

# LUIS VALDEZ'S *LA PASTORELA*: "THE SHEPHERDS' TALE": TRADITION, HYBRIDITY, AND TRANSFORMATION

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## ABSTRACT

The article analyzes Luis Valdez's video version of the traditional nativity play *La Pastorela*, using Foucault's notions related to discourse and power and his concepts regarding heterotopic space. It posits that Valdez's hybrid *pastorela* encompasses traditional as well as postmodernist elements making it possible to inscribe within the text transgressive and subversive elements. In this manner, the Chicano playwright is able to articulate his concerns related to issues of social justice for the Mexican American population and, more specifically, for the farm worker. Four elements included in the Valdez *pastorela* are seen as particularly transgressive and subversive: the figure of the farm worker as protagonist, the Chicano English/Spanish used, the hybrid nature of the musical compositions as well as the multiplicity of musical genres included, and the use of the devils. These four elements transform the *pastorela* from a traditional religious play into a contemporary subversive text that challenges the status quo.

KEY WORDS: *Pastorela*, nativity play, Luis Valdez, shepherds' play, folk theater, liturgical drama, Foucault, *Los Pastores*

## RESUMEN

El artículo analiza la versión producida en vídeo por Luis Valdez del drama navideño tradicional *La Pastorela* usando las teorías de Foucault relacionadas con el discurso y el poder y sus conceptos del espacio heterotópico. El estudio propone que las estructuras híbridas inscritas en *La Pastorela* comprenden elementos tanto tradicionales como postmodernistas. De esta manera, el dramaturgo Chicano puede inscribir elementos transgresivos y subversivos y además puede articular sus inquietudes relacionadas con aspectos de justicia social para la población méxicoamericana y, más específicamente, para el trabajador agrícola. Cuatro elementos incluidos en la estructura de *La Pastorela* son particularmente transgresores y subversivos: la figura del trabajador agrícola como protagonista, el lenguaje chicano, el aspecto híbrido de las composiciones musicales y multiplicidad de géneros musicales, y el uso de los diablos. Estos cuatro elementos transforman a *La Pastorela* de drama religioso, tradicional a texto contemporáneo y subversivo que reta el estatus quo.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Pastorela*, auto navideño, Luis Valdez, teatro pastoral, teatro popular, drama litúrgico, Foucault, *Los pastores*



Much of Chicano literature traces its antecedents to European cultural production dating from the sixteenth century. The *copla* and the *décima* in poetry, the *romance* and *canción* in song, and religious dramas in theater are but a few examples. Luis Valdez's video drama *La Pastorela: "The Shepherd's Tale"* (1991) is fundamentally based on the folk play *Los Pastores*—a Christmas mystery play based on the Spanish *autos sacramentales* imported to America by Franciscan friars in 1524. When Spanish missionary friars arrived in what is now Mexico they resorted to the *auto sacramental* theatrical performances to instruct the Native American populations on the intricacies of the Catholic faith. Through the spectacle of live theater the clergy were able to transmit their religious message since they did not speak the Native American languages and the Meso-American Indians did not speak Spanish. In this study I analyze Valdez's pastorela with respect to traditional as well as postmodern elements and posit that this particular nativity play's evolution and transformation, as well as its hybrid nature are directly connected to political and ideological issues extant in society. Furthermore, I posit that it is this hybrid position between tradition and modernity that makes Valdez's drama *La Pastorela* a strategic weapon that can be effectively deployed to articulate contemporary political issues and to advocate reforms for social justice via its accepted traditional religious format. Through this strategic maneuvering, Valdez's militancy is attenuated and appears less threatening to more conservative, reactionary forces. The hybrid nature of Chicano artistic expression lends itself well to being used as a tool in combating repressive national and state forces.

The transformations evident in pastorela production and their link to power relations adhere to theoretical paradigms posited by Michel Foucault regarding the manner in which discourse is connected to power. Foucault's writings detail the power of discourse and how those in power seek to control it. In his essay on "The Discourse of Language" he asserts:

in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures, whose role is to avert its powers and its dangers, to cope with chance events, to evade its ponderous, awesome materiality.

In a society such as our own we all know the rules of *exclusion*. The most obvious and familiar of these concerns what is *prohibited*. We know perfectly well that we are not free to say just anything, that we cannot simply speak of anything, when we like or where we like; not just anyone, finally, may speak of just anything. We have three types of prohibition, covering objects, ritual with its surrounding circumstances, the privileged or exclusive right to speak of a particular subject; these prohibitions interrelate, reinforce and complement each other, forming a complex web, continually subject to modification (Foucault 1972, 216).

Foucault further points out that the two major prohibitions are those "dealing with politics and sexuality" (1972, 216). Equally important in Foucault's theories on discourse and pertinent to my analysis of the Valdez pastorela, is his view on the importance of history in discursive change. That is to say, particular forms of discourse will be acceptable or unacceptable according to who is in power at a

specific point in time. The French critic's work on the prison system (*Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*) and on madness (*Madness and Civilization: A History of Madness in the Age of Reason*) delineates how an epoch's archival rules and constraints determine whether particular discourses are classified as normal or mad. Should these discourses be considered abnormal or beyond the pale of society's dictum, there will be attempts to repress and silence them. Pastorela production falls within this purview of repression, censorship, and silence in certain historical periods and enjoys a modicum of freedom of expression at other points in time.

The Foucauldian concept of heterotopia is also important in the analysis of pastorela production. Foucault's notion that we are in an epoch of space, of simultaneity, of juxtaposition, of the near and the far, of the side-by-side bear out in Luis Valdez's pastorela since all of the above Foucauldian concepts are evident in the video production of the play (Foucault 1986, 22-27). Hybridity is evident in the juxtaposition of medieval shepherds with the *vato loco* (gang member type) and his 1955 shiny red Chevy. The medieval devil will appear in several guises including as Hell's Angels and as a Middle East sultan with his flying carpet and throng of scantily clad belly dancers.

Valdez's *La Pastorela* can be viewed as a heterotopia in two significant aspects: it is a play usually performed in a particular space—a stage (i.e. the San Juan Bautista Mission in California) and it is a video seen through a television screen. Foucault defines both of these spaces, the theater stage and cinema, as heterotopic.

The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real space several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible. Thus it is that the theater brings onto the rectangle of the stage, one after the other, a whole series of places that are foreign to one another, thus it is that the cinema is a very odd rectangle room, at the end of which, on a two-dimensional screen, one sees the projection of a three-dimensional space... (1986, 25)

In addition, although Foucault does not explicitly state it, another heterotopic space can be dream space. Dream reality is another reality and is analogous to a mirror (which Foucault does classify as a heterotopic space) in that it too reflects material reality. It can be conceptualized as a Foucauldian counter-site where reality can exist at multiple levels —i.e. real, phantasmagoric, magical, heavenly, extra-terrestrial, and so forth. Valdez's video version of *La Pastorela* begins by depicting everyday farm worker reality but this reality is soon transposed (about five minutes into the video) into a dream world where fantasy and reality intermix in order to weave the tale of the struggle between good and evil.

I center my analysis on Valdez's video production played on national television in 1991 (although he has been presenting pastorelas in San Juan Bautista, California since the 1970s. See *Los Angeles Times*). My work underscores the long trajectory traveled by this literary text: i.e. from European medieval and Spanish colonial periods to the present. This shepherds' play has evolved into various forms since its inception in the Middle Ages in Europe and its importation to the Americas in the sixteenth century. Luis Valdez's version is one in a series of transforma-



tions this folk drama has undergone. Valdez will suffuse the theatrical representation of the play with political elements and absurd juxtapositions which situate it within postmodernist parameters. The Chicano playwright will evince at times a subversive view of society while at others an affirmative stance is taken particularly when its referent is Mexican American culture and family values.

As pointed out earlier, the *autos sacramentales* were used as a strategy to christianize the Native American populations. The religious play *Juicio final* (*Last Judgment*) was first performed in 1533 and was the first European drama enacted in America; by the end of the decade at least seven different plays had been staged.

These early missionary plays performed in New Spain soon evolved from religious plays to more secular forms of entertainment. The popular sectors found the dramas extremely pleasing and fairly flexible in structure so that almost immediately changes in these religious plays began to be introduced in spite of the fact that the changes were unacceptable to the clergy and tended to scandalize them. Fray Juan de Zumárraga, First Bishop of Mexico, classified the *autos sacramentales* as too sexually explicit and prohibited their enactment during the 1540s decade<sup>1</sup>. Fortunately for pastorela productions, the Bishop died in 1548 and so with the Bishop's demise the plays were performed once again.

The arrival of the Jesuit Order in 1572 infused a new life in pastorela production since they came to America well versed in literary traditions and with a strong European theatrical background. The term "pastorela" emerged during this period and the representation of these plays began to surface throughout the various geographic regions of New Spain. Nevertheless, the constant attacks against dramatic productions continued so that by 1644 Bishop Juan Palafox de Mendoza in his battle with the Jesuits attacks with great severity the enactment of these dramas. The pastorelas nearly receive a deathblow when the Jesuits are expelled in 1767 and denunciations against these dramatic performances appear accusing them of being scandalous. In spite of their being banned by the Inquisition the plays do not disappear but on the contrary, the character of the devil expands to include numerous secondary devils —normally the Seven Deadly Sins plus Lucifer and Satan.

It is in the nineteenth century, during the Wars of Independence that pastorelas become part of the emerging Mexican national landscape and began to be tied to cultural identity. The Independence Movements (1810-1821) of Mexico and other Latin American countries embraced a political ideology derived from the Age of Enlightenment and other revolutionary movements taking place in the eighteenth century in such countries as the United States and France. The pastorela, having been banned under Spanish rule, now exploded as a symbol of national freedom. Once again, a political movement stimulates the flourishing and expansion of this genre.

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<sup>1</sup> For a good introduction to the history and evolution of the pastorela see Romero Salinas.

The nineteenth century witnessed three different expressions of pastorela production: (1) traditional, religious pastorelas, (2) literary, mainstream theater pastorelas, and (3) urban pastorelas. The character of the hermit is introduced at this juncture since he is symbolic of the contradictions found in the Catholic Church.

After the Mexican playwright and author Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi's pastorela appeared in 1826, right after the independence movements, an explosion of literary pastorela texts surfaced in the ensuing Christmas seasons. Theaters throughout Mexico City enacted pastorelas or pastorela-derived plays such as *Los hijos de Bato y Bras o travesuras del diablo* (*The Sons of Bato and Bras or the Tricks of the Devil*) written by an anonymous author [1848]; *La pata del diablo* (*The Devil's Foot*) written by Mariano Osorno in 1862; *El diablo predicador o mayor contrario amigo* (*The Preaching Devil or the Worst Contrary Friend*) written by Calizto Dodun y Conde, [1888-89].

The three categories of shepherds' plays continued to be popular during the twentieth century although in Mexico City the urban pastorelas predominate and are characterized by their strong sexual overtone, their mordant criticism directed toward the ruling class, the bourgeoisie, and toward politicians. Mexico City's urban pastorelas zeroed in on the economic problems of the country and the social injustices extant therein. Written mainly for entertainment, pastorela performances make people laugh with their strong doses of satire and irony explicitly presented. Nevertheless, the social and political criticism is such that the playwright producer and actor of the avant garde pastorela *Tapadeus*, Germán Dehesa, in an interview I conducted with him in December 1986, informed me that he was constantly in fear of having his production shut down by government officials.

Since the 1960s, after the noted Mexican playwright, Miguel Sabido, introduced sophisticated, urban pastorelas in Mexico City, there has been a renaissance of pastorela performances in that metropolitan center as well as throughout Mexico and the Southwest (*Los Angeles Times*). In 1986, when I first undertook fieldwork on the genre, I was able to collect nine different variants of the shepherds' plays that were on stage in numerous theaters throughout Mexico City.

Luis Valdez's play *La Pastorela: "The Shepherds' Tale"* is based on a traditional shepherds' play titled *Los Pastores* found in the American Southwest but, in particular, popular in Texas and New Mexico during the nineteenth century, and early twentieth century. Both Texas and New Mexico continue to enact pastorela performances every Christmas season.<sup>2</sup> This traditional play depicts the shepherds Lizardo, Bato, Gila, Abelicio, Bartolo, Menapas, Dina, and Melideos tending their sheep when an Archangel (Gabriel in some texts and St. Michael in others) an-

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<sup>2</sup> For Texas see Flores, an in-depth study of a popular pastorela performed every Christmas in San Antonio, Texas. For New Mexico, I videotaped two pastorelas in Taos and Española in 1989 and have them in my pastorela collection.



nounces the birth of the new born Jesus and directs the shepherds to go worship him at the grotto in Bethlehem. On their journey to the grotto, the *hermitaño* or hermit, representative of the Catholic Church, joins them. Throughout the shepherds' journey the devil(s) appears and tries to divert them by using various strategies to distract them.

*Los Pastores* is the most widely diffused liturgical play throughout the Americas there being hundreds of variants attesting to their popularity.<sup>3</sup> A common structural variation in the drama is found within the tricks the devil plays on the shepherds when trying to intercept their pilgrimage to worship the new born Child. The devil may use any of the Seven Deadly sins in tempting the shepherds to forget their quest. As might be expected, the most common Deadly Sins used are Lust, Gluttony, and Greed, i.e. sex, food, and money!

Valdez adheres to the traditional structure and plot of the *pastorela*. His basic plot has the announcement of the birth of Christ given by St. Michael (played by Linda Ronstadt); the shepherds' journey; the hermit's incorporation in the journey; the devils' machinations in trying to divert the shepherds from their sacred task (main devil, Osmodeo, played by Chicano comic Paul Rodríguez); the battles between minor devils and St. Michael; the battle between Lucifer and St. Michael (victory of Good over Evil); the final scene at Bethlehem where the shepherds pay homage to the new-born Jesus.

There are four major strategies through which Valdez subverts the traditional *pastorela* structure in order to permeate it with an ideology that is congruent with Chicano political positions and demands for social justice and a more equitable society. These strategies include: the farm workers as protagonists, Chicano language registers, i.e. code-switching (English and Spanish), working class speech, expletives, standard Spanish, standard English, and *caló* (mainly adolescent jive talk or jargon); numerous musical genres; and representation of the devil in a multiplicity of forms (Hell's Angels, wealthy Californio rancher, Middle East sultan.)

## FARM WORKERS

The Chicano playwright subverts the traditional *pastorela* structure by incorporating the contemporary farm worker into the plot. In this manner the *pastorela* is not merely a traditional religious play but becomes a political statement vis-à-vis the exploited farm worker. The issues of poverty are underscored at the inception of the play and will be reiterated throughout. The offers by the devils of rich banquets and plentiful food resonate within the ideological parameters of farm worker exploitation and poverty in a wealthy society.

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<sup>3</sup> Juan B. Rael collected numerous *pastorelas* and has a detailed study of their diffusion.

Valdez initiates the action on his video with the camera shot of a dreamy young woman named Gila seated on a hillside near the town of San Juan Bautista, California. After focusing on the young woman, the camera proceeds to show a group of migrant farm workers who are returning from laboring in the local garlic fields in Gilroy, California. This is a small agricultural town located in a rich agricultural area near San Juan Bautista and known as the “Garlic Capital of the World.” The workers realistically present the poverty found in the United States among Mexican Americans and in this manner underscore the political subtext of the play. The migrant workers’ camp further demonstrates through the sharp camera’s eye the poor living conditions under which the farm workers toil in spite of being the principal workers in California’s multi billion dollar agricultural industry. Poverty and a life of backbreaking work are evident in the faces of the workers. The lack of money pervading the lives of these workers is underlined when Gila upon returning to her house complains to her mother of the lack of adequate Christmas presents for the children. The stoic mother chastises the young girl for her discontent and her complaining.

After this brief interlude in Gila’s house, the family proceeds to the mission church in San Juan Bautista to see a pastorela performance (this pastorela is presented every other year in the San Juan Bautista mission). As Gila sits in a church pew an object falls from the priest’s pulpit and strikes Gila on the head rendering her unconscious. Valdez uses the same filmic technique present in the classic movie *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) where young Dorothy, the main character, is struck on the head by a flying object and “wakes up” in another reality. Gila, in a similar manner, “wakes up” in another reality. She is transported from the San Juan Bautista Mission church into the countryside and “wakes up” as a shepherdess tending sheep with her father and neighbors all dressed as shepherds. Thus the play within a play begins and the pastorela narrative commences for immediately after Gila wakes up in the bucolic setting of the hills of San Juan Bautista the archangel St. Michael makes his dramatic appearance and conveys the message to the shepherds about the new-born Jesus.

Valdez’s casting of the farm workers as principal characters in the pastorela contextualizes the play within present working-class conditions. The farm worker as sacred image, as hero, as an active agent in helping the forces of Good overcome the forces of Evil redefines his/her role in society. They are the subjects, the privileged ones within the frame of the narrative and are not pathetic objects to be pitied or scorned. Valdez’s pastorela is transgressive and subversive because it empowers the downtrodden through an artistic production.

## LANGUAGE

A structural element immediately noticeable in the play is the multiplicity of language registers used. *La Pastorela* is not performed in its original language, i.e. Spanish. The play introduces both Spanish and English in the dialogues and code-switching is particularly evident. Language becomes a subversive element in that

the pastorela is performed in the language of the Chicano —a language that has been vilified by hegemonic classes both in the United States and in Spanish-speaking countries. By using Chicano Spanish, English and a combination of both languages, Valdez is conferring legitimacy to what has been called a “bastardized” language. Gloria Anzaldúa in her book *Borderlands/La Frontera. The New Mestiza* includes a section titled “Linguistic Terrorism.” In this essay Anzaldúa discusses the issue of speaking Chicano English and its harsh consequences:

*Deslenguadas. Somos los del español deficiente.* We are your linguistic nightmare, your linguistic aberration, your linguistic *mestizaje*, the subject of your *burla*. Because we speak with tongues of fire we are culturally crucified. Racially, culturally and linguistically *somos huérfanos* —we speak an orphan tongue. Chicanas who grew up speaking Chicano Spanish have internalized the belief that we speak poor Spanish. It is illegitimate, a bastard language. And because we internalize how our language has been used against us by the dominant culture, we use our language differences against each other.

Thus Valdez’s use of Chicano English throughout the video affirms the linguistic validity of this form of communication and reaffirms its use as an important element in artistic creations.

The language employed in Valdez’s drama is not abstract or alienating; it is the voice of the Chicano people who creatively mix Spanish and English —the play being both bilingual and bicultural. Within Valdez’s forms of linguistic expression is the Foucauldian concept of heterotopia, i.e. a multiplicity and plurivalence of forms coexisting in a single space. Valdez incorporates the linguistic expressions created and articulated by the Mexican-American population and utilizes these expressions as realistic speech acts that aid in the structuring of a picaresque-type humor. For example, we hear Gila’s mother admonish her daughter: “Some diablo has gotten into you.” The code-switching interjects a humorous note and at the same time introduces other cultural elements since the word “diablo” (devil) conveys a series of cultural vectors indicative of the Mexican conceptualization of the devil. Other examples of code-switching include the following:

BILINGUAL TEXT

MY TRANSLATION

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|---|---|
| <p>1. Oh, <i>chihuahua!</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Here I am in my hermit’s cave.</p> <p>2. Help your <i>comadre</i> get some <i>tortillas</i>.</p> | <p>1. Oh, darn it!</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Here I am in my hermit’s cave.</p> <p>2. Help your co-mother get some <i>tortillas</i>.</p> |
|---|---|

(excerpts from video *La Pastorela*, 1991)

The bilingual expressions function in various ways: two of the most important are to elicit humor and secondly to underscore Hispanic cultural aspects. In example #1 the term “chihuahua” is a common Mexican expression (a euphemism)



for the harsh expletive “chingado.” The term situates the action and speaker within a Mexican/Chicano cultural context being that it is specifically Mexican/Chicano and not Latin American or peninsular Spanish.

The same can be said for example #2 where the words “comadre” and “tortilla” are used as signifiers for Mexican/Chicano culture. In this case there is no direct translation for the word *comadre* (can be loosely translated as co-mother) or *tortilla*, a type of Mexican corn bread used in eating and as a main ingredient for many Mexican dishes such as *tacos* and *enchiladas*.

## MUSIC

A third major strategy through which Valdez incorporates subversive elements is through musical compositions. While traditional pastorelas adhere to religious *villancicos* (Christmas carols) Valdez’s text mixes the sacred with the profane producing various hybrid forms of music. For example *villancicos* and classic rock are played side by side (the classic rock song “Black Magic Woman,” recorded by Carlos Santa Ana and his band is played in one scene). Jazz is also played throughout one major scene in the video production and a *villancico* is rendered in a jazzy musical style. In this manner, hybridity is manifested through the various musical scores extant in the video production.

Musical compositions range from classical to working class, to middle class and popular culture. We find classical religious music, *conjunto* music (Tex-Mex), blue grass, rock and roll, Latin American, *nueva canción* and *canciones rancheras* (Mexican rural type songs). This mixture of musical compositions underscores the postmodernist obsession for breaking boundaries between the center and the margin. Nevertheless, within this musical styles what predominates are those musical compositions emanating from the working class; from marginalized groups.

## THE DEVIL

A fourth strategy used in subverting the traditional religious pastorela structure is through the figure of the devil. The representation of the devil has evolved from a traditional medieval figure, to a baroque devil in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, to a romantic, anguished creature of the nineteenth century and finally to a contemporary postmodernist devil. A heterogeneous mixture of devils appears in Luis Valdez’s pastorela some of which are half human, half animal while others are represented as the Hell’s Angels! The latter are dressed in Heavy Metal punk attire, i.e. they are dressed in black with metal trimmings throughout their shirts and pants. The representation of modern day evil as Hell’s Angels mounted on their Harley Davidson motorcycles produce both terror and humor. The characterization of evil in our modern day society as the Hell’s Angels and their appearance as such in modern day pastorelas are indicative of the flexibility of this genre’s structure; a structure which lends itself to easy updating of issues and events. In one

recent pastorela presented in San Diego, California (1999) the devils disguised themselves as three TeleTubbies!

While the devils play tricks on the shepherds in their attempt to divert them from their pilgrimage, they are not equivalent to the Mexican trickster figure. In Mexican culture the trickster figure plays tricks on the devil and defeats the devil, such a trickster figure in Hispanic/Mexican culture is Pedro de Urdemalas. The Mexican trickster always defeats the devil with his wit and cunning. In the case of pastorelas the devils are not clever enough to defeat the shepherds. The shepherds, on the other hand, are not the ones that defeat the devil(s); it is the archangel St. Michael and his angels who accomplish this feat.

Valdez's pastorela has the minor devils represented as Hell's Angels. However, the chief devil, Lucifer, (Luzbel) appears in three instances in different costumes. In Lucifer's first appearance he wears a black tuxedo with a black cape and arrives on the scene in a limousine. The image projected is that of wealth and power. In Lucifer's second and third appearance he is dressed as a nineteenth century *Californio don* (wealthy, titled, landowning person) and he is riding a horse. Here once again we can detect the political agenda resonating within the play. The landowner/ *hacendado*/ agribusiness rancher/ grower as representative of "evil" is within the political, historical parameters of Mexican/Chicano society. The Spanish/Mexican *hacendado* (landowner) has been perceived as "evil" from the perspective of the Indian and the *mestizo* who suffered under the hacienda peonage system in the Spanish colonial period and the Mexican nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Since there are no longer Californio (Spanish/Mexican) landowners, the figure is a signifier for the contemporary California big business farmer with whom César Chávez, the Chicano union organizer, fought so hard against. Valdez was intimately involved in the struggle to unionize farm workers and his pastorela is within the parameters of the union struggle tradition of the Teatro Campesino. An interesting question arises as to why Valdez did not present Lucifer as a contemporary Anglo grower but chose the extinct Californio rancher. The answer most likely lies in Foucault's theory of discourse and power. Since Valdez's sponsors were probably Anglo-Americans and the national audience targeted is mostly Anglo, the Chicano playwright either self-censored his pastorela or he was pressured into changing the ethnicity of the grower to the now defunct and very dead Californio. Censorship frequently happens to Chicano artists who are too vocal or too graphic in their denunciations of Anglo-American oppression and discriminatory practices.

The two figures, Jesus Christ on the cross and Lucifer are counter-posed and at times these two appear to blend into one. This blending coincides with Luis Valdez's adaptation of Mayan philosophical beliefs of "Tú eres mi otro yo" ("You are my other self"). The disappearance of the boundary separating good and evil between the archetypal figures of Jesus and Lucifer underscores the postmodernist position of abolishing boundaries between binary structures such as good and evil; the signifier and the signified.

Valdez's *La Pastorela: "The Shepherds' Tale"* encompasses multiple aspects characteristic of postmodernist aesthetics. It is a politically subversive play that aims

its critical darts directly at the establishment and at capitalist society and in particular against those forces oppressing the Chicano people.

At the same time, Valdez's drama affirms traditional mores and beliefs such as love for one's family, respect for parents, belief in the tenets of Catholicism—although belief in the devil is not necessarily reaffirmed since the devils are a source of humor and laughter more than horrific figures. Lucifer, on the other hand, is representative of capitalism and the evils this system supposedly encompasses, i.e. conspicuous consumption, wealth, luxury, and so forth. The Holy Family is not satirized while the hermit, representative of the Catholic church is castigated through parody and satire for his hypocrisy and false humility. Valdez's shepherds' play continues to privilege heterogeneity. It attacks hierarchical structures such as patriarchy and the false materialistic values of our affluent society while affirming such Mexican American cultural values as the family and religious belief systems.

As is evident, the *pastorela* is a folk genre that continues to be performed in Mexico and the United States, both in the traditional religious style and in more contemporary modes. Political forces have been directly instrumental in the evolution of the genre and its flexible structure makes it appealing to playwrights. Dramatists frequently exercise their creative talents and transform the *pastorela* plays in order to meet contemporary tastes and to address the issues that concern today's audiences.



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