete review of the performance see
<<www.informador.com.mx/Lastest/jul97/28jul97/CULTURA.HTM>>. According to the newspaper *El Informador*, the *Güevita* production shifts the context of political satire from Argentina to Mexico. In the performance Rodríguez and her colleagues focus on local politics citing right-wing tendencies at the University of Guadalajara, they criticize the main newspapers in Guadalajara, as well as exposing problems at the national level suggesting embezzlement during the Salinas government and corruption in the church. This performance is important because it supports the theory that Evita is an iconic figure by showing the multiple meanings that

she has acquired. Most significantly, *Güevita* is an example of how Evita's iconicity has crossed national borders and how she can represent Mexican, as well as Argentine politics.

[11] This line is reminiscent of Alfred Jarry's *Ubu roi* which also begins with the same explicative and exposes the abusive power of an incapable ruler. *Ubu roi* premiered in Paris in 1896 and grew out of satire that Jarry created when he was 15 years old about his professor Félix Hébert. Jarry adapted the play *Les Polonais* that his schoolmates Henri and Charles Morin had written about Pere Heb, the King of Poland, who is bullied by his wife into taking over the world. Jarry combined the Morins's plot with his own previous work to produce *Ubu roi*. The result was a work that rejected the traditional bourgeois theater and the realist trends of the times (Gene Van Dyke <<hamp.hampshire.edu/~ngzF92/jarrypub/j100.html>>). Copi's reference makes an implicit parallel between the greedy and unlikeable ruler Ubu and Eva Perón, and captures much of the same scandal that the original staging provoked.

[12] Confederación General de Trabajo (C.G.T.) was the Center for the Labor Syndicate.

[13] Julie M. Taylor reports that the anti-Peronistists condemned the famous wardrobe that Evita possessed "not only for its extravangance but in terms of her original and permanent lack of refinement, repeatedly damning her taste as Hollywood-esque. This idea became the major theme of Copi's play 'Eva Perón'....Copi himself stated that he presented Eva Perón as a Hollywood heroine because 'that was perhaps the only thing she wanted to be and the only thing which she was denied'" (103). In this way, Copi created a grotesque parody of the Hollywood heroine in his character, Evita. Copi's Evita is perceived as anything but glamorous and is, instead, mocked for her attempts at adopting an elegant presence.

[14] The same idea is invoked in V.S. Naipaul's Essay *The Return of Eva Perón* written from 1972-1977. As Pamela Finnegan-Smith explains in her article "Sarmiento and Naipaul: Essay as History" Naipaul explains similarities between the rhetorical strategies employed by the two essayists. Finnegan-Smith also points out the same use of historical figures (Facundo and Eva) to elaborate the struggle for Argentine national identity (43). Both Finnegan-Smith and Naipaul agree that: "History in Argentina, is less an attempt to record and understand than a habit of reordering inconvenient facts, it is a process of forgetting" (Naipaul qtd. by Finnegan-Smith 42). Naipaul finds evidence of this forgetting and reordering in the period of the military dictatorship where Evita's legend and that of her husband were revived as both heroes and villains. For Naipaul, Eva exemplifies the difficult task of recording history with its many versions.

[15] Guglielmino seems to be poking fun here at Borges and those who share his same *criollo* roots. As Naipaul in his essay on Eva reveals: "Borges gives many interviews.... He talks about Chesterton, Stevenson and Kipling. He talks about Old English with all the enthusiasm of a man who has picked up a subject all by himself. He talks about his English ancestors. It is a curiously colonial performance" (122). Borges' "El simulacro" written about Evita presents, as one might expect, an unsavory picture of the Peronist Leaders.

From *Dreaming of You* to Dreaming of Being You: The Making and Remaking of Selena

The ending of a life and the making of an immortal *Latina* legend took place at a Days Inn Motel in Corpus Christi, Texas on March 31, 1995 when the Tex-Mex singer Selena Quintanilla-Pérez was fatally shot by her fan club president Yolanda Saldívar. The success Selena enjoyed while alive has continued and perhaps even grown since her death. Rafael Molina characterizes Selena with the words "mito, industria, culto y negocio" in his article commemorating the fifth anniversary of her death. Others refer to her as a sort of *Madonna latina,* and label her enormous popularity as *selenamanía* (Cruz Bárcenas 1). However one chooses to identify the phenomenon, there is no denying the tremendous impact that she and her music have had on the border culture between the United States and Mexico, as well as her growing importance in the United States' Latino/a population, and on mainstream America.

Selena's iconization in the late twentieth century is the result of particular factors that in many ways parallel those that were found in the River Plate region at the beginning of the twentieth century. Questions of identity and themes of border crossing surface repeatedly in the Chicano and Latino communities along the divide between Mexico and the United States in much the same way that they continually appear in Argentine and Uruguayan cultures, which are heavily marked by immigration from Europe. The hybridization of cultures along the border between the United States and Mexico finds its expression in the diverse

rhythms of Tex-Mex music and in the Chicana entertainer Selena. Selena, like Gardel, provides the public with the possibility for achieving success in spite of the odds. Like Gardel, Selena marketed and sold her image of success to the public and after her death the sales continue. She participated in creating music in different languages and in diverse styles for a variety of audiences.

The multiplicity inherent in the image that Selena performed and in the music that she produced also makes her a powerful symbol for traditional theater, because she represents many facets of popular culture along the border. By reviving Selena in works that dramatize her life and death, authors are able to re-examine questions of identity, racism and cultural bias for and against Latinos and Chicanos. The performance by Selena and those of her by others on the stage mark the uneasy divide between cultures and between the perception of one's self and others. These performances also explore the difficutly of finding one's place within binary structures. For these reasons Selena's popularity persists despite her death.

Fans still consider Selena's reign as Queen of Tex-Mex to be undisturbed as a poll shows taken five years after her death.[1] At the time of her death Selena was only 23 years old. She already dominated the music scene by having won two Grammy awards in 1993 and 1994, and she was the first female singer of *Latino* origin to reach the top of the Billboard ranking chart (Cruz Bárcenas 2). Before her death Selena released nine albums (two of her most successful were *Amor Prohibido* and *Selena Live*) between 1990 and 1995. Even more intriguing

however, was the release of five more albums within the next five years. All were wildly popular, making the top ten list on Billboard's Latin 50 chart (de los Santos 28). Her posthumous star shows no signs of dimming any time soon. As Sandra Cisneros, a Chicana writer from Houston, Texas confesses, "I bought a keychain with her face on it because it was the first time I saw a Chicana on a keychain that wasn't Our Lady of Guadalupe." [2] Selena's popularity is beginning to achieve an iconic status that is on a par with that of revered religious figures within the Latino community. Selena was struck down in, of all places, Corpus Christi, so her apotheosis seemed inevitable.

Her fame, however, must also be considered as part of an on-going marketing campaign that also shows little evidence of diminishing. Selena's likeness appears on everything from a Barbie-like doll to a life-size bronze statue. Her clothing, awards, sketches and other items are on display at a museum owned by Q Productions, her family's business. Her boutique, which is now run by her sister Suzette, carries her own line of clothing (one can even buy Selena brand jeans there). In addition, the following items about Selena can also be found: the feature film *Selena*, that skyrocketed Jennifer López to stardom; nine books about her life, endless magazine and newpaper articles, as well as special editions dedicated to her by *People*[3]; a docudrama by E! Entertainment; a documentary film by director Lourdes Portillo; baseball caps; perfumes; and so many other products that it is impossible to list them all here. Even the Corpus Christi Convention and Visitor Bureau has published a map of Selena sites

(Cuellar 32), and George W. Bush, while governor of Texas, declared April 16 as Selena Day to honor the slain singer's birthday and memory. There is also a Selena Quintanilla-Pérez Park in Houston, and the name of the Bayfront Plaza Auditorium in Corpus Christi was changed to Selena Auditorium (Arrarás 38). Evidence of her status in popular culture rests in the Hard Rock Café in San Antonio where a favorite dress of Selena's is exhibited inside a crystal urn as if it were a kind of holy relic (Arrarás 39). Selena continues to be marketed as a salable product for consumer culture, be it through merchandise, tourism or the media industry.

Selena continues to be the major source of income for her family despite the fact that she is deceased (Arrarás 57). María Celeste Arrarás reports in her tell-all biography *El secreto de Selena*[4] about Selena that in 1994 alone just before her death, Selena had earned an estimated five million dollars. This sum placed Selena on the top twenty list of highest grossing Hispanic artists for 1993-1994. This money belonged to a corporation that the Quintanilla family created, and the income, once operating costs were subtracted, was divided equally, it is thought, among Selena, her father, and her siblings (Arrarás 56-57). As a result, Selena was by no means a millionare since she received only a portion of the income earned from the record sales, performances, and other products. Selena was most certainly a lucrative product of show business, and represented among other aspects, an entire industry that supported and continues to support her

family financially. She is, as Molina aptly pointed out in his article about Selena, very much an "industria" and a "negocio."

For Molina Selena is also a "mito" and a "culto" because for many she evolved as a multifaceted icon. Investigating for her book Arrarás also uncovered the case of Juvenal Marín, who maintains that whenever she meditated under a tree Selena appeared to her in a vision seated upon a cloud. Marín believes she was chosen by Selena to spread a message to all her fans, asking them to stop suffering for her (Arrarás 37). At the unveiling of her memorial, Nicole D. Pérez of the *Corpus Christi Caller* interviewed fans who sounded as if they were making a pilgrimage to the deceased singer's statue. One fan stated: "I'm so excited, my hands are shaking. I've been here since noon because I wanted a spot right in front" (Pérez 4). Another commented: "We come on the anniversary of her death. We visit her grave and her home. Her memory will always live on" (Pérez 4).

In front of her house at the time of her death, her fans created an altar to adore their fallen idol (Arrarás 34). Arrarás states that more than 75,000 mourners signed the condolence book provided at the funeral (33). The site of the visitation was moved at the last minute to a convention center because the family feared there would not be enough room at the original location. A long line wrapped all the way around the building despite the change in buildings (Arrarás 33). The huge spectacle of mourning even extended to the Los Angeles Sports Coliseum where 4,000 fans participated in a Mass on the day that she was

originally scheduled to perform there, before the fatal accident/murder took her life.

Selena's mythification continues with the mystery surrounding her death and the fatal shooting by her supposedly loyal and dedicated friend and assistant, Yolanda Saldívar. The creation of a myth depends on mystery and cloudy details. Both of these ingredients can be found in the Selena's case. Even on the day of her burial, fans doubted in fact, that Selena was really dead. The sentiment in the crowd was so strong that the family felt obligated to open the coffin to prove that Selena's body was really resting inside (Canales "Obligan a abrir ataúd" *Gente*).[5]

The drama began with the shooting the 31st day of March at the Days Inn Motel in Corpus Christi and culminated in the court trial that found Saldívar guilty of murdering Selena. This particular drama is (re)created in Arrarás's *El secreto de Selena*. Not only is this book useful for its factual information, but it engages in the creation of the concept of a double, which is central to any performance. The making of the Selena image included a complicated set of factors such as media packaging, marketing of clothing and merchandise, the musical component in both English and Spanish, and Selena's own personal look as a voluptuous *chicana* wearing tight pants or short skirts, bustiers and lots of sequins. Selena made herself into a symbol by emboding two cultures at the same time. In her lifetime Selena already created her own double by learning Spanish as a second language and performing in that language. Her music recorded in Spanish won her first recognition and fame. Curiously, many have

noted that she was poised to cross-(back)over into the English market just at the moment of her untimely death. Her album *Dreaming of You* with songs in English released after her death sold four million copies in the United States and seven million world-wide (Corpus 1). Selena was a bi-cultural sensation. Her iconicity was already established through her use of language, music and physical appearance. She performed in these dual cultures simultaneously and appealed to four distinct populations: Chicanos/as and Latinos/as like her, fans in Mexico specifically, those in other Latin American countries in general, and non-Latino groups in the United States.

Arrarás' book takes the performance of doubles to an extreme by re-creating Selena as the character of a suspense-drama. As Elizabeth Bronfen describes in *Over Her Dead Body*, often in narratives and films when the death of the heroine occurs, the ensuing journey to solve the case involves resurrecting the dead woman by retracing her steps in life. Bronfen explains:

> The logic these narratives unfold is that to attribute a fixed meaning to a woman, to solve the mystery of her duplicity is coterminous with killing her, so that her death can be read in part as a trope for the fatality with which any hermeneutic enterprise is inscribed. The achievement of a stable semiotic meaning, which excludes semantic difference and ambivalence, is debated over the establishment of another stable division—that between the living and the dead. (294)

Arrarás' book is punctuated with this notion of establishing control over the meaning of the Selena icon. The title, *El secreto de Selena*, points to the mystery she intends to solve for us. There is a secret to be revealed and a need to put it and the dead woman to rest. Arrarás tries to attach a fixed meaning to Selena by giving a detailed account of her career, starting with her debut as a child, and ending with her last moments in the motel room number 158 with Saldívar. She revives the slain singer for her readers, and thus re-makes her into a sort of fictitious double that inhabits the pages of the book and confuses the line between life and death.

By giving her readers a detailed account of the courtroom drama, culminating with the details of Selena's death, Arrarás attempts to establish the dividing line between mortality and immortality, a division that is deceptive when applied to mythic figures. This hidden line between life and death, I believe, is a possible explanation of the secret that Arrarás alludes to in her title, although perhaps it was not the one that she intended. There are also the sordid rumors that surround Selena's death that most definitely play a part in Arrarás's title: the motivation behind the killing and the *secreto* that Selena and Saldívar allegedly shared. Arrarás again brings Selena back to life in her recreation of the final events, suggesting a possible lesbian relationship between Selena and Saldívar. Saldívar roundly denies such a relationship in her interview with Arrarás. Arrarás and others imply that there may have also been a possible amorous relationship between Selena and the plastic surgeon Ricardo Martínez

from Monterrey. Other rumors of sexual and physical abuse toward Saldívar by Abraham Quintanilla, Selena's father, further cloud the events surrounding Selena's death. Quintanilla also denies the allegations. Finally, the now famous financial improprieties that Saldívar is reported to have committed while keeping the books for Selena's fan club and boutique continue to complicate efforts to understand clearly the terrible denouement of their friendship.

Citing her professional loyalty to Saldívar and a promise to keep confidential the information that was given to her off-the-record, Arrarás' conclusion presents her readers with the possibility that there are in fact two secrets, or rather a secret with two parts. Though Arrarás believes one is highly improbable, she maintains that the other one should be clear to anyone who has read the book carefully (260). Arrarás never explains concretely what this secret really is, and prefers to leave it up to her readers to infer what it might be: "Todo lo que he revelado lo he hecho entrelíneas, porque sé que todos los protagonistas de esta trama han tenido distintas motivaciones para decir las cosas que han dicho, unas muy sublimes, otras totalmente calculadas" (260). Again, fixing a meaning to Selena and her secret(s?) proves to be a difficult task, even for those like Arrarás who appear to have the last word. Arrarás brings Selena to life in the pages of her book, but ultimately "kills" her through her investigation, and thereby tries to solidify Selena's unique meaning that appears to elude even those closest to her. Selena's second "death" in Arrarás's book highlights the confusion caused by Selena's iconic paradigm: she achieves immortality on Earth by

crossing over the boundary of mortality. The astounding longevity of Selena's fame and fortune after death only serves to foster more and more intrigue. The "second Selena," the one created in Arrarás' book and the illusion created through marketing and posthumous albums, also suggests a fundamental deception. Again, Bronfen is helpful in understanding the complexities:

> The revenant, occupying the interstice between the two forms of existence—a celebration and a triumph over death—calls forth two forms of anxiety, i.e. the anxiety that death is finitude and the anxiety that death may not be the end. Because the heroines are revenants of sorts, because their appearance deceives, they function as living tropes for the notion that a secret, a truth lies hidden beneath the surface of the body. (294)

The "second Selena" certainly suggests this idea of a hidden meaning, and her "presence" only serves to highlight again the interstitial space that she occupies in death. As well, the Selena double reminds the public of the unique space the singer filled as a *chicana* entertainer moving across and between borders of language, culture, and nationalities. Arrarás contributes to the on-going invention of the Selena persona that continues to fascinate the public.

Evidence of the continuing love affair with the slain entertainer surfaced again in the Spring of 2000 when the musical *Selena Forever* opened in San Antonio, Texas to commemorate the anniversary of her death. The musical was written by Edward Gallardo, a Puerto Rican dramatist living in New York and

Fernando Rivas, a composer of Cuban descent who also resides in the United States. Gallardo and Rivas used many of Selena's own songs, as well as adding their own original scores and lyrics to recount the life and success of the Tex-Mex singer. If casting calls alone were a criterion for her popularity, there should be no doubt about her star quality. Over 1,000 actors auditioned to play the role of Selena in the musical in a period of just eight weeks in eight different cities (Méndez 30). The musical opened to a sold-out crowd in San Antonio and played in several cities before closing temporarily for revisions. María Pérez, a dress-maker from San Antonio, was responsible for designing many of the outfits worn by Selena in her real-life performances, and she collaborated in the production of clothing used in the musical (Torrea 2). Selena's revival on stage, it appears, was to be authenticated as closely as possible, even down to the exact replication of her clothing. Through the use of clothing, lyrics and living effigies, *Selena Forever* attempted to carry out the mission of the title to keep Selena around, as nearly as possible, forever. Exasperated with all the press attention given to the murder, Gallardo stated in an interview, "People forget the life. I want to keep the life force that is Selena alive" (Gallardo qtd. by Bernstein 4). Therefore Selena does not die on stage, and the audience only hears a gunshot suggesting her death somewhere outside the limits of the stage, outside of the performance. This ending reminds the audience again that Selena has become more than just the person; she is a legend, a performance that can be restaged and reinvented. Selena, now back on stage, has been "bodied forth"

again in the sense that Joseph Roach defines the concept of effigy and has crossed-over into mortality (or is it immortality?) once more.[6]

Moving across boundaries is a main concern for the authors of *Selena Forever* and surfaces repeatedly as a topic in the musical as well. Rivas commented in an interview with Ellen Bernstein: "We're tapping into a different public here. It's a Latino mindset, but I'm hoping the Anglo world will find this good. I'm hoping it will cross-over" (2).[7] The references to cutting across cultural borders are numerous in the musical. Selena's identity resonates to the idea of transition between life and death, Anglo and Latino cultures, unknown talent and superstar. The very first line of dialogue begins with the Emcee announcing the "cross-over sensation" from Corpus Christi (2). The band that sings many of the accompanying choruses, according to the stage directions, is supposed to be of "different types, reflecting SELENA's audience and her music" (3). Even the character Selena in the opening act exclaims, "Crossing over is just the next logical step/ In what's been a fantastic career" (4). This last quote seems especially poignant given the success the audience knows Selena achieved from the "other" side in death. Later, in the first act, Selena's father admonishes her for her choice of clothing, which he believes is too revealing. Selena replies to her father: "It's the style, you know I want to cross-over. To do that I have to look the part" (32). The ambiguity in this line of dialogue poses an intriguing question for the audience to ponder: what part? It is not clear exactly what Gallardo and Rivas had in mind when they wrote this line, especially since

Selena is normally credited with having created her own unique look. This spoken scene is followed by a musical one where Selena sings to her father:

> Take a look at Madonna/ All sexy and slinky/ So how can I be a twinkie/ From South of the Border?/ Janet Jackson's hot/ Cause she sells what she's got/ And I can't top that/ By playing your daughter/ I've grown up Daddy/ Despite who you want me to be. (33)

There is also another reference to Madonna in the second act, when Selena's producer Mr. Behar comments: "She can be the new Gloria Estefan. Be even bigger than Madonna" (67). This entire exchange between the characters in the musical has real life echoes in the media where another sort of transition was taking place. In Jennifer L.Willis's and Alberto González's article about the "Tex-Mex Madonna" they explore the use of the Madonna label used in the media to describe Selena to an audience in the United States that was unfamiliar, for the most part, with her success. As Willis and González explain: "This label was handy, easily understood, and totally inaccurate" (9). Though Selena's stage presence and costumes appear at first glance to share characteristics in common with Madonna's image of a sexually provocative performer, Willis and González contend that this is only true if one views her through the lens of mainstream Anglo America.[8] Seen through the eyes of the *tejano* community, Selena was a family oriented young woman who lived next door to her parents and across the street from her brother, married young and lived a clean life.

Willis and González maintain that the majority of the media was at a loss for understanding this border culture. As a result the media gave the tejano community a unique chance to explain its experience in its own voice. This new voice, in turn, resulted in a *Latino*-centered view of Selena where she could stand for contradictory discourses. "These discourses described Selena as a 'teasing, curvy siren with a girl-next-door accessibility'(Selena, 1996) who simultaneously maintained conservative family values" (Willis and González 10). Suddenly, Selena stood for another sort of transition. As Willis and González state: "To non-latinos, Selena argued for a new understanding of what it meant for women to dress sexy" (10). These authors make the case, that in the cultural framework of the *tejano* community, females have the freedom to dress more provocatively. Within the norms *tejano* culture women are protected by the system of machismo, which incorporates morals and traditions inherited from Catholic Spain. Within this system of beliefs, a man might look but never touch the woman of another unless he hoped for a sudden death. So, as Willis and González explain: "The image of the sexily dressed woman was reconceptualized for non-tejano audiences by supplying a tejano-centered understanding" (11). The Tex-Mex Madonna label was eventually discarded in favor of the more accurate "Queen of Tex-Mex" that most use to describe Selena now. The cross-over happened on several levels as the musical repeatedly reminds us.

Questions about the image of the slain singer also surface in Hugo Salcedo's play *Selena: La Reina del Tex-Mex,* published in 1999 as part of a

collection of Salcedo's works in *Teatro de Frontera 2.* As has already been shown, the title alone reflects the changes in how Selena was and continues to be labeled. Salcedo's play revolves primarily around questions of shifting and enigmatic identities. In fact, the dynamic of Salcedo's play hinges on the notion of movement and instability. Salcedo writes about the border culture between the United States and Mexico, and the exchange between these two countries and cultures. Selena's significance, for Salcedo, is one that slides back and forth across national boundaries. In Salcedo's play, the Selena story shuttles between cultural identities and speaks to the experience of immersion into the foreign and re-entry into the familiar.

Diana Taylor's article "Dancing with Diana: A Study in Hauntology" about the deaths of Princess Diana, Selena, Mother Teresa and Eva Perón suggests that the deaths of these very different icons provoke vastly distinct global and regional reactions because of the deeper cultural narratives that they have come to represent. Taylor cites disparaging comments made on the Howard Stern show [9] as an example of how the death of Selena was reduced to a mere "incident" instead of the world-wide drama that the death of Princess Diana sparked (66-67). Taylor questions why some icons travel in death and others, like Selena, do not. This line of reasoning, perhaps, misses the point where Selena is concerned because as Salcedo's play confirms, Selena is an icon that speaks precisely about the notion of traveling. In fact, it is impossible to speak about Selena without incorporating the theme of travel. Selena is a figure that implies

a priori the concept of movement simply because of her cultural background. Hers is a unique experience of *la cultura fronteriza*, and though Selena's persona is for sale to all, she represents a finite group of cultural identities that at the same time is infinite. As Gloria Anzaldúa suggests in her essay "Borderlands":

> A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. *Los atravesados* live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half-dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the "normal." (628)

Anzaldúa's definition of borders includes the U.S.-Mexico border, but she applies the experience to psychological, sexual and spiritual borders as well (627). The border and those affected are easily recognizable, but the myriad consequences are incalculable.

Salcedo's play zeroes in on this space of instability and transition beginning with an off-stage voice introducing Selena: "De costa a costa, de frontera a frontera, conquistando el mercado en toda la Unión Americana y la República Mexicana, con ustedes desde la ciudad de Corpus Christi... ¡SELENAAA...y los Dinos!" (124). The Selena that enters on stage, however, is not the Selena one might expect but rather a drag queen who represents her.[10] Curiously enough, the drag queen's name is *Unión Americana*. This

representation of Selena suggests movement in several ways. First, there is an implicit movement inherent in any sort of repetition. As Bronfen defines it: "Repetition is a double movement, a return to something primary and the production of something new" (326). This is certainly the case with Salcedo's drag queen who simultaneously attempts to reincarnate the late singer, but who also obviously changes in some fundamental ways the image we associate with Selena because it is now a man's body that wears the clothes and sings the songs. *Unión Americana* directs himself to the memory of Selena: "Te doy vida en mi traje de adoración y recuerdos....muere si quieres pero vuelve a renacer aquí, conmigo" (125). Her rebirth in his act is a repackaging of the Selena image in a new format, recalling the original form, but altering it so that it appears as an innovation. Likewise, as in Anzaldúa's definition, Selena now crosses over, so to speak, into the taboo zone of transvestites.

The second form of movement is suggested through the idea of rebirth, where Selena moves from life to death and back to life again. Again, in Anzaldúa's theory of the border the "half dead" represents another kind of inhabitant of the transitional zone. Finally, movement is also proposed through the concept of shifting identities in the name of the character *Unión Americana*. Calling the young transvestite by this name reminds the public that there are shifting identities, ethnicities and lifestyles that are subverting the dominant paradigms in the United States. The growing Hispanic population in the United States is a force that is beginning to change marketing campaigns; it raises

questions about whether there is a need for an official language and for bilingual education programs. It was even a topic in the 2000 presidential campaigns where speeches and ads were transmitted in Spanish to court the Latino vote. The year 2000 also marks a change in musical taste with the first annual Latin Grammy Awards, televised in prime time. By choosing this particular name, *La Unión Americana*, and by embodying Selena as a drag queen, Salcedo was prodding his audience to see the possibilities for shifting identities and meanings: a man represents a woman, and a *Chicana* represents the United States.

The second scene only serves to reinforce this theme of migration. Here, a character defined only as *Woman* carries what the audience assumes is a child in her arms as she crosses the border. The woman speaks to the child:

> Mi corazón es solamente un suspiro para tanto cariño que te tengo. Arriba vuelan los zancudos en busca de compatriotas. Abajo los carros policía de la *Border Patrol*. Nosotras solas en medio como carne de *hamburger*. ¡Y nos llaman indocumentados porque no aguantamos el hambre *there in the south* y entonces caminamos al norte, *forever al norte*! ¡Y nos llaman indocumentados porque *we want to work*. (126)

What the audience does not know until the woman reaches the middle of her long speech is that she is Yolanda Saldívar, and she is supposed to be carrying Selena. Yolanda tells the child, "Las fronteras estoy saltando ya. Selena. *Sweet Selena*" (127). Revealing her identity, the woman later explains: "Te acompañará el pensamiento de la Yola...*Because for you*, porque para ti seré siempre la madre,

la fan número uno, la amante amiga, la entrañable Yolanda" (127). Again, Salcedo highlights the most obvious matters of political border crossings, but he also alludes to the more subtle topics of crossing the lines of accepted norms with reference to the enigmatic relationship between Yolanda and Selena.

While it appears that Yolanda cares for the child (Selena), carrying her to safety, as a mother would, by the end of the scene she brandishes a revolver, raving: "Es doloroso: alcanzar la eternidad mediante la tragedia.... Una despedida violenta, repentina, *forever*" (127). Yolanda moves from one extreme as a maternal figure and friend to the other as a homicidal maniac. Salcedo also reminds the audience of the other line that was perhaps crossed by these two women, that of homosexuality. Physically carrying the child Selena over the border, Yolanda visually demonstrates for the audience the theme of movement and suggests to us in her speech the various cross-overs that the Selena image connotes. The unusual aspect of this scene is revealed when Yolanda, crossing the *frontera*, unwraps the bundle that the audience supposes is Selena only to reveal to the spectators that there is no one inside. Does this empty bundle stand as a visual reminder of the empty space left by the singer's death? Or, is it perhaps the space of the undefined that marks the experience of borderlands? It is difficult to know, because the only thing left is her fame. The newspaper *El Norte* reported that Saldívar confessed to Aurora Blanca on one occasion: "[yo] odiaba a Selena. La odiaba porque siempre ganaba en los Tejano Music Awards" (Herrick *Gente*). Yet, she worshipped Selena like a god, and her

apartment in Corpus Christi was filled with pictures of Selena and other memorabilia, including a life-size poster (Herrick *Gente*). Moreover, the same is true of her apartment in San Antonio where a photograph of Selena was so large it covered an entire wall (Herrick *Gente*). As Thaddeus Herrick reports, "Entre más Selena aceptaba a Saldívar, más se convirtió ese odio en adoración" (*Gente*). Listing a string of stars immortalized in life and death, such as Patsy Cline, Richie Valens, John Lennon, and Pedro Infante, Yolanda ends the second scene with the promise to Selena that her murder will bring guaranteed eternal stardom. The character Yolanda believes she has defied even the normal limits of time and reality by providing Selena immortality in the public's mind. Another border crossed.

Salcedo explores this idea more concretely in the following scene titled "Puentes y fronteras." The characters Roberto Pulido, another musician, and Chela discuss the news of Selena's death. They cannot believe that she is dead, hoping it is only a marketing ploy to spark interest and sales. A ghost-like Selena enters with the dancers and music from "Bidi Bidi bom bom" and dancers, and recites with Roberto the poem *Bridges and Borders* by Gina Valdés:

ROBERTO: *There are so many borders*

SELENA: Hay tantísimas fronteras

ROBERTO: *that divide people,*

SELENA: que dividen a la gente,

ROBERTO: *but for every border*

SELENA: pero por cada frontera

ROBERTO: *there is also a bridge.*

SELENA: existe también un puente. (130)

This image of Selena presented by Salcedo confirms what Anzaldúa states in her essay "Borderlands" about the *mestiza*: "the future depends on the breaking down of paradigms, it depends on the straddling of two or more cultures.... *la mestiza* creates a new consciousness" (630).

This new consciousness is, in part, the result of the 1994 Free Trade Agreement between the United States, Mexico and Canada. As Guillermo Gómez-Peña notes in his essay "1995—*Terreno Peligroso*/Danger Zone: Cultural Relations between Chicanos and Mexicans at the End of the Century," the opening up of commercial markets coincided with a militarization of the borders between countries, specifically the United States and Mexico. As a result, definitions of identity became increasingly more difficult to pinpoint. With the breakdown of the oppositions that characterized the Cold War, the United States, now in the position of having to redefine its identity, found itself longing for a nostalgic (imaginary) past (Gómez-Peña 134). Without the Soviet Union, the United States suffered an identity crisis and fabricated a new list of enemies which Gómez-Peña lists as: "fundamentalist Muslims, Japanese businessman, Latin American drug lords, black rap musicians, and, more recently, 'illegal aliens' in both senses of the word: cultural Martians invading 'our' institutions, and seditious laborers who are 'stealing jobs from *real*

Americans" (Gómez-Peña 134). With this new list, leaders such as Pete Wilson, Newt Gingrich, Jesse Helms and Pat Buchanan rode the bandwagon of rhetoric calling on U.S. citizens to "Take [their] country back" (134). The new enemy became people of color and the fight was being waged along the borders and in the arena of politics, especially in states like California, where the immigrant population continued to grow.

On the other side of the border, Mexican identity was also in question. While the Mexican government under President Salinas de Gortari was bent on developing new international relationships and projecting the image of a postmodern country gazing northward, there was also a questioning of identity taking place in Chiapas (Gómez-Peña 134). The explosion in Chiapas has forced the Mexican government and its citizens to look inward and explore their current racism against indigenous populations (Gómez-Peña 134). As Gómez-Peña shrewdly observes:

> Although the roots of our crises are of a very different nature, both Califas (California) and Tenochtitlán (Mexico City) are living through unprecedented identity crises. And, for the first time in the twentieth century, there is a growing consciousness on both sides of the border that the crises and dangers we are undergoing are similar. (134)

However, although the experiences on both sides of the border share many points of contact, the relationship between Mexicans and Chicanos is still one that is

marred by misunderstanding. It seems that there are still many invisible borders that have yet to be crossed. Writing in 1995, Gómez-Peña contends that:

> *la mexicanidad* and the Latino/Chicano experience are becoming completely superimposed. The two hundred thousand Mexicans who cross the border every month bring us fresh and constant reminders of our past (for Mexican Americans, the continual migratory flow functions as a sort of collective memory). And the opposite phenomenon also happens: the mythic North (which represents the future) also returns to the South, searching for its lost past. Many of the Mexicans who come to the "other side" become "Chicanized" and return to Mexico—either on their own or by force of the immigration authorities. In the act of returning they contribute to the silent process of Chicanization [that] Mexico is currently undergoing. (136).

This, one can only assume, is the reason for the great popularity of Selena and Los Dinos. The "dual dynamic" (as Gómez-Peña terms it), the movement back and forth across borders and the contamination of styles, language, culture, politics, economics and many other factors, ultimately found a sort of resting place in the music of Selena. Appealing to this dynamic at just the right moment, Selena captured the public's attention in the early 90's, climbing charts, winning awards and becoming an iconic figure of the border.

Selena actively moved across these borders and cultivated a great following in Mexico. In June of 1992, she performed in Mexico for the first

time, and her song "Carcacha" was an instant hit. The video for "Carcacha" was filmed in Monterrey, Mexico (Flores 1). In 1993, Selena was named la Reina de Taquilla because she was the first artist to fill the Baseball Stadium in Monterrey, Mexico. As a result of the overwhelming interest in her concert, she decided to repeat it 15 days later ("Acude a cita con la muerte" *Gente*). After her death, the El Far West Rodeo, the last place she had performed in Monterrey, erected an altar to her, played her songs all night, and began the Rodeo Huinalá with a prayer dedicated to Selena's memory. Her song "Tú Robaste Mi Corazón" was played (Vallejo and Tamayo *Gente*). The director of Representaciones Artísticas Apodaca, Oscar Flores, stated in his column written just after her death: "Nosotros la [Selena] llevamos a Guadalajara, Puebla, México, Tamaulipas, y Coahuila, pero donde más se presentó fue aquí en Monterrey" (*Gente*). Her success in Monterrey, a city that is close to the U.S. border, is an example of what Gómez-Peña calls the "dual dynamic":

> The "northern" sounds of rap and *quebradita* (a fusion of north Mexican *banda* and techno-pop) can already be heard from Yucatán to Chihuahua; while the songs of Mexican bands such as los Caifanes, La Lupita, Maldita Vecindad, and Los Tigres del Norte are being hummed from San Diego to New York. Selena, the "queen of Tex-Mex" (RIP), is venerated in both countries. The sounds of "*techno-banda*" and *quebradita* (no one can deny that these are immigrant sounds) re-Mexicanize Chicano music. The "cholos" and the "salvatruchos" (young Salvadorans in L.A.) are

> wearing Stetson hats and cowboy boots, while Aztec punk-rockers in Mexico City, Guadalajara, and Tijuana are expropriating Chicano iconography and fashion, and talking in Spanglish *que no?* (137)

Selena was in the right place(s) at the right time to capitalize on the superimposition of Mexican and Chicano cultures, and her success in the border region is testimony to the need for finding new icons that could straddle problems of identity for populations on both sides and in between.[11]

The issue overlapping regions is clearly explored in Salcedo's play in an exchange that occurs between Yolanda and Unión Americana. In the fourth act, after a brief scene in which María Celeste (Arrarás) interviews Yolanda, and a scene in which the maid at the Days Inn Motel recounts her testimony to Unión Americana of the events that occurred just after the shooting, a ghost-like appearance by Selena ends the fifth act. Selena enters singing her "Techno cumbia" just after Unión Americana states: "¡Y llegará el ángel a repartir justicia entre vivos y muertos! ¡Y sobre tu nombre de luna se erigirá el Nuevo Imperio! ¡Y tu reino no tendrá fin!" (136). The music, a mixture of styles (techno and *cumbia*) from different regions, reminds us of Gómez-Peña's suggestion that cultures are being superimposed. Similarly, though the obvious reference to the "New Empire" is a biblical one, given the allusion to angels and the imagined after-life of Selena, the possibility of a more abstract concept related to border issues is also plausible. Just as the hope for harmony and a place of belonging exists in the religious realm, that same possibility also exists in art, specifically in

this case, music. In spite of the fact that "the long convoluted history of cultural exchange between Chicanos and Mexicans can be translated as a chronicle of missed encounters" (Gómez-Peña 136), at some level Selena was able to provide a more united reign over a diverse population that was otherwise fragmented.

The appearance and suggestion of a New Empire leads into a scene where Yolanda and Unión Americana converse about the experience of crossing borders. To begin the scene titled *¡CINA, OH PATRIA!*, Yolanda jumps the metal wall that divides the United States and Mexico, only to be stopped by the Border Patrol, played by Unión Americana dressed as the Statue of Liberty:

> UNION AMERICANA: Aquí es propiedad privada. No puede entrar y salir como en su casa.
>
> YOLANDA: Ya iba de regreso. Nomás quería ver tantito. (136)

A few lines later Yolanda defends herself:

> YOLANDA: *I'm american citizen.* Yo sólo quería asomarme. Cruzar por donde alguna vez, de jóvenes, cruzaron mis padres... hace ya tantos años... quería saber.... Yo nací en la Unión Americana, aquí en Texas.... En la Unión Americana hay muchos extranjeros, muchos, de todos lados: de México, de China, de Michoacán, de Rusia, de Zacatecas, de la propia India... han ido llegando poco a poco.
>
> UNION AMERICANA: Como el moho. Como la humedad. Como la sarna. (136)

The blatant confrontations between cultures are played out in a hostile dialogue between Yolanda and the monolithic, layered figure of the United States described in the stage directions in generic terms as Unión Americana, the Statue of Liberty, and the Border Patrol. These three images convey a multiplicity of meanings, both just and evil, and they demonstrate how images and connotations begin to form depending on national perspective. Salcedo also reinforces the stereotypes present in the United States, leading many to conclude that those who appear to be Chicano are illegal aliens when, as in this case, many times they are U.S. citizens. From the dialogue presented in Salcedo's play, Yolanda, too, is a layered character representing illegal aliens and chicanos, and good and evil. To further complicate the exchange, Yolanda recognizes yet another facet of Unión Americana:

> YOLANDA: Jaime García Salazar… La vida te da sorpresas. Sorpresas te da la vida.
>
> UNION AMERICANA: *¡My name is Jimmy! Jimmy*…García.
>
> YOLANDA: *O'key, don't worry. No, problem, Jimmy. Do you like texana musica?* ¿Te gusta la música texana? *I love it.* A mí me fascina. *I have a*… Tengo una amiga… *Would you like to know her?* ¿Te gustaría conocerla? Bueno, no es mi amiga mi amiga. Yo soy la presidenta del club de admiradoras. Yo le digo la Reina. *The queen.* Es la reina del *tex-mex.*
>
> UNION AMERICANA: ¿Selena? ¿Conoces a Selena? (138)

Jaime/Jimmy is Yolanda's childhood neighbor. Yolanda also reveals that Jaime/Jimmy's mother is from Nuevo León, Mexico. To end the scene Yolanda proclaims: "Jaime, *Jimmy*. Unión Americana, ¡como quieras! Vas a ver cuánto nos vamos a querer tú y yo. ¡Y cuánto vamos a querer a nuestra Reina!" (139). Inevitably the ending centers on Selena as a point of mutual understanding between Yolanda and Jimmy, suggesting a reconciliation between the two opposing forces. As Gómez-Peña concludes, the exchange between Mexico and the United States has made it impossible for one side to live without the other. They are intertwined, and whether it is a relationship of antagonism or acceptance, or both, each defines itself in relation to the other.

Selena and her brand of Tex-Mex music provide a meeting point between the cultures of the United States and Mexico. For the communities of immigrants and populations in flux living along the border Tex-Mex music captures their particular experience. The enormous rise in popularity of Tex-Mex music parallels in many ways that of the tango, discussed in chapter two. Many of the same social factors that propelled the tango and Gardel to popularity can be found in the music of the border and in the figure of Selena. At the turn of the last century the River Plate Region experienced a dramatic increase in immigrant populations that had an effect on the language and popular culture. Some of these changes included the development of dialects like *cocoliche* and *lunfardo*, the creation of the *grotesco criollo* theatrical style, as well as the new music called tango. A remarkably similar phenomenon is taking place in the border region

where both the United States and Mexico are living through the evolution of new culture. In literature and theater, a new category of *literatura fronteriza* deals specifically with issues of the border culture that often mixes languages in everyday speech. The combination of cultures is very apparent in the music industry, as well as with the *tejano,* also known as Tex-Mex, genre of music.

The adoration and idolization that Gardel received was and continues to be replicated with Selena for similar reasons. Just as immigrants from Europe poured into Argentina and Uruguay hoping to make their dreams for a better future come true and *hacer la América*, so many Mexicans have crossed the border to achieve the same sort of *American dream* in the United States. The economic draw of the North at the close of the millennium and beyond holds many of the same promises that the River Plate did a century ago for immigrants. The rapid ascension of Gardel from the working class neighborhood of Abasto to international superstar status is revived with Selena. Her meteoric rise to stardom, in spite of her humble beginnings, provides fans with the same hope for economic prosperity. If a working-class *Chicana* girl can make it in both Spanish and English markets, her fans are then persuaded by her fortune into thinking that they might also be able to survive in the economy of *the other side.* One is reminded that Selena's success came first in Spanish; and only later did she cross back over into the English speaking market of the United States. Her posthumous albums reflect this combination, often including songs both in Spanish and English. Alejandro Acevedo confirms that: "El caso de Selena resulta más

trágico porque ella realmente estaba viviendo el sueño americano: factor determinante en el éxito masivo de Selena ya que ella representa ese sueño que por generaciones los emigrantes mexicanos persiguen: volverse ricos en Estados Unidos" (15).

It is also important to note that the Tex-Mex style itself also shares many of the same characteristics with the tango and its cultural context. Traditionally, *tejano* music has been associated with the *ranchera* style produced by those of Mexican descent living in Texas. However, in the last decade or so, the *tejano* style has come to cover a much broader range of rhythms. The style originated with the introduction of the polka accordion that Central Europeans imported into Mexico in the nineteenth-century (Acevedo 14). The connection with the *bandoneón* in the tango is quite obvious. Similarly, just as the tango eventually moved from the brothels and lower class establishments into the parlors of the middle and upper classes in Argentina and Uruguay, so too has Tex-Mex music closed the gap between the lower classes and the middle and upper classes. As Harley Jebens explains: "durante los últimos años la acordeón, en un tiempo considerado como un instrumento de 'clase trabajadora,' ha sido adoptada por los jóvenes hispanos quienes la han combinado con influencias propias, música pop, country y rap" (*Gente*). Jebens goes on to explain that though the influences are clearly multinational, the Tex-Mex style is indigenous to the United States. In this way, like the River Plate tango which combined a variety of influences such as African and European rhythms, the Tex-Mex style also draws on international

beats, but alters them to fit its own profile. Tex-Mex music represents a new category of music born in and of the border culture. In the words of Selena's father *tejano* is understood as "una fusión de rock and roll, norteño, country, corrido y jazz" (Acevedo 14).

Evidence of the change in the style of music began in 1991 when the *tejano* groups *Mazz* and *La Mafia* began to achieve popularity outside the border zone on the East and West coasts of the United States, as well as in Mexico (Jebens *Gente*). The group *La Sombra* scored a huge hit with the song "*El Sancho*" that combined a polka rhythm with rap lyrics, drum beats and keyboards (Jebens *Gente*). What used to be an industry of sales reaching 30 to 50 thousand albums, grew in 1995 to sales of 500 thousand, and proof of the popularity could be found in radio stations devoted exclusively to *tejano* music like KXTN-FM in San Antonio.[12] Even Arista Records recognized the growing importance of Tex-Mex music and established a base in Texas dedicated to the promotion of *tejano* artists (Jebens *Gente*). Just before her death, Selena signed a five million dollar contract with the record company SBK in New York, proving once again the growing and lucrative interest in the *tejano* genre (Jebens *Gente*).

Many point to Selena's album *Dreaming of You* as the best example of the Tex-Mex style where she intersperses English and Spanish, as well as crossing rhythms that are as diverse as *mariachi* and reggae or *cumbia* and hip hop (Acevedo 14). Two of the songs from this album appear in the film *Don Juan de Marco*, a postmodern parody of the Don Juan story, where Selena

appears in a small role. *Tejano* music sung by Selena, like Gardel's tango before it, appealed to a population of immigrants trying to establish themselves in a new culture that was in the process of establishing a new identity, one that combined the old world with the new, foreign with native languages, and a whole set of social and political ideologies. Just as Gardel had transformed the tango from simply being a melody to a melody with lyrics, the new *tejano* artists with Selena at the forefront were changing Tex-Mex music into a new fusion of sounds, images and languages.

Salcedo points specifically to this new brand of music in a scene between Selena and her father, Abraham, just after she has undergone liposuction surgery. As she lies in bed recovering, Abraham visits his daughter, reminiscing about her childhood:

> ¿Te acuerdas cuando te sentaba en mis piernas y comenzabas ya desde chiquita a cantar? Cuando no sabías español y estuve enseñándote pacientemente, para que cantaras tus propias canciones y no imitaras a los gringos. No. Mi'ja es morena. Tiene que cantarle a su pueblo, cantar de sus sentimientos pero en su propia lengua. Que no se pierdan las costumbres, porque aunque vivamos aquí en Estados Unidos, de todos modos llevamos nuestra sangre latina. Nuestra música. (145)

Abraham's comment about her own language prompts one to muse about what that might be. However, the final line of his speech seems to confirm that their music, this special mixture of sounds that is *tejano*, is the perfect form of

expression for those living as part of the border culture. Similarly, in much the same way that the River Plate simultaneously represented the possibility for upward movement and the unfulfilled dreams of many of those who arrived full of hopes, the border zone stands equally for prosperity and despair. As Acevedo notes, just across the border: "Es la región con la que todavía sueñan muchos mexicanos aunque esté convirtiéndose, aceleradamente, en la tierra de las oportunidades perdidas," and Acevedo goes on to say that in this space of "*High (tech)* y el *Low (taste)* [que] han unido para siempre sus vidas: es la región en la que se destruyen las leyes del inglés para acordarse que también se habla español" (12). The confusion over languages and symbols is what made and continues to make Selena such an accessible idol because she represents, as Gardel did, the contradictions and contaminations of two cultures in an attractive package.

Hoping to explain from "the point of view of one of her fans" the impact that Selena had on the Chicana/o and Latina/a population and the music industry, Lourdes Portillo made a personal journey to the geographic and psychic border zone, and produced in 1998 the documentary *Corpus: A Home Movie for Selena* (Liner 2). Set up as a sort of visual scrap book, Portillo's film intersperses footage of Selena and her performances with commentaries from family, friends, fans and even some detractors. In 1997, just two years after Selena's death, Portillo, who was born in Chihuahua, Mexico and raised in Los Angeles, began

her research for the film in Texas. The documentary opens with Portillo seated in front of the camera explaining her reasons for undertaking this project:

> I walked into my parents' living room and they were really engrossed by the TV because someone had been shot. I said 'Who was shot?' They said, 'Selena.' I asked, 'Who is Selena?' When I saw the coverage on television, I couldn't believe that this brown girl had gotten to be so famous. That's when I decided to make a film about Selena.

Portillo goes on to explain that it was her own internalized racism that kept her from believing at first that a Chicana could have garnered such fame.

The initial scene with Portillo facing the camera (added for the PBS broadcast) establishes a dialogue with her viewers and provides the framework for the entire film by marking the rest of the footage with a metadiscourse for understanding Selena's popularity and Portillo's take on that popularity. From the outset, Portillo underscores the importance of how we see the images of Selena, her family and her fans that flash before our eyes and the relationship that we have with those images. Highlighting the importance of seeing and being seen, Portillo's use of documentary allows her to utilize her camera as she would her own eyes to present us her vision/version of Selena's life and the lives that she touched. However, by placing herself in front of the camera and looking into it, Portillo also seems to wink back at herself, acknowledging that she too can be seen, as well as see, and that this also has its own set of implications. Portillo's

film explores the consequences of looking and being seen for the Latino community in Texas through the life and death of Selena.

Performance of identity, culture and gender rest on the notion of being seen and seeing those who perform. Portillo's opening comments reinforce the idea of performance of identity and vision by explaining that even in the Latino community Selena was sometimes invisible because of internalized racism. For Portillo, the importance of telling the stories about Selena rests in the need for latinos to be seen in the media: "We need to see ourselves portrayed . If there had been a Selena on the television, it probably would have made me feel like I belonged in this country. We need to see our experiences validated. Otherwise, we don't exist and if we don't exist, we become diminished by the media. And we can't allow that to happen" (Acosta 3). As Belinda Acosta reminds us in her article about Portillo's film: "Part of the Selena phenomenon included the complete ignorance of the mainstream (including middle-class Latinos), who were not only surprised at the reaction to the singer's death, but asked 'Who's Selena?'—as if to say, since we don't know who she is, she must not exist, or, she must not matter" (3). Acosta affirms that Portillo's work is precisely about expressing the opposite reaction, and making the case that Selena did/does matter.

Portillo puts Selena's life and fame under the scrutiny of the lens of her camera and magnifies her on the screen so that her viewers might see Selena for the first time as larger than life. Portillo's methods find a parallel in scientific

and theatrical practices of the seventeenth century. Discussing the ocular-centric practices of modern science and theater in his essay "The Artificial Eye: Augustan Theater and the Empire of the Visible," Joseph Roach relates the amplification of specimens under the microscope and the new system of classification of species in the seventeenth-century to cultural encounters and theatrical experiences. Roach argues that Augustan theater, like the microscope, was a tool used for the enlargement of everyday object into subjects of gigantic proportions for the purpose of study and categorization. By measuring the visible behaviors of the other specimen or the actor, the viewer was able to fix these behaviors in relation to a European norm through the use of the artificial eye of a microscope or the proscenium stage (Roach 142). As a result, Roach concludes that Augustan theater can be interpreted as "an instrument closely analogous to contemporary optical instruments, especially suited to the magnification of behavior. Used within a system of observation and implicit classification, such an instrument disseminates...powerful constructions of social and cultural differences" (143). For Portillo, the camera functions as the tool that enlarges Selena on the screen for her viewers, allowing them to examine her in a new way and to make comparisons.

Specifically, parallels can be found between Portillo's approach and Roach's theory of performance and science because her project reveals a system of classification. Portillo gives Latinos a forum for speaking about Selena and themselves in comparison to the rest of the United States. Here, Latinos discuss

Selena's performances and the performance of identity. In this categorization the gaze is from the other side, from Latinos who identify their own behaviors and identities in relation to the "norm" of the rest of the United States. Selena is the prototype in Portillo's film that allows members of the border community in Texas to speak about their shared experiences and the impact of cultural borderlands on identity and self-actualization within the United States.

Perhaps the most telling scenes of Portillo's film deal with the young female performers at the Tejano Fine Arts Academy. These young girls see Selena as a role model for young Chicanas/Latinas, one that had previously not existed. Portillo announces to her viewers in the opening sequence that Selena is a "repository of ideals and desires" and that she is most certainly a "complex role model." The young girls who imitate Selena's look and her music at the Academy provide us with their own personal testimonies to back up Portillo's filmic thesis. One young girl looks into the camera and reveals that, for her, Selena meant that "you didn't have to have a certain look." When Portillo asks her to clarify her statement, the young girl responds by stating that one does not have to have blonde hair to be successful. Portillo's words from the beginning echo back to her viewers in this brief conversation: "They [young female fans] saw in her [Selena] who they could be. They couldn't be like the blonde Barbie, so they could be like her."

Performing Selena's music and imitating her appearance in recitals at the Tejano Fine Arts Academy allows these young fans to fix a place for themselves

in relation to the anglicized norms of the rest of the United States, and perhaps the world. Whereas blonde hair, blue eyes, and white skin are the prized physical traits required for success in most media campaigns, Portillo offers an alternative scenario in which young Chicana/Latina performers with dark hair, dark eyes and brown skin are on display for the viewers as the star attraction. Portillo's footage of the young girls' performances of Selena alternate with actual clips from Selena's performances throughout the documentary, and reinforce for the viewer the type of magnification through performance/through the camera that Roach describes in his essay. The viewer is reminded through this visual hopscotch between Selena and the Chicana/Latina imitators that a different visual appearance is required for identification. In this instance, the system of classification that the film privileges is that of the "exception" rather than the "rule." Portillo's statement, the performances by Selena, and those of her young fans are powerful forms of resistance to cultural practices that refuse to see or acknowledge those who do not have a certain look. Clearly, Portillo has made Selena and her fans the protagonists of her film, and in this way she turns the magnifying lens on norms and internalized racism that classify segments of the population into hierarchies where Anglo features are at the top and Chicano/Latino features are near the bottom. Portillo, Selena and her fans suggest that there is another way of seeing themselves portrayed.

Malissa Mychaels, a drag queen who performs as a Selena imitator, personifies in the most exaggerated way the alternative self-image that Portillo

indicates. Mychaels claims that Selena revolutionized the world of drag queen performers by changing the rules of communication. According to Mychaels, before Selena "you would never see drag queens speaking Spanish and joking around in Spanish. All that was a world that was invisible... was kept in the closet." Curiously, Mychaels reveals that for most drag queens, their sexuality was not in the closet, but that they were not accustomed to performing in Spanish, nor were they comfortable with conversing in Spanish off-stage. Mychaels explained that "their basic roots" were in the closet. Selena, by performing in Spanish, allowed a space for Spanish-speaking drag queens to come out as Chicanos/as or Latinos/as and acknowledge their other identities (cultural, ethnic, linguistic and/or racial).

For the female participants who shared their comments in the section of the film titled "Intellectuals"; however, Selena did uncover some basic sexual identities. Seated at a table, writers and artists such as Sandra Cisneros, Cherríe Moraga and others discussed over dinner the sexual profiles that Selena represented for her young fans. Speaking about the young girls at the Tejano Fine Arts Academy, Moraga explains to the other dinner guests that, "Selena gave these girls a way to have Chicana sexuality." Moraga notes that these young girls exhibit none of the awkwardness of puberty while they are performing Selena's "tortured love songs." For Moraga, the girls danced and moved their young bodies without any of the customary "vergüenza" that often accompanies teenagers' mannerisms. However, Cisneros differs with Moraga, claiming that

Selena stood for "dangerous things." In Cisneros' opinion, Selena is a controversial symbol for young girls for several reasons: she left school at the age of 12 to pursue her singing career, her performances encourage young preteens to go on stage and be sexy and her death reinforced the biases against Chicanas by showing that you have to be "bludgeoned, raped or shot to get on the cover of *Texas Monthly* [magazine] if you are Chicana."[13] The performances by Selena and her imitators, as well as the intellectuals who analyze them, demonstrate the complex meanings Selena embodied. Here, Selena serves as a catalyst for "speakers" within or around the edges of the Chicano community to reveal their own different or contradictory views. These exchanges by intellectuals and the revelations of Mychaels serve to uncover the hidden significance that Selena represented through languages and physical image.

Looking at these other images, ones that showcase Chicanas and Latinas, Portillo plays with the notions of performance that Peggy Phelan terms as "unmarked." Specifically, unmarked performances are those that remain invisible or appear to be invisible; those that are refused the possibility of establishing an identity. These performances retain power by refusing to take part in a system of identification that privileges one subject over the other. While Portillo does not necessarily keep the subjects of her documentary "unmarked" for political purposes in the way that Phelan's theory of performance maintains might give them more autonomous power, Portillo does acknowledge the theoretical basis of Phelan's argument. Portillo's film demonstrates Selena's popularity for her

young fans stemmed from the need to define one's identity in a society where often these young Chicana girls are not even seen, or they are seen in a poor light. Selena is the perfect icon because she is a famous role model for the young girls, but at the same time she represents, as Portillo herself commented, the internalized racism that kept her from being seen by many in mainstream America, as well as within the Chicano/Latino communities. The complexity of Selena's legacy lies exactly in the difficult task of explaining her identity, and Portillo wisely sets up a circular structure where there is no clear answer for her viewers. In this way, the documentary mimics the real life challenges that Chicano/as and Latino/as face. Phelan observes that identity:

> emerges in the failure of the body to express being fully and the failure of the signifier to convey meaning exactly. Identity is perceptible only through a relation to an other—which is to say, it is a form of both resisting and claiming the other, declaring the boundary where the self diverges from and merges with the other. In that declaration of identity and identification, there is always loss, the loss of not-being the other and yet remaining dependent on that other for self-seeing, self-being. (*Unmarked*... 13)

In Phelan's theory, identity revolves around the need for an other, and the same circularity can be seen in Portillo's attempt to define Selena and, eventually, herself in relation to Selena. Portillo's circular structure turns around the complex question of Selena's fame. Recalling the opening scene in which

Portillo examines her own feelings of racism towards those of her own background, the rest of the footage that follows is an attempt to explain Selena's impact as a Chicana in the entertainment business and Portillo's subsequent acceptance of Selena's importance. Portillo confirmed her view of Selena's meaning in an interview with Elaine Liner, explaining that she regards the young singer as the first young Hispanic woman to enter the national dialogue: "Here comes a brown woman, very beautiful and very talented, taking up a space that had never been filled by someone else. She represented people that traditionally had not had a presence. I think that is her real importance" (3). Of course, one might assume that one of the people who had not had a presence previously is Portillo herself, because she, like Selena, works in the entertainment sector.

Portillo, like the young fans she films, identifies with Selena's Chicana roots and in her image finds a kind of self-definition. However, at the same time, Portillo highlights awareness of the dividing line between Chicanos/Latinos and other segments of the population that Selena calls into question. In Portillo's work, Selena also serves as a marker for the widely held assumptions that ruie public and private opinions about who can become famous, both consciously and subconsciously. Selena gave her fans a role model to identify with, but in doing so, she reinforced the divisions between cultural and political practices and called attention to a distinct type of physical traits shared by certain groups of fans. Portillo shows the devotion of fans like Momo, who cleans Selena's headstone everyday, fans who are so distraught over her death that they are almost unable to

listen to her music because it makes them physically ill from crying, and those like Frank Fregoso, who confesses that after Selena's death he feels like "something has been stolen from his heart, that something had been taken away from him." All of her footage has the end effect of making her viewers ask themselves the same questions as Portillo: Who was Selena and how did this brown girl get to be so famous?

Portillo also emphasizes the circular structure of her arguments through the comments a store clerk makes about the malleable identities that Selena embodied. The young female clerk explains to Portillo and her viewers that Selena looked "Mexican" in the United States, specifically, in Corpus Christi, Texas, while in Mexico she looked "American." By singing in Spanish and in English Selena identified with two different audiences that often overlapped, and in some instances did not, because of language barriers. Likewise, these different audiences identified with Selena for her ability to sing in Spanish and English. How these audiences saw Selena was an important part of her popularity because audiences could often see themselves and the "other" in Selena. Phelan reminds us that "the external gaze is a compensatory way of returning a failed inward gaze," (*Unmarked*... 15) and that ultimately, "The desire to see is a manifestation of the desire to be seen" (*Unmarked*... 18). By seeing Selena as Mexican or American, and by hearing her sing in Spanish and English, fans along the border were able to find a way of dealing with their own experiences of overlapping identities and cultures. Selena personified the border experience because she was

like her audiences and yet, she also represented the experience "from the other side."

Selena is simultaneously a subject to be identified with and one that represents differences. It is the contestatory nature of her image that makes her an attractive idol for so many to adore because as Phelan mantains, "Seeing the other is a social form of self-reproduction. For in looking at/for the other, we seek to re-present ourselves to ourselves" (*Unmarked*... 21). Portillo expresses a similar idea as she toys with her own initial refusal to believe in Selena and her subsequent identification with her. In her interviews with fans, Portillo mimics back to her viewers the unstable, yet very real, dividing line between self and other, noting implicitly, and at times explicitly, that "one needs always the eye of the other to recognize (and name) oneself" (Phelan, *Unmarked*... 15). This stance resonates throughout the film and is even reflected in the inclusion of the documentary in the PBS series titled "Point of View." Portillo indicates to Liner in her interview that "she took the point of view of a fan paying tribute to a star," and that "This is an essay from [her] perspective and not a film that Abraham [Quintanilla] would have made" (2).[14] Portillo's gaze, the gaze of the fans, and the viewer's gaze all beg the question of identity: "What is it, how do you define it, and in relation to what/whom?" These become powerful questions about a community's values when the viewers are looking at/for identity in a commercially successful celebrity. Portillo appears to be searching for her own identity throughout the film about Selena. She "re-presents herself to herself"

literally by addressing her viewers in front of the camera, and figuratively through images of Selena and her Chicano/a and Latino/a fans. Portillo accomplishes this representation by demarcating the lines that unite her with and divide her from Selena, who represents the so-called "other" in this filmic essay on identity. Selena also highlights the "other" by standing in contrast to mainstream, middle America. This is the metagaze to which I referred that is replicated throughout the documentary by Portillo, by the participants, and for the viewer who contemplates the screen.

Selena, like Frida Kahlo, Carlos Gardel and Eva Perón, died young, but continues to enjoy posthumous success and popularity. Her music and clothing have retained their marketability, and her likeness can be found in the pages of magazines and on the television. It appears on the big screen and on the stages of the Fine Arts academies, transvestite shows and other venues. Her complex musical style and her look continue to offer those living in the border zone between Mexico and the United States a model for success and an image with which they can identify. Selena created herself through music, language, and clothing and accentuated her physical appearance to court certain audiences and provoke reactions (both good and bad). Her death provided her family and Chicanos/Latinos the opportunity to have a voice in the media and control the way that her image would be seen by the rest of the world. Selena through her performances can be seen as an icon of popular culture for her ability to represent a variety of meanings. Selena's iconicity makes her an attractive figure for the

director Lourdes Portillo, the playwright Hugo Salcedo and the television anchor María Celeste Arrarás because she performs so many identities. The layering of performances *by* Selena, with performances *of* Selena allows Portillo, Salcedo and Arrarás to explore performances of identity, culture, politics and sexuality in segments of the populations of Mexico and the United States where the borders often overlap.

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[1] The newspaper *El Norte* reports: 73.7% of those polled continue to consider Selena as their ruling monarch in *tejano* music. "Sondeo." *El Norte.* 1 Apr. 2000. <http://www.elnorte.com/general/encuesta/resultado.asp>.

[2] This comment appears in Lourdes Portillo's documentary film *Corpus: A Home Movie for Selena.* In her statement, Cisneros highlights and, at the same time, ridicules the popular commercialization of religious icons, such as the Virgen de Guadalupe, within the Latino community. Her observation also suggests that there is a certain irony inherent in the popular apotheosis of figures like Selena and their subsequent salability. The trivialization of the religious image of the Virgen de Guadalupe on a keychain is countered by the grandiose reverance paid to the entertainer Selena. However, in both cases, Cisneros reminds the viewer that the images are reduced to the status of existing only as items produced for mass consumption.

[3] In 1995, *People Magazine* decided for only the third time in its history to dedicate a special edition to Selena after fans in the United States requested it following her death. At the time, the only other special editions that had been published were to honor Audrey Hepburn in 1993 and Jackie Bouvier Kennedy Onnasis in 1994. *People* released 80 percent of the 600,000 copies in the Southwest region of the United States where they quickly sold out. Due to the great demand,

People announced another printing of 325, 000 copies only four days after the original release date. (Juan Manuel Navarro for *El Norte: Gente* 4/18/95, 4/28/95)

[4] Arraras's book is also an autobiography about her own coverage of the Selena story on the television show *Primer Impacto*.

[5] José Canales for *El Norte* reports that several of the fans gathered to mourn the singer doubted that the body of Selena was present: Teresa Aquino Martínez was skeptical: "Esto que se está haciendo es un engaño, en el ataúd no está Selena, nos están engañando." Another couple who traveled from El Paso, Texas described their feelings: "Aquí no sientes nada porque no está Selena, sientes más si vas fuera de la casa de ella." Sandra y Ramiro Torres and Nancy García from Brownsville, Texas also commented: "Cómo sabemos que en realidad ella está ahí." (*El Norte: Gente* 4/3/95)

[6] See Roach's article "History, Memory, Necrophilia" in Peggy Phelan and Jill Lanes *The Ends of Performance* (1998).

[7] See the film *Cross-over Dreams* which elaborates on the specific use of the term "cross-over," and how it refers to the success of a minority or a regionally-specific musician into the mainstream music industry

[8] The implications of the contrast between the Biblical Madonna and the singer Madonna also raise questions about the traditional position of women within the typically paternalistic *machista* society that is still very much a part of *tejano* culture. Many have alluded to the strict control that Selena's father exercised with her and his need to control her image even after death. For more information on the relationships within Latino families, see *The Latino Family and the Politics of Transformation* by David. T. Abalos. For more information on Abraham Quintanilla's relationship with Selena see *El secreto de Selena* by María Celeste Arrarás.

[9] Taylor cites Sterns comments: "Selena? Her music is awful. I don't know what Mexicans are into. If you're going to sing about what's going on in Mexico, what can you say?... You can't grow crops, you got a cardboard house, your 11-year old daughter is a prostitute[...]. This is music to perform abortions to!" (qtd. in Arrarás 24)

[10] Ads for a drag show began to appear in the newspaper *El Norte* shortly after the death of the Reina del Tex-Mex. On Saturday the 15th of April, 1995 an ad for Antonio's Le Club reads: "Gran homenaje a la Reyna del Tex-Mex con la auténtica doble de Selena recordando todos sus éxitos caracterizados por Extasís Travestí show."

[11] Governor Bush, speaking at the declaration of Selena Day, maintained that Selena represented the essence of the culture of Southern Texas. Selena was the girl from Corpus Christi who achieved international fame without forgetting her origins. Bush went on to say that she was a model who inspired millions and broke all ethnic, cultural, linguistic barriers, as well as that of age (José Canales, *El Norte: Gente* 4/14/95).

[12] KXTN-FM was rated the most popular station in San Antonio for listeners between the ages of 25 and 49 years (Jebens *El Norte: Gente*).

[13] Selena finished school through a correspondence program while she was on the road performing.

[14] Portillo makes reference to the Hollywood film in which Jennifer López starred as Selena. This film was overseen by Selena's father, Abraham Quintanilla.

The Boulevard of the Unbreakable Dreams

For those who aspire to fame and immortality, the path is often marred by failure and the destruction of dreams. Most never achieve their goal of being famous. The icons in this study, Frida Kahlo, Carlos Gardel, Eva Perón and Selena Quintanilla-Pérez, were admired during their lifetimes, but in death their dreams of success have been fulfilled even more richly than they could have ever suspected. They represent the paradoxical combination of careers cut short by untimely deaths and fabulous longevity. For all of them, death was a step on the road to eternal fame. They have become immortalized through the representations and recreations of others who speak for them and through them. Understood in this context, their dreams are still intact.

Through this study I have contextualized the lives of these four artists within the boundaries of their own time periods to show their strong ties with historical and political events of the past. However, the popularity of these icons in recent theatrical productions also required analyses of how they can also symbolize many of the concerns of the late twentieth century. Based on biographical and autobiographical information, other historical documents and the artistic works produced by these figures, my project explores the performative aspects that the icons cultivated and expressed through their work, lives and bodies. These elements link the cult figures to contemporary performance theory. These analyses demonstrate how Frida, Gardel, Evita and Selena were performance artists who created their own personas, composed

scripts for them and then performed them in public and in private. The connections that existed between the artistic representations that these figures performed and their real personae are so intimate that it is difficult to separate fact from fiction. The overlap between life and art that these artists embodied illustrates the conscious and unconscious roles played by every person in daily life. On a larger scale, the performances that these artists enacted serve as metaphors for the performances generated on the national and international stages of the world.

Much has been written about these figures, but there is no comprehensive study that links them with both performance studies and traditional theatrical spectacle. In most cases, there are no critical analyses of the plays discussed in the preceding chapters because they are still in manuscript form or have only recently been published. My project marks the initial step in understanding how iconic figures can be used to reveal historical, political and social information about popular culture. In turn, the cult personalities in this study demonstrate how aspects of popular culture are performed in traditional theatrical settings as well as in nontraditional spaces. The formal stage represents only one type of performance. By examining a broader category of performance with respect to these four iconic figures, it is possible to identify the subtle roles of identity that rule sexual, political, cultural and national behaviors and their implications in daily life.

The evolution of the use of the icon from a religious tool for teaching scripture into an object, and ultimately an image that reflects consumer culture, is important for understanding how icons symbolize a variety of discourses at the end of the twentieth century. The icon's capacity to represent multiple ideologies makes it the ideal term for describing artists like Frida, Gardel, Evita and Selena who expressed in their art and actions a willingness to align themselves with political and social causes. The numerous performances that these artists layered also make them attractive to others because the layers demonstrate how the artists represented a variety of identities. The joint approach of combining performance theory with cultural studies has allowed me the opportunity to explore how these cult personalities truly became iconic figures and why they persist as famous personalities both within their own native countries and outside those borders.

The passage of time has not diminished interest in Frida, Gardel, Evita and Selena; rather it has increased the attention paid to the four artists' works and their lifestyles. They are intricately tied to the times and circumstances that surrounded them while they were alive, and yet they transcend these limits of time and mortality to appear again and again. The living effigies, the actors that represent Frida, Gardel, Evita and Selena on the stage, only serve to reinforce their immortality. In this way, they are preserved but not static. Possibilities for new representations and interpretations abound.

Another important artist of the twentieth century who has reached international fame and iconic status is Pablo Neruda. In future studies I hope to apply some of the techniques and observations about performance of identity through art and life to some of the works created by and about Neruda. The Chilean poet has very clear ties to politics and historical events in his native country, and these are the topic of works by Antonio Skármeta in *Ardiente paciencia* (1986), Jorge Diaz in *Desde la sangre y el silencio/Fulgor y muerte de Pablo Neruda* (1991) and *Pablo Neruda viene volando* (1992) and the Italian film *Il Postino* (1995). Neruda also works as an international icon as well because authors like Carmen de la Fuente link him to the culture and politics in Mexico in her theatrical piece *Neruda en mi corazón* (1985). The poetic writings that Neruda produced also figure prominently in all of these works and constitute another element of performance and identity, as well as his own theatrical text *Fulgor y muerte de Joaquín Murieta* (1966).

Other figures like Che Guevara were considered in this project, and while he is an excellent example of an iconic figure, the fact that he was not an artist precluded his inclusion in the final list of candidates. However, in another format Che Guevara would make a compelling subject for the study of performance. The anniversary of his death in 2000 brought an avalanche of new biographical material to the literary shelves to further reinforce his immortality. The famous image of Che Guevara in a beret appears on T-shirts, posters,

keychains, books and in graffiti on public walls. He continues to play the role of spokesman for a cause long after his death in all parts of the world.

In studying iconic figures like Frida Kahlo, Carlos Gardel, Eva Perón, Selena Quintanilla-Pérez, and perhaps, Pablo Neruda and Che Guevara, the possibilities for establishing multiple readings of their impact during the twentieth century are endless. The combination of the concepts of iconography with theories of performance only broadens the scope further. Through creative repetition on the stage dramatists are able to maintain the essence of the story and life of the figure, but each representation also holds open the possibility for innovation because no two performance are ever identical. The potential for change is the aspect that allows for dynamic performances and evaluations of history and its figures. The contemporary element of the performances, which were written and possibly performed in the second half of the twentieth century, also establishes a link between the past and present. These icons defy the passage of time, but they also highlight its progression and the changes that occurred over the span of a century. These "twice-performed" behaviors also remind the viewer of the persistence of cultural norms and the simultaneous evolution of cultural practices.

By replacing religious saints with secular ones, twentieth-century dramatists present reflections on popular culture to their audiences. Instead of religion to guide behavior for the after-life, populations at the end of the millennium look to painters, musicians, politicians and others as their leaders.

Contemporary audiences want to see their world through symbols that come from their time period and through these iconic figures, perhaps, see their place in the path of time.

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