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Publication Date

2019

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
SANTA CRUZ

THE ADAPTATION OF THE WESTERN WORLD

Taking Up (Liminal) Space

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THEATER ARTS

By

Mary Isabel Cruz

June 2019

The Thesis of Mary Isabel Cruz

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ABSTRACT

THE ADAPTATION OF THE WESTERN WORLD:

Taking Up (Liminal) Space

by

M. Isabel Cruz

American theater remains a decidedly Anglo-patriarchal institution, up to and including what is deemed worthy of being called “American” theater. Not seeing themselves represented on stage, people of color have created their own companies, and endure the criticism of not only engaging in what is sometimes considered a self-inflicted segregation, but also being seen as inferior to mainstream theater. There is the need for a third option: a theater between traditionally exclusionary “American” theater, and the “ethnic” genres that have been reduced to niche theater. I propose adaptation as that third option.

Through Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Nepantla* theory, existence between two worlds, I establish my own need to claim space and tell stories that exist in the in-between; a liminal space for me and theater makers like me, who don’t quite fit in one designated space or the other. For this project, I adapted a work from the Irish canon, *The Playboy of the Western World*, by John Millington Synge (1907), setting it in a time and place in U.S. history that is also Latin American history: 19th century California. As I consider my history and, even as I question my own identity, I propose this adaptation as a vehicle for representation and self-identification. I conclude that, due to casting, a staged reading and a workshop production were successful in distinct ways.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am so grateful for my professors at UC Berkeley, without whom I would not have made it to where I am today. I would like to thank Professor Jody Allen Randolph for introducing me to Ireland in a way no one else could have, and Professor Thomas Walsh for keeping me connected after coming back home.

I owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. Michael Chemers, Professor Amy Ginther, and Theater Arts of UC Santa Cruz, for the support to make this project possible. Thank you to Dr. Matthew Spangler, for taking a chance on the sibling of one of your actual students. You all remind me that I am on the path on which I am meant to be.

To the surviving members of the graduate cohort, thank you for challenging me and participating in the very first reading of this adaptation. My work could not have moved along with your feedback. A special thank you to Ben, for making the Barn accessible; it was the perfect place for the first staging of this play.

Much appreciation to all of the students involved in the staged reading, and/or the workshop. I could not have completed this program without the enthusiasm and presence of a group of undergraduates, “my lil’ homies,” including: Amanda Ceballos, Edith Castorena, Rey Cordova, Vanessa Di Franco, Xochitl Rios-Ellis, Enrique Villalobos, and Adrian Zamora. In the most difficult moments, I would think about giving up, but then I would think of you, and knew I had a reason to go on. You gave me purpose.

Finally, to my family: you inspire me in ways you’ll never know. This work is dedicated to: my mother, who wasn’t allowed to attend college; George Bonvie, whose support has made all of this possible; and Luna, my very own Pangur Bán.

Section I: Introduction

While completing my undergraduate career at UC Berkeley, there occurred a situation that was pivotal in informing the decisions I have made, and will make, in my educational and professional careers. In Fall 2015 and Spring 2016, respectively, the main stage productions in the Department of Theater, Dance, and Performance Studies were Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*, and *Chavez Ravine*, by Culture Clash. I was the only female actor who was cast in both productions. The juxtaposition of the two plays revealed an "us versus them" mentality amongst my classmates. My fellow students of color expressed frustration that a hundred-year-old work from the Anglo-patriarchal canon was taking up space in the season, while my white classmates expressed indifference, if not disdain, towards the department's decision to produce a play "about Mexicans," and I was caught in the middle. The experience brought on the anxiety that people will always have an opinion on what kind of theater I should even be interested in participating, and the realization that my choices as an actor and theater maker, even if not political by intention, would always be viewed through a political lens. Most difficult of all, it made me begin to question where I belonged in the world of theater.

That summer, I decided to participate in Berkeley Summer Abroad. The Ethnic Studies program in Mexico City, to which I had applied, filled up in record time, so I was pulled in another direction: Ireland. For six weeks, I studied Irish dramatic literature and theatre, and though I had believed that my research would gain more from a program in Mexico, I quickly began to see strong parallels between Irish culture and history, and Latin American culture and history. Not only did this adventure greatly influence the work I would do in my last year at Cal, but it was the inspiration for this very project: to adapt a play from the Irish canon and set it in Alta California.

In this thesis, I will explore adaptation as a socially-relevant, and creative form of playwrighting, particularly for the purpose of representation and inclusivity of people of color, in theater. My adaptation of *The Playboy of the Western World*, by John Millington Synge (1907), is set in a time and place in U.S. history that is also Latin American history: 19th century California. When Europeans were the immigrants, achieving whiteness by groups, and borderlines were moving northwards on the map, this is a time during which occurred what Gloria Anzaldúa refers to as “the invention of the Mexican-American” (119, 2012). As my ancestry is equal parts Native American and European, I find it appropriate to adapt the work of an Anglo-Irish playwright, the two of us navigating our way through the world, as both the colonized and the colonizer. I also find it fitting to use the work of a writer whose people eventually achieved whiteness as a vehicle for representation of people of color.

In this paper, I argue that adaptation is an accessible way by which to achieve representation of people of color on stage, and as a method of decolonizing the Anglo-patriarchal narrative. The theory I apply to my adaptation process is *Nepantla*, as professed by Gloria Anzaldúa, as well as her ideas of Border Art. I explore the cultural and historical parallels between Latin America and Ireland that inspired the idea for this adaptation, then provide historical dramaturgy for my work. I touch on the first production of the original play, as well as two previous adaptations, and consider what about the original lends itself to adaptation, particularly, in relation to my adaptation, positioning the original work within *Nepantla*. Finally, I describe my writing process, giving justification for my dramaturgical choices. I conclude that a staged reading in the Winter Quarter was successful in providing an opportunity for students of color to represent themselves in a story with which they identified, while the workshop I directed in the Spring Quarter was a success in spite, or because of, the need to adapt my adaptation to casting limitations. I end up where I started, in

Nepantla.

SECTION 2: Argument

The first famous American actor is said to be Edwin Forrest, who made a theater career for himself in the 19th century by playing a Native American character. The white man from Philadelphia portrayed, for decades, the titular character of *Metamora; or the Last of the Wampanoags*, a play by John Augustus Stone, written in 1829 (Steen, January 2016). Not only was this the foundational ethnic stock character upon which American theatricality was built, but it became a way for colonial society to claim American identity as distinct from their European history. And thus, colonization took center stage. Two hundred years later, though the United States is an ethnically diverse country, American theater remains a decidedly Anglo-patriarchal institution, up to and including what is deemed worthy of being called “American” theater. Not seeing themselves represented on stage, people of color have created their own companies¹, and endure the criticism of not only engaging in what is sometimes considered a self-inflicted segregation, but also being seen as inferior to mainstream theater. There is the need for a third option: a theater between traditionally exclusionary “American” theater, and the “ethnic” genres that have been reduced to niche theater.

Representation has become a concern, if not a demand, of theater practitioners and students of theater who belong to marginalized groups. People of color, women, nonbinary and trans people, among others, long to see our/themselves represented in American theater². After the successful run of *Zoot Suit*, by Luis

¹ Campo Santo is an established San Francisco Bay Area company that produces devised and original works by people of color. Its founding member, Sean San Jose has received numerous awards and grants.

² It was celebrated as “a milestone” when Mickey Rowe was cast as Christopher Boone, in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, becoming the first actor with autism to play the autistic character (Fierberg np).

Valdez, at the Mark Taper Forum, in 2017, Christina Ramos, a graduate student from California State University Long Beach, and Professor Anthony Barnes put together statistics to find out how many plays written by Latinos had been produced at the Los Angeles theater company since *Zoot Suit* originally premiered in 1978. Out of 300 plays produced in the last 40 years, only 10 were by Latino playwrights. 45 were by women. 216 of the 298 plays produced since 1967 were written by white males (Byrnes and Ramos 2017). This is especially discouraging given that the population of Los Angeles is nearly 50% Latino/Hispanic.³

It is not my intention to speak for any marginalized group with which I do not identify. For the purposes of my project, and this paper, I refer to the representation of people of color. I'd like to differentiate between representation on stage, and representation in storytelling. Representation on stage means more ethnically and/or racially diverse casting. Representation in storytelling must go beyond appearances, and forces us to ask the question: whose stories are being told on stage and why?⁴ People of color have been expected to be able to relate to white characters. White has been the default, the blank slate onto which we project our own experience. Ian Marshall and Wendy Ryden argue that to “make whiteness [...] visible” is a “challenge [to] white supremacy,” itself: “To pull at the strings that would unravel this white supremacy would subsequently [...] unravel the very fabric of what we call U.S. culture and society” (246.)⁵ Allowing the stories of non-white communities to be told on stage implies that “U.S. culture” is not solely white culture.

³ 48.5%, according to the U.S. Census Bureau 2005-2009 American Community Survey.

⁴ An added layer to this question is “By whom?” While I doubt Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber asked himself whether *Evita* was his story to tell, I am aware that theater practitioners and theorists are currently asking this of themselves.

⁵ “Interrogating the Monologue: Making Whiteness Visible.” *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 52, no. 2, 2000, pp. 240–259. This article focused on writing classes, but I felt it was germane to my argument.

Academic and theatrical institutions are making efforts towards racial and ethnic diversity and inclusion, to varying degrees of success.⁶ As an undergraduate actor at UC Berkeley, representation was my function: in *The Cherry Orchard*, my inclusion in the cast provided representation on stage; in *Chavez Ravine*, it served as both representation on stage and in storytelling.⁷ Because most plays being produced are the work of white males, and full of white characters, and universities are under more palpable pressure to address the lack of opportunity for students who identify as people of color, the methods by which non-academic theater companies seek to address the issue of inequity are insufficient.

Amongst the most controversial methods, currently, is “color-blind casting,” in which “actors are cast without regard to their race or ethnicity” (Pao 4). At best, color-blind casting may lend itself to representation on stage, by providing the opportunity for traditionally white characters to be portrayed by actors who are people of color. The harmful flipside of this is when white actors are cast as characters that are intended to be played by actors of a particular ethnic or racial background.⁸ Even when color-blind casting lends itself to representation on stage, it does not necessarily accomplish the same in storytelling. Having a colorful cast in a play from the canon is a step in the right direction, but only begins to solve the problem of cultural inequity.

When I embody a traditionally white character, it inherently changes who

⁶ American Conservatory Theater, in San Francisco, has recently made headlines, with a lawsuit being brought against them by “the only full-time black faculty member” for “racial discrimination and harassment” (Tran and Weinert-Kendt np).

⁷ The cast for both shows were racially/ethnically diverse, and both directors were criticized for their casting choices.

⁸ Barnette cites a specific example of negligent color-blind casting, in a production of *Jesus in India*, by Lloyd Suh, at Clarion University, in 2015: “In addition to the extraordinary legal blunder of not obtaining the rights to produce this play, the director cast it with non-Indian actors in roles meant to be played by South Asian actors” (124). Once made aware that play was being produced, and after seeing photographs of the cast, the playwright asked that the play be recast. The show ended up being cancelled.

the character is.⁹ I identify as a person of color, specifically, Chicana, Latina, or Hispanic, depending on who you ask.¹⁰ I imagine being scolded by Gloria Anzaldúa for anytime I've referred to myself as Hispanic, which she considers "copping out" (84). And according to Diana Taylor, I am U.S. Latina, not Latin American, because I was born in the States (1429). My father identified as Chicano, so I consider that term of a certain generation. I catch myself using the label with which everyone else in the room seems to be comfortable.

This is the problem with identity and identifying oneself: it is for the purpose of being identified, and it is meant to make it easier for everyone but you. Further, it forces you to place yourself within the racial hierarchy, the hierarchy that, according to Aníbal Quijano, was established with "the colonization of America" (534). By this logic, finding a way to self-identify for the purpose of true representation would be an act of decolonization.

Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang admonish against the softening of the concept of decolonization into academic theory (*Decolonization is Not a Metaphor*, 2012), asserting that actual decolonization would mean the reacquisition of lands by indigenous peoples. In *Latino/as in the World System: Decolonization Struggles in the 21st Century U.S. Empire* (2005), Ramón Grosfoguel, Nelson Maldonado Torres, and José David Saldívar argue that, to fully achieve decolonization, we must reconsider what it means to be "colonized," in today's society, suggesting the political, educational, and theoretical changes towards which many have been working. I feel compelled to acknowledge the latter argument. I also cannot deny the power of theater as a

⁹ Unless I am supposed to be passing for white. Just last year, I played Emily Webb in a production of *Our Town*, by Thornton Wilder, and an older white woman in the cast commented on how I looked "too Indian" (and she meant Native American). Despite the fact that the play includes a brief history of the people indigenous to what is now New Hampshire (Wilder 1938), and that the actor playing my mother was a black woman, I didn't have the heart to tell her that this Emily was not white.

¹⁰ My current favorite is a term coined by Richard Montoya of Culture Clash: "MoCoS – Mexican, or Chicano, or Something."

catalyst for social change.¹¹ This is where I see my contribution to the discourse of decolonization: creatively transcending borders through theater.

I feel the need to claim space and tell stories that exist in the in-between; a liminal space for me and theater makers like me, who don't quite fit in one designated space or the other. At this point in my education, it is clear that the phrase, "Western Canon," is a euphemism for "Anglo-patriarchal canon." Until mainstream American theater becomes less racially homogenous, and until new works no longer take a backseat to the canon, adaptation is a way to bring stories of underrepresented groups to light.¹² Jane Barnette attests, "[...] the question of representation, especially with regard to casting, is one of the ways that theatrical adaptation can either reify or challenge societal norms and representations of history" (124). By locating my story within the Western Canon, giving new meaning to classic works, I can create opportunity for representation and theatrical decolonization.

As I write this, a search for images of Edwin Forrest yields not only likenesses of the quintessential American actor, but a photo of one of my UC Berkeley acquaintances, who apparently played the actor playing Metamora. There, amongst pictures of the 19th century actor in full headdress, was a photo of my former schoolmate wearing a (hopefully) intentionally stereotypical Native American costume. This was one of two white male classmates who, on separate occasions, said to me, "There are so many of you." So many brown girls? So many non-

¹¹ Bertolt Brecht, Augusto Boal, Luis Valdez have all used theater for this purpose.

¹² In community college, even after proclaiming myself a serious student of theater, I had little to no interest in Shakespeare. I was quite sure I was the very kind of person the Bard had never intended to have perform his words. That changed through the power of adaptation. Being aware of the racial/ethnic makeup of his students, the head of the Gavilan College Theater Department, Dr. John Lawton-Heahl, commissioned an old friend, Randall Stuart, to adapt *Much Ado About Nothing*, for a predominantly Chicana/ Hispanic cast. Though I would never have imagined myself as Beatrice, I did some of my best work as Beatriz.

white students? Whether there truly are no roles for me, or if I simply have not found my place, the insensitive, intolerant, and ignorant attitudes I've experienced are the result of a larger problem in theater and education in this country: a lack of representation. In order to represent myself, I will claim the particular space in which I find myself: the in-between.

SECTION 3: *Nepantla* Theory

The Nahuatl (Aztec) word for “the in-between” was *nepantla*. This idea was central to Aztec philosophy as the nature of “human existence[...] defined by inescapable processing, becoming, and transformation” (Maffie 523). In the sixteenth century, *nepantla* became “the Nahuatl term for the space between the indigenous and Spanish cultures” (Taylor 1429). Today, the word has an added layer, with additional complications for a person of mixed indigenous and Spanish (Mexican) ancestry, living in the United States. Gloria Anzaldúa writes:

It is a limited space, a space where you are not this or that, but where you are changing. You haven't got into the new identity yet and haven't left the old identity behind either – you are in a kind of transition. And that is what *Nepantla* stands for. It is very awkward, uncomfortable, and frustrating to be in that *Nepantla* because you are in the midst of transformation. (102, 2012)

Growing up in a town with a population that was almost half Chicano and half white, I was not accepted as Mexican by people who identified as Mexican, but I definitely was not white. Diana Taylor attributes to borderland theorists a significant shift, in the 1980s and 1990s, during which she notes, “Chicanos went from being seen as ‘people without culture’ to ‘people between cultures’ (Saldívar 23).” For us, *nepantla* is “that liminal space of the everyday [...]” (Taylor 1429). Without the permission to simply be, this constant grinding of cultural, mental, and emotional gears is exhausting.

My entire existence has been within the realm of *nepantla*. I am nearly half-

and-half Native American and European. My grandfathers were born in Mexico, to parents or grandparents who were from Spain. My grandmothers were born in the U.S. Southwest, with indigenous parentage. I was born and raised in California. I grew up in what I affectionately refer to as a rural suburb: Hollister. When asked where this small town lies on the map, I answer, “South of South Santa Clara County, East of the Central Coast, West of the Central Valley...”

This neither-here-nor-there-ness has been a significant presence in my theatrical endeavors. Though my only performance experience for many years was with El Teatro Campesino, founded by “the Father of Chicano Theater,” Luis Valdez, I have never considered myself a Chicano theater artist. When performing in works from the canon, I am othered. Anzaldúa asserts that, to accept both one’s indigenous and European ancestry is really to deny both. She proposes a third option: a *mestiza* consciousness, the result of our “mixed” experience, which she describes as “the straddling of two or more cultures” (102, 2012). This cultural choreography requires a “creative motion” (102, 2012), and becomes a lifelong performance. If the *mestiza* life is one act of adaptation after another, then adaptation becomes the *mestiza* theater, embracing and filling the form of a mix.

Anzaldúa asserts, “The *nepantla* state is artists’ natural habitat – most specifically, for mestizo border artists who partake of the traditions of two or more worlds [...]” (57, 2015). For my adaptation, the worlds I “partake of” are the one I inhabit, California, and a world with which mine has much in common, Ireland. By claiming the liminal space in which I am situated, I can “reconstruct [my] culture’s present and past” (60, 2015), and create culture that allows me to self-identify.

SECTION 4: Aztlán and the Emerald Isle

“In 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue...,” but first, he stopped in a small church in Galway, Ireland, to say a prayer. He was not the first colonizer to set foot on the island, and perhaps he thought it would bring him luck to embark from the

West Coast of this island of colonized people, on his journey to colonize another. The first time I went to Ireland, I had never been farther away from home, and never felt closer to where I am from. Learning about Irish culture and history recontextualized my Latin American culture and history. The parallels run from centuries ago through today.

The pre-Columbian, mythical homeland of the Aztecs is called *Aztlán*. It is the land from which the indigenous people traveled (part of which is now the United States), to settle in what is now central Mexico, where they would build an empire. The Spanish arrived in the Americas in the early sixteenth century and, in the early 1520s, defeated the Aztec empire. This “conquest” was expedited with the help of a young indigenous woman, called La Malinche. Translator and companion to Hernán Cortés, she is said to be the mother of the *mestizo*, and she may be Queen of *Nepantla*: caught between the indigenous and the Spanish. She is credited and blamed for giving birth to a nation: México. Chicanos are her bastard children.¹³ So wounded are we by the sins of the mother, she is monsterized as La Llorona,¹⁴ “the weeping woman” who seeks vengeance on the father of her children by killing them. A woman on which a nation is built is then blamed for the suffering of her people, and condemned as a traitor.

Ireland uses woman as symbol of nation and land, in the form of Kathleen Ni Houlihan. Unlike La Malinche, this female figure is not based on a person who lived, but they both reside in a liminal space of the cultural imagination. The Irish people suffered centuries of colonization. Roman Christianity imposed itself on the ancient Celts. Invasions by the Vikings, then the Normans, produced legendary battles with the Gaelic tribes. In the 1530s (not long after the Spanish defeat of the Aztecs), King

¹³ For more on La Malinche, see *The Labyrinth of Solitude and Other Writings*, by Octavio Paz (1985).

¹⁴ For more on monsters and monsterization, see *The Monster in Theatre History: This Thing of Darkness*, by Dr. Michael Chemers.

Henry VIII's establishment of England's rule over Ireland, created religious warfare between the Catholics and the Protestants, the effects of which can be seen to this day. A hundred years later, Oliver Cromwell's regime confiscated 11 million acres of land (Killeen 97). In the eighteenth century, the Ascendency took ownership of what once was Irish land. In times of famine the beautiful Kathleen was there to watch over her people, in times of war, she became the hag, the Sean-Bhean Bhocht, who lured her own sons into battle. She was the subject of plays by writers of the Irish literary movement known as the Celtic Revival,¹⁵ as *La Malinche* and *La Llorona* have become the subject of plays by Latinx playwrights today.¹⁶ This is a complicated relationship for two decidedly patriarchal societies to have with the motherland. What wounds are these mothers nursing?

The emerging science of epigenetics¹⁷ has made claims of being able to detect trauma in the DNA. It is a theory as epic as the Aztecs and the Celts, themselves: "A concept of 'historical trauma' has been adopted to call attention to the collective, cumulative, and intergenerational psychosocial effects that resulted from past colonial subjugation and persist in abated form to the present day (Niezen 2013)"¹⁸ (Lock 161). Now, there may be scientific evidence that these are not just societal problems or cultural issues, but part of our biological makeup.¹⁹ "[...]The devastating legacy of settler colonialism" (Lock 161) can be seen under a microscope. When the colonizer comes to stay, the colonized get pushed down or forced out.

During the U.S. Late Antebellum period (1845-1860), one of several "major

¹⁵ *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*, by Lady Gregory and W.B. Yeats, and *The Countess Cathleen*, by Yeats.

¹⁶ *La Malinche*, by Carlos Morton. *Lloronas*, by Carlos Manuel.

¹⁷ Definition: the study of changes in organisms caused by modification of gene expression rather than alteration of the genetic code itself.

¹⁸ This was a study conducted in Canada, during its Truth and Reparations campaign, with the indigenous communities: "Independently, mental health professionals and individuals living in first nations communities have consistently associated these high rates of pathological distress with the experiences of colonization that commenced 5 centuries ago" (Niezen 2013).

¹⁹ Epigenetics seems to have as many critics as it does champions.

waves of migration” (Steen), the Irish immigrants arrived to New York City.

The Irish arrived to the United States to find themselves othered. New York theater featured ethnic stock characters, including the Bowery B’Hoy and Gal, named for the primarily Irish immigrant neighborhood, and predecessors of the Latina Spitfire.

Racist campaigns contained cartoons illustrating the Irish as subhuman. In order to claim their “Americanness” and, by extension, whiteness, many Irish men became police officers (“coppers”), and Irish musicians performed in blackface, a popular trend at the time. The Irish were hated immigrants then, like Mexicans now.

To be of European ancestry, but not white is racial liminality. In Latin America, there is a condition known as “La Maldición de Malinche” (“The Curse of Malinche”), in which a Chican@ or Latin@ person favors one’s European heritage over one’s indigenous ancestry. Whiteness has been achieved by ethnic groups who are not indigenous to this land. Today, the Statue of Liberty seems to be associated with a prestige immigration, as the cite where Europeans were given allowance to enter the country, and the Wall is meant to keep out the people who were already on the continent.

“America is not a stable place or object of analysis, but a highly contested practice – physically, politically, artistically, and theoretically,” states Diana Taylor (1419). She compares maps made by the Aztecs to the maps made by Europeans during the peak of exploration and “discovery.” The Europeans took a bird’s-eye-view, one that allowed them to, literally, look down on the world. The Aztecs took a more down to earth approach, including in their maps landmarks and footprints, and even drawings of themselves. If my indigenous ancestors caught a view from above of how *Aztlán* has been marked, they might agree with the writing on the wall:

“Borders are scars on the earth.”²⁰

²⁰ In Spanish, “Fronteras: cicatrices en la tierra,” this was spray-painted on the Mexico side of the border wall that runs through Nogales; the U.S. side is in Arizona (Gutiérrez and Young, np).

SECTION 5: Borders Crossing

From the perspective of the U.S.-born person of Mexican descent, the most significant added layer of *nepantla* came more than 300 years after the arrival of the Spanish; with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, in 1848, the U.S. Southwest and California became two worlds at once. Anzaldúa asserts, “The border is the locus of resistance, of rupture, of implosion and explosion, and of putting together the fragments, and creating a new assemblage” (49, 2015). It is up to artists who find ourselves in *nepantla*, constantly adapting to living in two worlds at once, to stitch together the pieces, for the purpose of creating works in which we may identify ourselves. When *Aztlán* was claimed and rearranged, we got lost in the shuffle, and it is that place and era I chose as the backdrop for my adaptation.

The U.S. declared war on Mexico, on May 13, 1846, after a border dispute in Texas.²¹ The war would last fewer than two years and end in Mexico’s surrender. A group of immigrants, mostly Irish, found themselves caught in the middle of the Mexican-American War: *Los San Patricios*. The St. Patrick’s Battalion was a troupe who were serving in the U.S. military, then defected and fought on the Mexican side.²² This may have been because of the strong anti-Irish sentiment, in the U.S., during that time. It may have seemed just, to the Irish-Catholic immigrants, to be on the side of the Catholic country. Also, Mexico had preceded the U.S. in banning slavery and, though the Irish immigrants had put much effort into distinguishing themselves from African-Americans, their own history included being forced onto

²¹ Texas had been admitted to the union on December 29, 1845, in spite of threats of war from Mexico. After seeking boundary adjustments, the U.S. Army, under General Zachary Taylor, advanced to the mouth of the Rio Grande, the river that the state of Texas claimed as its southern boundary. Mexico considered the advance of Taylor’s army an act of aggression and, in April 1846, sent troops across the Rio Grande. Polk, in turn, declared the Mexican advance to be an invasion of U.S. soil. The U.S. declared war on Mexico on May 13, 1846. (History.com)

²² For more on the history of the Saint Patrick’s Battalion, see “During the Mexican-American War, Irish-Americans Fought for Mexico in the ‘Saint Patrick’s Battalion,’” Francine Uenuma, for Smithsonian.com.

ships and sent to colonies, where they were imprisoned, or forced to work as indentured servants. Whatever their reasons for siding with the Mexicans, the battalion was eventually captured by U.S. soldiers, and those who were not executed were marked as traitors. In Mexico, they are still honored and celebrated.²³

The war ended in 1848, with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo,²⁴ and the U.S. gained the land from Mexico that now makes up, at least in part, seven states: California, Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada, Colorado, Utah, and Wyoming. The first three listed, along with Texas, were/are thought to be the Aztec homeland, *Aztlán*. According to Anzaldúa, “The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo created the Mexican-American in 1848” (119, 2012), and ever since, we have been neither Mexican, nor American. She writes of the U.S. Southwest, telling this little-known, intentionally obscured history of the parts of the United States that used to be México.²⁵ She recognizes that, “Both Chicana/o and border art challenge and subvert U.S. imperialism and combat assimilation by either the U.S. or Mexico, yet they acknowledge their affinities to both” (59, 2015). I am from this liminal space that used to be one, before it was crossed by the border of the other, then became: the West.

Mid-nineteenth century California is a time of great transition: the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, statehood, the Gold Rush, then an influx of Anglo U.S.

²³ ...on St. Patrick's Day, of course.

²⁴ “Following the defeat of the Mexican army and the fall of Mexico City, in September 1847, the Mexican government surrendered and peace negotiations began. The war officially ended with the February 2, 1848 signing in Mexico of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. The treaty added an additional 525,000 square miles to United States territory, including the land that makes up all or parts of present-day Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming. Mexico also gave up all claims to Texas and recognized the Rio Grande as the southern boundary between itself and the U.S. In return, the United States paid Mexico \$15 million.” (History.com)

²⁵ In 2010, HB2281, a law banning Chicano Studies in public school, was passed in Arizona. For more on this, see: “Chapter Six: Race Erased? Arizona’s Ban on Ethnic Studies,” by Brandy Jensen.

Americans. California was considered a wasteland, until gold was discovered. Then, it became an extension of “the land of opportunity.” Native Americans and Mexicans were such successful miners that laws were created in favor of the Anglo immigrant Americans. Guns were distributed by the government, in case the new residents needed to “protect themselves” from the natives (Valerio-Jimenez). This was “the wild west.”

More specific to the time and place in which my adaptation is set, 1870s San Juan Bautista, the mission village was incorporated as a township in 1869, the same year as the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad. The system through which the lifeblood of the nation would flow did not run through the village, so it never became a hub. After the peak of the Gold Rush, the small town suffered. The village has a haunted history of Spanish settlement and indigenous enslavement, the mission graveyard filled with the bones of those who died building it. In the 1870s, it was home to the surviving Mutsun Ohlone, Californios, Mexicans, and European settlers.²⁶ This seemed the fitting place to have an Irish railroad worker on the run take shelter in the inn owned by a Californio, and cared for by a Mestiza woman.

Anzaldúa affirms, “The Mexico-U.S. border is a cite where many different cultures “touch” each other, and the permeable, flexible, ambiguous shifting grounds lend themselves to hybrid images” (59, 2015). As a living, breathing, “hybrid image,” I take this inspiration from the world I’ve always known, and create a hybrid with a world that seemed too familiar to not bring home with me. Through adaptation, I layer one “Western World” over another.

SECTION 6: *The Playboy of the Western World,*

or “A Guy Walks into a Bar...”

Written by John Millington Synge, during the Irish literary movement known

²⁶ For more on this mission village, see *Images of America: San Juan Bautista*; by Joseph McMahan, Carla Hendershot, and the Plaza History Association.

as the Celtic Revival, *The Playboy of the Western World* premiered January 1907, at the Abbey Theatre, in Dublin. Lady Gregory, W.B. Yeats, along with Synge, initiated the movement in order to celebrate their Irish roots. Though Synge would label his play as farce, the conventions of The Abbey staged the violence realistically, creating a drastic change in aesthetic distance, turning the comedy into the grotesque. In the third act, when the lead actor spoke the word “shift,” in reference to Irish women in their underwear, the audience erupted in outrage, leading to an historic phenomenon in Irish theatre history: “the Playboy Riots.” What is believed to have begun as actual outrage soon became the reason some audience members attended.²⁷ The play survived the controversy to become part of the Irish canon.

A notable, relatively recent production was in 2005, by the celebrated theatre company in Galway, Ireland: Druid. For Druid Synge, the company staged all of J.M. Synge’s plays on the same day. Druid’s production stayed faithful to the original, in which Christy Mahon wanders into a bar and claims to have killed his father with a loy, while working in the potato garden. Aaron Monaghan, the actor who played Christy, names this as his favorite play, and confessed to me the difficulty of performing it. Druid’s ambitious presentation was called by The Irish Times, “One of the greatest achievements in the history of Irish theatre” (Wildfire Films/Druid). Why does this seemingly uniquely Irish play lend itself to adaptation?

An adaptation written in 1988, *The Playboy of the West Indies*, by Mustapha Matura, is set in a village in Trinidad, in the 1950s. Ken (instead of Christy) enters a bar on the beach, and claims to have killed his father while working in the sugar cane fields (Richards C1). The adaptor stayed true to the narrative of the original, and customized the language and comedy to the island (ibid), and transplanted the story and cast of characters into another part of the world.

²⁷ For more on the Playboy Riots and controversy of the premiere run, see “On J.M. Synge,” in *Modern and Contemporary Irish Drama*, edited by John P. Harrington.

In 2007, the Abbey Theatre produced *The Playboy of the Western World: A New Version*. The co-adaptors were Bisi Adigun, founder of the first African theatre company in Ireland (McIvor and Spangler ix); and Irish writer, Roddy Doyle. In this modern interpretation, Christopher Malomo, a Nigerian immigrant, goes to a pub in Dublin and claims to have killed his father with a kitchen pestle (Adigun and Doyle 2007). In an adaptation that speaks to the current immigration situation in Ireland, the stranger to the village in the original becomes a stranger to the island.

In my adaptation, Christy Mahon is an Irish immigrant who finds himself in a *cantina* and inn, in a mission village in California, and claims to have killed the foreman of his railroad crew. W.B. Yeats is quoted as saying, “All literature in every country is derived from models, and as often as not, these are foreign models. It is the presence of a personal element alone that can give it nationality in a fine sense, the nationality of its maker” (Kelsall xiii). The specificity of the original work creates identifiable cultural parallels that make the play fecund ground for adaptation.

Of all the Irish plays I have read, *The Playboy of the Western World* is the one that invited itself home with me. I felt the world of the original play was built with the same framework as the world I know, a neither-here-nor-thereness. Like myself, the characters seemed to inhabit a liminal space, to be in a state of perpetual transition. Synge’s work marked a transition in Irish playwrighting, as part of the purpose of the Celtic Revival was to tell the untold stories of the Irish people, a people living in the in-between. The play, itself, is a product of *Nepantla*. My very existence rooted in this realm, I felt called to transpose and translate this play, in order to tell a story of my people, during the time we were permanently relegated to the in-between.

When describing the plot of the play, I have been asked, “Why would they harbor a criminal?” The answer: it’s the West. The original is set on the West Coast of Ireland; my adaptation, on the west coast of the U.S.: California, synonymous with the West. Malcolm Kelsall states, “[...] the theme of the play, the rebellion of youth

against age, son against father, is at the root of Western civilization” (xxi). According to Kelsall, Synge felt “that the setting of *The Playboy*, the language, the actions of the characters, should be grounded in recognizable fact” (xiv). With historical dramaturgy, by setting my adaptation in a place I know, and having this place inhabited by people I know, I hope I have achieved that. At the same time, the added layer of *nepantla*, of people living in two worlds at once, gives us not just fact and character, but “[...] archetypal tales and ancient myths” (xiii). I am starting to believe Synge’s original was farce, as the more time I spend with my adaptation, the more it becomes melodrama. Kelsall says of the Celtic Revival, “The life and imagination of the folk, the history, legends, and myths of the land: these were the staple of theatrical creation” (xii). By engaging with another culture, I have tapped into my own.

SECTION 7: Exegesis

My writing process for adapting this play has been very different than I had planned. I had pictured myself with a very structured writing process that would have resulted in a few different drafts of the play. Almost as soon as I began, I realized that a rigid, layered process would be a waste of time. Adapting Act I was so enjoyable, I mocked myself for having been so scared to begin. The storyline and the dialogue translated so well from the original setting and characters, to my chosen setting and characters, the choices I had to make were simple. My playwriting professor, Philip Kan Gotanda, told our class of undergraduate playwrights, “The more specific it is, the more universal it seems.” Specificity creates truth in performance and storytelling, and in making the dramaturgical choices to transplant the original text to the world of the adaptation, I found myself skipping the steps I’d laid, so as not to leave any gaps in my work.

Asking myself, “Which is my story to tell,” I’ve ended up with a primarily Hispanic/Californio/Mexican cast of characters. I have translated some of the

original dialogue into Spanish. Once I decided who the characters were in this world, the lines that wanted to be in Spanish came naturally. The names of most of the characters are the Spanish equivalent of those of the Irish characters in the original.

The only character who keeps his name and ancestry is Christopher Mahon, our would-be hero. With some exceptions, it has made sense to transfer his dialogue from the original to my adaptation, usually making only small adjustments to better suit the ear of a U.S. audience. I hope this emphasizes how well the original text lends itself to the setting and cast of characters I've chosen for the adaptation. I believe that, so long as I am transparent about this, there is no legal issue.

If I've created a role for myself in this play, it is that of Margarita, who by way of mestizaje, must become the protagonist of my adaptation. She is descended from the Mutsun, who were indigenous to the area, and the Spanish, so is at war with herself. Somehow, she is a gentler version of her equivalent in the original; at least for now.

Besides the group of Village Girls, the character of Margarita's fiancé was the potential wild card. At some point I did consider making him one of only two recognizably white males in the play. Monterey has a history of European men marrying the daughters of Spanish and Mexican landowners, in order to obtain the land. This would have been the reason for John, an Englishman, to court Margarita. Instead, I decided that this was a role for an actor with whom I can identify. So, Shawn Keogh in the original, has become Juan Caballero, who traces his ancestry to the first Spaniards to dock their ships in the Monterey Bay. Though he is a simple farmer, he considers himself a gentleman.

Changing the relationships of some of the characters has changed the way those characters behave. The most significant, but possibly not very noticeable alteration came with the decision to avoid the small matter of incest. Apparently, in

the original, the character equivalents of Margarita and Juan were second cousins; the female lead was engaged to her cousin (Kelsall). I decided to make intentional what has been a publishing error, and made the character of the Widow, la Viuda Quintanilla, a relation of Juan, instead of Rita. This changed the way the two female characters interact with each other, for if the Widow is the aunt to the man Rita is supposed to marry, Rita must find it in herself to be tolerant of her company.

Act I translated so easily, I began to feel guilty. That was not the case with Act II. In approaching some very significant plot points, I hit a fearful writer's block. So fearful, in fact, when it came to having to write entirely new dialogue for Christy, I considered leaving out the story of how he killed a man, the main story in this story. I felt unsure about making Christy a railroad worker, instead of a humble farmer. (Later, while visiting the Irish Emigration Museum, in Dublin, my choice would be validated, upon seeing a photograph of an Irish railroad crew in the States.) This meant his weapon, the cultural icon of the loy in the original, would be transformed into a railroad tool. If I had decided to write a Chicano adaptation, our man would be Cristóbal, a farmworker who claims to have killed his *patrón* (boss). He would have done it with the short hoe, and it would have been immediately recognizable to the Chicano community. If some cultural significance is lost with this choice, it is one of my big regrets about this process. I began to doubt the significance of what I am trying to do with this adaptation.

The major development while working on this act was deciding on the decade during which my adaptation is set. The time I've written myself into is the 1870s. The early waves of migration into the United States have carried Irish and German immigrants to the East Coast, joining the New Englanders. On the West Coast, California statehood is fewer than thirty years old. The Transcontinental Railroad has been recently completed. San Juan Bautista and Hollister are a part of Monterey County. Revisions will require going back and finding spots to establish

the San Juan Mission as an entity of the setting.

Act III, and the problem of the ending had been looming. When asked about it, I said I would figure it out when I came to it. If the violence was alarming in the original, it simply had no place in this version; it would only contribute to a decidedly masculine energy. And what to do about the multiple supposed slaughters between Christy and the man he thought he killed? I ended up with a truncated conclusion. It was swift and symbolic, but not very thorough. And what becomes of Margarita? What does it mean that this is the character with which I identify, and a character I can't help but think is not fully developed?

For a staged reading at the end of Winter Quarter, I was gifted with the cast of my choosing: primarily Chicano- and Latina-identifying student actors. Nearly every actor matched the ethnic/racial identity of the character they portrayed, including a student from Ireland to play Christy. They brought the work to life and found the meaning with which I endowed it. One member of the cast picked from the text ideas I had made no effort to make obvious, and only been thinking of while writing. It was a play; I was relieved. And I have never been on the receiving end of so much gratitude from fellow students and theater-makers.

Section 8: Conclusion

Jane Barnette states, "As our country becomes more diverse, and the conflicts between clashing beliefs grow more acute, representation on stage must also adapt to reflect and refract the complexity of what it means to be human" (149). My intuition that J.M. Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* could be adapted and set in nineteenth century California was correct. It has transformed to tell a California story, and an immigrant story, while remaining an Irish story. It is a human story.

The staged reading was a success, in that I had the cast I needed to tell the story I wanted to tell, and was able to give the roles to actors who I wanted to have represented. More than one actor who participated claims both Mexican and Irish

ancestry. One told me this was the first time she was a part of a project that spoke to both sides of her heritage, and she couldn't wait to tell her dad about the play. Another actor thanked me for seeing her as Latina, and casting her as a Spanish-speaking character, because that is not the way she is seen, but that is how she identifies. This was very moving confirmation that I had accomplished the casting goals I had set for the purpose of representation.

As I was in the process of directing a workshop production of my adaptation for the Chautauqua Festival, in the Barn Theater, I felt that the production would not match the reading in its success as a culturally significant work. Due to casting limitations, I had to make changes that, initially, seemed antithetical to my goals of representation. Whereas the cast for the reading was predominantly Chicano/Latina, the cast in the workshop was nearly half Chicano/Latina and half white, much like the place in which I grew up. The most significant change was that the character of the fiancé, whom I had decided, during the writing process, would be Juan Caballero, became John Ryder, during the casting process. The name changed because the actor was white, and I cast him because he spoke Spanish. This would have been where I drew the line, in terms of adjustments I would have been willing to make to the piece: I would not have changed the Spanish translation into English.

Even though it did not happen in the way I had originally intended, the production was a success. The performance on the night of Sunday, May 26, in particular, was overwhelming, in terms of audience response: the laughter; the collective gasp when the Widow entered, all dressed in black; the sighs when Rita entered, all dressed in white; the cheering and the jeering; I could not help but think, this must be what it was like in the theaters of 19th century New York. This was a melodrama. At the curtain call, when my cast received a standing ovation, my sister and mother looked at me, and tears filled my eyes.

Gloria Anzaldúa speaks the truth of my craft: "The new mestiza copes by

developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity [...] Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else” (79, 2012). I unintentionally created a piece of American theater, a piece of Chicano theater and, because it is both, it is neither. By adapting, I created a third form: through adaptation, I gave new meaning to a work from the canon, and created an opportunity for representation on stage and in storytelling. Both lamenting and savoring the liminality, the perpetual transition, the constant becoming, through *Nepantla*, I have found my place and begun to claim space in theater.

Appendix

The Playboy of the Golden West

An Adaptation

By M. Isabel Cruz

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Department of Theater Arts
MA Program

Characters

Margarita Reynoso – Rita is a young woman, born and raised in California, between the Central Coast and Central Valley. Works for her father in a cantina and inn.

Miguel Jaime Reynoso – A Californio. Margarita's father. Owner of cantina and inn.

Juan Caballero – A successful farmer, he traces his ancestry to the first Spaniards to dock their ships in the Monterey Bay. He is engaged to Margarita.

La Viuda Quintanilla/The Widow – Juan's Tía (aunt).

Filomeno and Diego – farmers, and friends of Miguel.

Sara, Susana, Honor, and Nelly – Village Girls

Christopher (Christy) Mahon – An Irish immigrant.

The Foreman – Christy Mahon's superior while working for the railroad.

Setting

The mission village of San Juan Bautista, California, 1870s. The land has been inhabited by Matsun Ohlone, and claimed by the Spanish; before becoming a Mexican territory, then being won by the United States. California statehood is not yet 25 years old. The United States has received waves of European immigrants, and U.S. Americans are now immigrating to the newly annexed state. The city of San Juan has been recently founded, in 1869. That same year, the Transcontinental Railroad was completed, and passed the city by. Post Gold Rush, the small town is struggling.

The action takes place in the cantina and inn, on the main street of the village. At Right, a counter/bar, with a mirror and shelves on the wall behind, holding bottles and jarros. Left of counter, the Upstage wall has a door to outside, and a window with a table below. At Left, a fireplace, with chairs nearby, and staircase to inner rooms.

Note: Quotation marks (") denote where I have kept a direct phrase from the original text.

A tilde (~) denotes where I have cut chunks of dialogue.

Act I

An Autumn evening. Margarita is alone in the cantina. She sits near the fireplace, writing.

Rita *(slowly, as she writes).* Six yards of white fabric, and six yards of white lace. A pair of lace boots, high heels, and brass eyes. A black top hat. To be delivered to Señor Miguel Jaime Reynoso, with three barrels of ale, in the hay cart of Diego Valentín, on the day of the Fair...*(She scratches out the last part.)* The week after the fair.

Juan Caballero *(Enters through the front door, and crosses down right center, as she signs the order. Upon seeing she is alone, he looks around awkwardly.)* Where is he?

Rita *(without looking at him).* He's coming. *(Addressing letter.)* To The Rosenberg Brothers General Store, Hollister.

Juan *(uneasily).* I did not see him on the way.

Rita It would take the eyes of a cat to spot him this dark night. *(Licks stamp and sticks it to letter.)*

Juan I stood, for a moment, outside, wondering would it be proper to pass, or to invite myself in and see you, Margarita Reynoso, *(crosses to fireplace)*, and I could hear the cows sleeping, their breath caught in the stillness of the air, like rain caught in the clouds after a drought.

Rita *(Putting letter in envelope.)* He's in the Plaza, meeting Filomeno Acebo and the others, for the wake of Margaret Breen.

Juan He'll be stumbling home from an Irish wake in the dark of night.

Rita He will, and leaving me alone, here. *(She rises to place envelope on side table, then winds clock.)* Aren't the nights so long now, Juan Caballero, to leave a girl on her own, listening to the clock until the sun comes up?

Juan *(Awkwardly.)* Soon you'll have nothing to worry about, when we're married. For "wakes or weddings", I have no want to wander in the darkness of the night.

Rita Such certainty, Juanito, that I'll marry you? *(She busies herself, straightening up behind the counter.)*

Enter through the front door Miguel Jaime, followed by Filomeno Acebo and Diego Valentín. They are not quite sober.

Men *(Together.)* Que Dios bendiga este lugar.

Miguel *(To the men.)* Siéntense, y descansen! *(To Juan.)* Y cómo estás, Juan Caballero? Stopping by on your way to the wake of Margaret Breen?

Juan No, Señor, I'm just on my way home.

Rita Unlike, you, Papá, sin vergüena, giving yourself the night off and leaving me alone in the cantina?

Miguel *(In good humour.)* Would it be any different if I were to go for only part of the night?

Rita What father leaves his daughter for twelve dark hours, to stack the firewood, listening to the sound of the dogs howling, the cows mooing, and my own teeth chattering from fear.

Diego What harm could come to you? You're tough enough to keep order in the cantina.

Rita The men bringing in the harvest, the traveling merchants...Tiburcio Vasquez – all wanting drink, then wanting more after they've had some. *(To her father.)* Surely, there is much that might harm me, and I won't tend the place alone again, do what you will.

During this speech, Juan has been watching her, fearing she may tell of the strange man. He tries to creep away.

Miguel If you're so afraid, let Juan Caballero stay with you. It is God's will that he should be taking care of you now.

Juan I would, of course, be happy to oblige, Señor, but I'm afraid it would be improper. What would the Padre say?

Miguel *(With contempt.)* Por Dios! Just sit by the fireplace, keep the lights lit, and she in another room. Tonight, for I hear there is a strange man dying in a ditch, she'd be safer with another person here.

Juan I'm afraid of Padre Anzar. Don't go testing me, your daughter and I not yet married. *(He moves towards the door.)*

Filomeno Tie him to the bar. He'll have to stay and won't have any sins to confess.

The drunk, older men move between Juan and the door.

Juan Señores, please, let me pass.

Miguel Quit your fussing and have a seat by the fire. *(Knocks into him, as he crosses to the bar to pour himself another drink.)*

Juan *(Trying to get past the men.)* Let me through the door.

Filomeno *(Catching him by the coat.)* Leaving so soon?

With a haughty shimmy and a jerk, Juan pulls himself out of the coat, smooths his hair with his hands, and walks through the door in a huff.

Miguel *(Grabs the coat from the men, and raises it helplessly towards the door, not motivated enough to go after him.)* "Well, there's the coat of a good [Catholic] man. Oh, there's sainted glory this day in the lonesome west." I've found you a God-fearing husband, Rita. You could have a dozen young women tending to your fields, and no need to spy on him.

Rita What right do you have to make sport of the man? He's only obeying the Padre. Besides, you're to blame, for not wanting to spend a penny on someone to keep and tend bar, so I would have no worries while doing my work. *(She snatches the coat from him and takes it behind the counter.)*

Miguel Where would I get a barkeep? Should I send the town crier hollering through the streets of San Francisco?

Juan *(Opening the door just enough to put his head in, in a hushed voice.)* Señor!

Miguel A tus órdenes?

Juan The strange dying man is peering over the ditch. I think he's coming out to steal your chickens. *(Looks over his shoulder. Scared.)* He's coming up behind me *(he rushes inside)*, and if he heard what I just said about him, he'll follow me home in the dark to take my life.

For a pregnant moment, they all watch the door. Enter Christy Mahon, fatigued and filthy.

Christy God save all here!

Filomeno Válgame, Dios!

One of the men crosses himself, as the other stares at the stranger, mouth open.

Christy *(Crossing to counter.)* “Woman of the house”, “I’d trouble you for a glass of [ale]”. *(He holds out his hand, over the bar, and coins fall from it.)*

Rita *(Pouring him a glass.)* Are you one of the merchants, staying in the village for the fair?

Christy “No, I’m destroyed [from] walking.”

Miguel Then sit and warm yourself by the fire.

Christy “God reward you”, “master of the house”. *(He picks up his glass, and moves toward the fireplace, then stops and looks around.)* Do the police visit this place often?

Miguel Had you come earlier, you’d have seen a sign with the words, “Licensed for the Sale of Beer and Spirits, to be consumed on the Premises.” What cause would the police have to spy on me?

Christy “A safe house”. *(Relieved, he crosses to the fire, moving stiffly as he sits. He sets his glass beside him, takes a small carrot out of his pocket, and begins to eat it.)*

Miguel Are you scared of the police? Are you wanted?

Christy Many are wanted.

Miguel Surely many, with the low harvest, and the railroad passing us by. Is it larceny?

Christy Of some kind, called by a different word.

Rita Do you not know the name of your crime? What do you say to the priest when you go to confession?

Christy I’m slow at learning, never a scholar.

Miguel If you’ve spent time in the corner, wearing the dunce cap, larceny means robbery, stealing. Is that what you’re wanted for?

Christy “I [am] the son of a strong farmer”, who “could have bought” this house with the coin in his pocket, and “not missed the weight of it”.

Christy (“*Offended.*”) You’re not speaking the truth.

Rita (*Having grown impatient with the room full of men.*) I am not speaking the truth?

She grabs the bottle of liquor, picking it up in such a way that the men shield themselves and, with it raised, turns to Christy, who panics.

Christy “Don’t strike me!” “I killed [a man] for doing the like of that.”

Rita You killed a man?

Christy (*Calmer.*) It was a week ago, Tuesday, so help me, God. I did, and may the Virgin Mary “intercede for his soul.”

All the men cross themselves. Juan steps away from Christy and towards the door.

Men Who? Who did you kill?

Christy Foreman of my railroad crew.

Miguel And where did he come from?

Christy These blessed States. Says his people were on the Mayflower.

Miguel (*With an awe bordering on respect.*) An Anglo? “That [is] a hanging crime,” hombre. You must have had good cause to do a thing like that.

Christy He was a rotten man. I couldn’t suffer him any longer.

Filomeno So you shot him?

Christy I’ve never used weapons.

Diego Did you stab him?

Christy “I did not”. I just raised the spike maul, and let the blunt end of it fall on his skull. He fell at my feet, not “a grunt or groan from him at all.”

Miguel (*Motioning for Rita to pour into Christy’s glass. Truly impressed.*) How were you not hanged, hombre?

Christy I was seen by no one, and fled.

Miguel And the police haven't caught up with you, these eleven days you've been gone?

Christy "Never a one...on the highway of the road."

Filomeno *(Raising his glass.)* Too scared to lay a hand on him.

Diego *(Raising his glass.)* Seguro que sí.

Miguel *(Raising his glass.)* Salud! *(They drink.)* And how far would they have to trace your footsteps? Where is it, Señor, that this act was committed?

Christy *(Suspiciously.)* Oh, far from here, master of the house.

Filomeno Every man should have his secrets.

Rita Papá, if you are looking to hire a barkeep, we could have him tending the place for us.

Filomeno If you had him in the house, the police would never come sniffing around, for fear of him. We could be serving tequila to the horses.

Diego Courage is rare in these times, and a man who would kill his foreman, debe tener cojones tan grandes –

Rita *(Cutting him off.)* De verdad, if I had that young man, here, with me, I would fear no other men, living or dead.

Christy *(Delighted.)* "Well, glory be to God!"

Miguel *(With respect.)* Would you consider staying here, Señor, and helping tend the cantina? We'll pay a good wage, and will take great care not to overwork you.

Juan You think it wise, Señor, to bring his kind into this house, *(jerking his head to gesture toward Rita)* con Margarita?

Rita Did we ask you?

Juan *(Indignant.)* Con sangre en sus manos...

Rita Cállate! *(Then kindly, to Christy.)* You are welcome here, Señor.

Christy And I'd be safe here from the law?

Miguel Yes, seguro que sí. The police in this village are decent, thirsty men, who wouldn't hurt a mangy mutt, let alone you.

Rita You must stay, at least for a rest. Your feet must be blistered, and you are in need of a bath.

Christy *(Looking around, shyly.)* It is a nice inn. *(To Miguel, nervously.)* It's not a trick you're playing on me?

Miguel I would be afraid to have a laugh at your expense. Rita will prepare your bath, and wash your clothes.

Christy "I'm thinking I'll stay."

Filomeno *(Shoots up from his seat.)* Por Dios y por fin! She'll be safe, guarded by a man who killed his foreman. Vámonos ya, Miguel, to the wake, before all the good stuff is gone.

Miguel *(Heading towards the door with Diego and Filomeno.)* Pêrdoname, señor. What is your name?

Christy Christopher Mahon. Back home, they called me Christy.

Diego *(To Filomeno.)* No es nombre de mujer? *(The two exit.)*

Miguel Bienvenido, San Cristobál, and rest yourself. I'll return in the morning. *(From outside, the men holler.)* Make that noon. *(He exits.)*

Christy *(Calling after him.)* Bless you, and thank you! *(He turns to see Rita.)*

Juan *(To Rita.)* Would you like me to stay? And protect you?

Rita *(Brusquely.)* I thought you were afraid of the Padre?

Juan Surely, under the circumstances...

Rita When you were asked to stay, you refused. Now, I've no need of you, so you may go.

Juan But the Padre –

Rita Vete al padre, entonces, and leave this boy with me.

Juan Don't make me call my Tía.

Rita You're going to wake the bruja? Go home! *(She rushes him to the door and locks it. She turns around to see a nervous look on Christy's face. She attempts a smile, and for the first time, we see how tired she is. She crosses to him.)* You must be exhausted from travelling, Señor. Make yourself comfortable by the fire.

Christy *(Gingerly taking off his boots.)* "I'm tired, surely, walking wild eleven days and waking fearful in the night."

Rita *(Watching him, as if he were a puppy she had just taken in.)* What small feet; you must come from a great people, with the name of a noble family of Europe.

Christy "We were great, surely, with wide and windy acres of rich [Irish] land."

Rita And I'm sure you ruled over it, like a handsome young prince.

Christy Me?!

Rita Yes. *(Abruptly moving to the counter, to fix him a meal.)* Did the girls where you come from never say such things to you?

Christy They did not.

Rita Well, I suppose, girls young and old, are saying it, here, once they hear your story.

Christy "I've told my story no place till this night," Margarita. Maybe it's foolish to be talking so freely, but I feel no fear, here, with you decent people, and a kindly woman such as you.

Rita I'm sure you say that, in every cantina and inn, to every girl you meet.

Christy *(Emphatically.)* "I've said it nowhere till this night. Walking the world", through field and orchard, seeing "young limber girls" helping the men with the harvest, or "fine women" calling them in for a meal, then I going to sleep in a muddy ditch or beneath a haystack, "these eleven long days", and "I've seen none the like of you."

Rita Even worn with travel, you have the words of a poet.

Rita (*Jumps up and throws the blanket on Christy.*) Eat quickly, then lie down, for if she sees you're in a mood for talking, there'll be no rest tonight. (*Crossing to door.*)
Habladora!

Christy quickly tries to situate himself under the blanket, then reaches for the food.

Rita (*Opening door.*) Buenas noches. Qué tiene usted? What brings you here so late this night.?

V.Q. (*Entering and looking the room over until she sees Christy.*) Encontré a Juan Caballero y el Padre, y me dijeron del...man de misterio. I'm to bring him to my casita, where he is to stay with me.

Rita Tonight?

V.Q. Sí, esta noche. 'No es apropiado,' dijo el Padrecito, 'for a young woman to be alone with such a man. (*To Christy.*) Hola, miijo.

Christy (*Shyly.*) Good evening to you.

V.Q. (*To Rita.*) Que amable se parece. (*Approaching Christy.*) Ay, míralo, sentado ahí, (*to Christy*) con su "cup and cake." It must have been an evil spirit did possess you, and that's what made you kill the man.

Christy Maybe.

V.Q. Surely, it was.

Rita (*Looking from one to other, wide-eyed.*) Ya, basta! (*Changes her tone.*) Por favor, Señora, leave him be. Can't you see he's exhausted from travelling?

V.Q. We'll be leaving, just as soon as he's finished his supper. We'll get along all right, muchacho, the things I've heard about you, and the things they say about me...

Christy (*Innocently.*) Did you kill someone?

Rita Of course not! He died...from mysterious causes...

V.Q. (*To Christy.*) Had you been here at the time of the death of my husband, you would have heard some say that I was that 'mysterious cause.' (*To Rita.*) And if I was the cause, he'd be company better suited for me, than for a muchacha, como tú, who would go galloping after any man who winks at you, like a horse for her carrot.

Rita How dare you say that, when it is you still trying to catch the breath it took you to run the length of the Alameda to see him.

V.Q. (*She laughs “derisively.”*) Perhaps, then, if you will not let him come, I will take my rest here, con usted. (*She settles into a seat by the fire.*) There’s terrible passion in a man who takes the life of another.

Rita He’s not going. (*Searching.*) He’s been hired by Papá, as our new barkeep.

V.Q. Well, what man wants to sleep where he works in the day?

Christy (*“Timidly.”*) God bless you and thank you, “but I’m [barkeep] in this place, and it’s here I’d [gladly] stay.”

Rita (*With quiet satisfaction.*) Ya lo oiste. I’ll walk you out.

V.Q. (*As they cross to door.*) Que horror ser vieja y sola. (*She turns to Christy.*) Rest yourself, mijo, and take care. She is promised to Juan Caballero, and they wait only for the next harvest to be married. Agony is all you’ll find here, if you fall under her spell. (*She exits.*)

Christy (*Crossing to Rita, as she locks the door.*) “What’s that she’s [...] saying?”

Rita Pay her no mind. What right does Juan Caballero have, sending his Tía to spy on me?

Christy You won’t be marrying him then?

Rita I wouldn’t marry him if the Pope, himself, came from Rome to see it happen.

Christy Thank God for that.

Rita Get to bed. I stitched that quilt myself. Lie down now and sleep. May the Virgen bring you rest, until the rooster wakes you at dawn. (*She goes upstairs.*)

Christy (*Watching her.*) “Whisper now, [Margarita], if I’d come in at that door and said I’d never done anything worse than stealing a [pinch] of salt, would you have spoken that gentle in me ear?”

Rita Truthfully, Señor, no, pobrecito.

Christy “May God and Mary bless you and reward you for your kindly talk.
(*She exits into inner room. He snuggles into his bed.*) “A clean, soft bed”...”two fine women
fighting for the likes of me”...Wasn’t I a foolish fellow not to kill my foreman in the
years gone by.”

End of Act I

Act II

Same room in cantina. Morning. The mission bells ring. A rooster crows. Christy is whistling, while shining a lady's boot.

Christy “There’s her boots now, nice and decent for her evening use, and isn’t it grand brushes she has? *(He sets down the boot and brush, and crosses to counter.)* Well, this’d be a fine place to be my whole life [...], smoking my pipe, and drinking my fill, and never a day’s work but drawing a cork [every now and again], or wiping a glass.” *(He looks at himself in the mirror.)* “Didn’t I know rightly I was handsome, though it was the devil’s mirror [was all I had to look upon till now], would twist a squint across an angel’s brow. And I’ll be growing fine from this day, [with] soft [...] skin, and won’t be the like of the [poor] fellows” laboring, with bent back in the hot sun. *(Voices outside.)* “Is she coming back?” *(He looks out the window.)* “Stranger girls. God help me, where’ll I hide myself [...] till I’m dressed?”

Christy grabs his things and runs upstairs. Enter Village Girls: Susana, Nelly, Honor, and Sara. After they’ve opened the door, one of them knocks.

Susana There’s nobody here.

Nelly It’s too early for them to have gone anywhere.

Susana Juan Caballero must have been playing games with us. There’s no man here.

Nelly But Juan doesn’t play games.

Honor *(Excited, noticing the makeshift bed.)* Look! That must be where he slept last night.

The Girls rush over to his things. Christy peeks over the banister, listening to them.

Nelly Do you think those are his boots?

Sara *(She picks up the boots, observing them.)* Evidence. The stories in the newspapers say the murderer sometimes leaves with blood on his boots.

Susana “Blood, Sara?!”

Christy *(Holding all the gifts.)* “I’m very thankful to you all...” *(To Sara.)* Are those my boots you’re wearing?

Viuda Quintanilla *(All of sudden appearing in the doorway.)* Muchachas! Sus madres go hoarse calling you out of bed to help with the morning chores, pero cuando hay hombre, you rise with the cock! *(She eyes Christy.)*

Sara takes off the boots.

Girls *(Excitedly.)* That’s the man –

V.Q. I know who he is...Have you had breakfast yet, mijo?

Christy No, ma’am. I’m waiting for Rita to come home from the market –

V.Q. Muchachas, el desayuno. *(She sits. Beckoning to Christy.)* Vente.

Christy understands the gesture and goes to sit beside her, while the girls work to prepare a meal; some of them falling over themselves and each other to get at bread, tea, dishes; while others move slowly, resentful of the Widow.

V.Q. *(She pats his knee.)* I’ve signed you up for the horse races.

The Girls squeal and chatter excitedly.

Sara He’ll be the winner, no doubt!

V.Q. Now, before Rita returns, share with us the story of what dangerous deed brought you to our mission village.

Girls Tell us!

Christy *(With some reluctance.)* “It’s a long story...”

V.Q. Don’t be modest. Or keep it to yourself, if you’d rather be haunted.

Christy We were nearly done laying the day’s track.

V.Q. And you were hungry and sweaty and exhausted from the work.

Christy Aye, and the Foreman came 'round to let go the crew for the evening.
All but me.

Girls *(Hushed.)* No!

V.Q. *(Gives the Girls a look.)* And why would he do that, mijo?

Christy He was aiming to have me fired for any reason.

V.Q. So you struck him?

Christy Not then. I was about to take my leave with the crew, and he stopped me with a rough hand. 'Not you,' he said. 'Why not?' I asked, looking up at him; he blocked out the sun.

The Girls bring over food and drink, and sit around him and the Widow, a captive audience. The Widow takes some of the food.

Christy 'Look at them crooked ties,' he spat at my feet and pointed at the track. 'What crooked ties?' I asked him. He grabbed me by the collar of my shirt, and dragged me over to the track, throwing me down, and holding my face to the rail.

Girls *(Squealing with fright.)* No! Dios mio!

Christy He growled, 'I'm sick of the sight of you.' Just as I began to taste the earth, and to think I'd be drawing my last breath, he released me. Thinking he was letting me go, I turned on my back, to see him standing there, silhouetted by the sun setting behind.

Susana He's a storyteller.

Honor He's a poet.

Christy He lunged at me. I reached for the maul and, as he came at me, "I hit a blow on the ridge of his skull." He fell down, dead, across the track.

Girls *(Clapping and rising.)* Que maravilloso! So brave! Dios te bendiga!

During the cheering, Sara goes behind the bar, to find glasses and a bottle of tequila. She sets them up on the bar.

Susana Perhaps la Virgencita brought him to our village to become a husband. La Viuda must want to marry again.

V.Q. You're embarrassing him.

Sara *(Pouring the liquor. During this speech, Susana crosses to the bar, to bring drinks to Christy and the Widow. Nelly crosses to get herself a drink.)* Like one of the San Patricios, you fought bravely, and someday they will write a corrido for you. *(She raises her glass.)* Here's "to the wonders of the western world": los vaqueros y los caballeros; las monjas y las brujas; tequila-makers and farmers; the Ohlone, who built our mission; y los Californios, the children of la Malinche.
Salud!

They all drink. Just then, Rita Enters, with a jug of milk, surveying the room in dismay. Upon noticing her, the Girls gasp and giggle, and Christy jumps up. The Widow, alone, seems unphased, staying in her seat.

Rita Les puedo ayudar, señoritas? *(Silence.)* Y qué necesita, usted, Viuda Quintanilla?

V.Q. No need to bust the bones in your corset, Margarita. We were just taking our leave. *(She and the Girls head towards the door. The Girls exit more quickly than the Widow. She turns around in the doorway to look at Christy.)* Remember the races. *(She shuts the door.)*

Rita *(As she calls out orders, Christy obeys.)* Clean up that mess. *(Christy picks up the dishes.)* Straighten up the furniture. Wipe the mirror. Where did those smudges come from?

Christy *(Embarrassed.)* "I was only making myself decent," and such "lovely girls" –

Rita glares at him so that he does not finish his sentence. With worry, he turns away from her. He sees the fireplace tools, grabs one.

Christy *(Crossing towards her.)* This piece of iron does remind me of how "I hit a blow on the ridge of his skull."

Rita I've already heard that story.

Christy *(With hurt pride.)* "It's [strange] you wouldn't care to [hear] it, [when] them girls [snuck from their beds to [listen] to me."

Rita *(Taken aback.)* Snuck from their beds? *(She makes an effort to regain composure, but is still upset.)* Well, this morning, while you were being showered with attention, and I was over at the market buying milk for your tea, I caught a glimpse of today's newspaper.

Christy "Is it news of my murder?"

Rita News of a hanging, as punishment for murder. What an awful death that must be; even more so, for an immigrant who's killed his Anglo foreman. He'd be shown no mercy, then tossed into a shallow grave, the dirt unceremoniously shoveled over his body.

Christy *(Frightened.)* "Oh, God help me. [Do] you [think] I'm safe?" You did say, last night, that I'd be in no danger "here with [you]" all.

Rita Danger will find you here, if you're telling your stories to those careless girls. Chismosas!

Christy "And you're thinking they'd tell?" "What joy would they have to bring hanging to the likes of me?"

Rita Who knows why people do the things they do?

Christy "[...Then] it'd be best, maybe, [if] I went on wandering, like Esau or Cain"...

Rita Or Saint Christopher, as my father called you.

Christy *(He looks at her.)* "And isn't it a poor thing to be starting again [...], a lonesome fellow[...] looking [at] women [...] the way the needy fallen spirits [look] on the Lord?"

Rita With your stories, and the way you tell them, surely you'll find plenty of company to keep.

Christy "It's easy for [...] you to be talking of plenty[...]with your shape and [shop,] and your share of gold, but there's great lonesomeness for a poor [...] pauper on the highways of the world."

Rita You're not the only one to live a lonesome life.

Christy “How would a lovely [...] woman the like of you be lonesome when all men should be thronging around to hear the sweetness of your voice, and the little infant children [...] pestering your steps”, as you stroll through the village.

Rita I don't need your flattery.

Christy Flattery!

Rita Flattery in exchange for pity. You only pretend to be lonesome.

Christy “I wish to God I was letting on, but it's lonesome I was in my own land, and lonesome walking the world.” “I was [...] born lonesome [...] as the moon of dawn.”

Rita I don't know what to make of you, Christy Mahon.

Christy “It's little I'm understanding myself, [...] only that my heart's scalded this day. [I'll be] stretching out the earth between us, [...] and not be waking near you another dawn. [...] I'd best be going [...], for hanging is a [wretched] thing, and [there's] little welcome [...] left [for] me in this house.” *(He turns to go.)*

Rita Christy! *(He stops and turns to look at her.)* Take off your coat, and put another log on the fire. Our new barkeep mustn't run off so soon.

Christy “[...]I can stay”?

Rita As long as the Viuda or the other girls don't lure you away.

Christy I'll be “working at your side”. “And I'll have your [voice] from this day filling my ears, and that look is come upon you meeting my two eyes...”

Rita *(Flushed.)* I think you'll be a dependable barkeep and helper...

Christy “[And I'm...] thinking, if [I'm] here in this house, seeing you combing your hair” “,or rinsing your ankles when the night is come” “[, it won't be long] till I'd be crying out after your shadow [as it passes on] the hill.”

She looks at him. He is gazing at her. Just then, Juan Caballero comes through the door, carrying a sack, with the Viuda Quintanilla close behind. There is an awkward silence.

Juan *(Attempting to maintain composure through his indignance.)* Margarita. Your chickens are getting into Diego's vegetable garden again.

Rita Otra vez! *(She grabs her shawl and rushes out.)*

Christy *(Awkwardly, but happily, inching towards the door.)* I'll just go help her...

V.Q. *(“Closing the door”, and putting her hands on Christy's shoulders, guiding him back into the room.)* She can manage. We've come because Juanito has something to say to you.

For a moment, the two men just stare at each other, both nervous. The Widow sighs and sits down. Juan looks to his Tia, who nods and offers a half-hearted gesture of the hand as encouragement. Juan dumbly hands the sack to Christy.

Christy *(A bit confused.)* Are you bringing me gifts...like the girls?

Juan What? No. I have something to say to you.

Christy Yes?

Juan *(He composes himself.)* I think it's time for you to be moving on. I will pay for your train ticket to the city of your choice. *(He takes money from his pocket, offering it to Christy.)* Go on, before Rita returns.

Christy *(Worried.)* “I will not.”

Juan I have relatives who work at the Presidio in Monterey. If I am able to secure a position for you there –

Christy “No.” “[Why] is it you're wanting to get [rid] of me?”

Juan Very well, then, I'll be forthcoming with you, Christopher Mahon. I'm going to marry Margarita. And I'm not comfortable having a calculating brute like you taking shelter under her roof.

Christy *(Insulted.)* “And you'd be using bribery for to banish me?”

Juan Now, don't be offended...*(He looks to the Widow for help.)*

V.Q. *(She stands. To Christy.)* It would be for the best, mijo, if you were to leave now, before that pitiful girl gets any ideas about the two of you. Though Juan can't imagine what Rita might see in you, he may be the only one, for the talk in the village, now, is of marriage between she and yourself.

"Christy beams with delight."

Juan *(Loses his composure. Comically intense.)* The two of you are not a match! She'd grow tired of you, and you angry with her, within a matter of days, then you'd kill each other. *("He makes the movement of strangling with his hands." He sees his Tía and Christy, stops, takes a breath, and calms himself.)* What she needs is a temperate, disciplined, God-fearing man. And that man is me.

V.Q. *(Taking up the sack and shoving it into Christy's arms.)* Run upstairs and try these on. Juan has packed his own clothes for you. Perhaps if they fit, he'll let you borrow them. If you like them, perhaps you'll consider his offer.

Christy I would like Rita to see me in some fine clothes...

V.Q. *(She yanks Juan's hat away from him and puts it on Christy.)* Go on, then.

Christy runs upstairs. The Widow sits down again, while Juan begins to pace.

Juan He won't go, Tía. And what's worse, he intends to marry Margarita.

V.Q. Well, if it's valor young women look for in a man, they won't be finding you, mijo.

Juan I don't know what to do. Help me, Tía.

V.Q. What can I possibly do to help you, mijo? I'm just a lonely viuda, a poor widow woman...

Juan I must find a way –

V.Q. ...married to your Tío for such a short time before he –

Juan That's it! Another marriage...

V.Q. Ay, to be married again? –

Juan ...but which of the girls...?

V.Q. ...I couldn't, possibly –

Juan You? *(She glares at him.)* I mean, you! You would do that for me, Tía?

V.Q. *(To appear reluctant.)* Hmm, if I married him, it would solve only half your problema, mijo. He would still be neighbors with your Margarita, y tú tan celoso...

Juan I'm not jealous of him! Do this, Tía, and I'll buy you a new house.

V.Q. The sacrifices I make for my familia...*(Upstairs, a door opens.)* Hay viene.

Christy comes back downstairs, looking dapper in the clothes that do not belong to him.

V.Q. Que guapo. You look so handsome, it'll be a shame to see you go.

Christy *(With pride.)* "I'm not going."

The Widow looks at Juan, who is seething. She motions for him to leave.

Juan Very well, I'll just leave you be, then. I should be heading to the park, anyhow. Good luck at the races. *(He exits.)*

V.Q. You look like a real gentleman. Come, have a seat, and let us talk.

Christy I'm going out to look for Rita.

V.Q. She should be on her way back soon. I'll keep you company till then.

Christy "From [now on], I'll have no [lack] of company when all sorts is bringing me their food and clothing."

He walks confidently to the door. He opens it, then stops, terrified. He quickly backs away. The Widow goes to him.

V.Q. What is it?

Christy "It's the walking spirit of [the] murdered [foreman]!"

V.Q. *(More sympathetic than we've seen her, trying to soothe him.)* Calmate.

V.Q. I can't be sure, there's been much talk of him...and me, with my poor English. Last I heard, he was planning on making his way to New York. He had hopes of going home.

Disgruntled, the Foreman stares at her, then leaves. The Widow slams the door shut. Christy comes down the stairs, full of fear and shame. The Widow watches him.

V.Q. "Well, [aren't you the] playboy of the western world." And the man you slaughtered is terribly active.

Christy *(Peering out window to make sure Foreman is gone.)* "What [will Rita] say when she hears? [Will] she be speaking to me [at all]?"

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From outside, the approaching sound of the voices of the Village Girls.

Girls Christy! Christy Mahon!

Christy Is it Rita?

V.Q. It's the muchachas. They'll want you riding with them to the races. What shall I tell them?

Girls Christy! Christy! Christopher Mahon!

Rita enters.

Rita Christy, let's go.

Lights out. Mission bells ring.

End of Act II

Act III

Lights up. The Inn and Cantina, early evening, the same day. A celebratory racket outside. A crowd enters through the door, spilling into the room, Christy at its center.

Village Girls
Felicidades! Our champion!

Diego & Filomeno
Congratulations! Bien hecho!

Rita pushes her way through the crowd.

Rita *(In good spirit.)* Por favor, todos! We will celebrate our hero's victory. *(Cheers from crowd. She tried to talk over them.)* But for now, he must wipe the sweat from his body and brow. Let him rest a spell, then you are all invited to return here, tonight, to honor him!

Applause from the crowd.

Christy "Thank you kindly, the lot of you. But" ...*(He hesitates for a brief moment.)*... "you'd say it was little only I did this day if you'd seen me [...] striking my one single blow."

The Men cheer. One of the Girls faints into the arms of the Widow, who impatiently, but lightly, slaps her awake.

Rita *(Losing patience, but still in a good mood, ushering everyone out.)* Ya basta. Que se vayan todos.

The crowd filters out, and Rita closes the door. She turns around to look at Christy. They are alone. She goes to him and begins wiping the sweat from his face with a handkerchief.

Rita You've been here only one day, and already won a grand prize. You'll do well for yourself here.

Christy "I'll have great times if I win the crowning prize I'm seeking now, and that's your promise that you'll wed me".

Rita *(She stops and moves away from him.)* How dare you? How can you speak of marriage when everyone knows you'll be moving on from here, as soon as you feel it's safe?

Christy And leave you? “I will not!” The frost of winter will have passed, and spring will find nothing to thaw, for I’ll remain warm by your side.

Rita And when summer comes again?

Christy “[...Y]ou’ll feel my two [arms] stretched around you, and I squeezing kisses on your puckered lips till I’d feel a kind of pity for the Lord God [...] sitting lonesome in his golden chair.”

Rita You might say that to any girl, Christy Mahon, but no other man could say it quite like you.

Christy Just “you wait to hear me” whispering between “mighty kisses”, the two of us lying in the “sunshine”.

Rita What do I possess that makes me a worthy diversion for our bold, travelling poet?

Christy “Isn’t there the light of [...heaven in your heart..., so] you’ll be an angel’s lamp to me” for to find my way home in the dark.

Rita As your wife, I’d be by your side on those dark nights, looking out for the law, and pointing out the constellations over our heads. *(Beat.)* But perhaps we’re telling stories to ourselves. This place could never keep a restless soul like you.

Christy *(He puts his arms around her.)* “If I wasn’t a good Christian, it’s on my naked knees I’d be saying my prayers” to every stone and poppy flower “paving the laneway to your door.”

Rita I do have a dress on order. *(They smile and embrace.)* I’ll light a candle in thanks to the Virgen for blessing us.

Christy “It’s a miracle and that’s the truth. Me there toiling a long while, and walking a long while,” till “there was [Margarita Reynoso]. And isn’t it a great joy was in store for me the whole while I was walking the world, and I coming on unbeknownst, [...]coming all times nearer to the golden glory of this passing day.”

Rita Bound to this place, I had myself nearly convinced to marry another. Then the wind carried you here, guided by the stars.

Christy “And to think[, for years, I’ve heard] women talking that talk to all bloody fools, and this the first time I’ve heard the like of your voice talking sweetly for my own delight.”

Rita The whole village would be surprised to hear I took a sweet tone with anyone. *(Voices are coming from outside.)* That’s Papá coming home. We should tell him...after he’s slept.

Rita and Christy move away from each other. Miguel enters, singing, and being walked in by Juan. After guiding Miguel to a seat near Christy, Juan crosses to Rita.

Miguel *(To Christy.)* Ah, you’re still here, mijo. *(He looks at Rita.)* Toda via? You missed a good party. By the time the body was laid to rest, early this afternoon, all had had more than their fill of drink. Five or six men were up on the hillside, vomiting behind tombstones! *(Laughing, then to Christy.)* I heard you won the races today! A destroyer and a sportsman! I feel sorry for the hombre whose house you mark to take a wife. *(Chuckles, then stops, pointing to Juan.)* Take stock of that proper and repressed Christian I’ve decided will be the husband to my daughter. And we’re moving the date up!

Christy It’s decided, then? *(He looks over at Rita.)*

Miguel Oh, yes. I can’t leave her unwed, around a raging scoundrel like you. I haven’t had *that* much to drink, mijo.

Rita *(Pulling away from Juan.)* Do I have no say in this?

Miguel What’s to say? It’s been settled.

Rita *(Exasperated.)* I say, I’m marrying Christy Mahon!

Miguel *(Fearful and dismayed.)* You mean for me to take this murderous man as my lawfully wedded son?

Rita Would you rather have your daughter marry a man with no passion or poetry?

Miguel Yes! Por supuesto. I need another drink. *(Crosses to the bar.)* Won’t you say something, Juan? No tienes celos?

Juan Actually, Señor, I've decided it's not prudent to hold feelings of jealousy towards a man who's capable of killing another.

Rita Well, some lucky girl will be very grateful I didn't marry you when I had the chance.

Juan And I'm sure you'll be the envy of all the others, taking up with a filthy criminal.

Rita At least with him, the talk is of moonlight, instead of manure!

Juan My farm provides nicely for me, and makes me capable of providing for you. It paid for that golden band I put on your finger.

A quiet moment.

Rita *(In earnest.)* I am not deserving of you, Juan Caballero.

Juan Margarita...

Voices outside, as the Villagers begin returning for the party they were promised. Christy is emboldened by the audience.

Christy “What will the lot of us gain by making blather till the fall of night? [Rita] said [she'd] wed me, and [I will] swear it in the face of God.”

Juan She was promised to me, first!

Christy Leave now, “or I'll maybe add a murder to my deeds to-day.”

Miguel *(Setting his drink down for the first time.)* Murder?! Estás loco! You won't be killing anybody, tonight – not here, in my establishment. Juan, why don't the two of you ride up to the peak and fight it out there? *(He gives Juan a little shove.)*

Juan *(Offended.)* I won't fight him, Miguel Jaime. I'd rather be a bachelor for life than stoop so low as to brawl with this barbarian. You seemed so set on my land and livestock, why don't you fight him, yourself?

Miguel I only thought a man of honor should fight for what's his...

Diego But what if the spring thaw has revealed a body, and the police are on their way for him?

Filomeno Estamos en California! Como que “spring thaw”? Besides, he showed up at this very doorstep on a late summer evening.

Diego Yo sé, I was there!

Filomeno My point is, if no body was found then, no body will be found now or ever. *(Raising his glass.)* To the palest bandido in the west.

Diego raises his glass.

Both Salud! *(They drink.)*

Miguel enters from upstairs. He descends the stairs in a hustle.

Miguel Hermanos, a little early to be drinking, isn't it?

Filomeno *(Pouring another drink.)* We were drinking to you. *(He offers the glass to Miguel, who refuses.)*

Miguel Gracias, pero no.

Diego Ay, Miguel, you haven't had a drink in months.

Miguel I live with a murderer. No soy pendejo. Put down your drinks and help me with the horses.

The men exit. Christy enters from upstairs and happily runs down the stairs. He looks at himself in the mirror, very pleased with how he looks in his wedding attire.

Christy If my old da could see me. The playboy of the western world.

Viuda Quintanila bursts through the door and shuts it.

V.Q. He's returned!

Christy Who?

V.Q. Ay, mijo, who do you think? Who have you been lucky to avoid these last months? He's asking around the village, and all know you now. Someone will give you up, and he'll have his revenge. Vente, you must leave.

Christy "I will not". Rita loves me now, surely. "What good would be my lifetime if I left [her]?"

V.Q. So, you'll tell your story to another girl, in another village.

Christy I won't leave Rita! I could wander into "a drift of chosen females, standing in their shifts[...], from this place to the Eastern world."

V.Q. *(Going to him, and holding his face in her hands.)* You'll think on your time here, with us, as if it had all been a dream, mijo.

The Village Girls run in. Sara immediately begins taking off her petticoat.

Sara The angry man is on his way! Here, put this on!

Sara hands her petticoat to Christy, while another one of the Girls throws her shawl around him.

V.Q. Muchachas! Quick thinking.

Christy *(Struggling feebly.)* Leave me go, will you, when I'm thinking of my luck today, for she will wed me surely.

V.Q. *(To the Girls.)* You'll help me with the horse cart. We'll roll around back and throw hay over him.

Christy "You'll be taking me from her? You're jealous, is it, of her wedding me?"

Rita appears at the top of the stairs, in her wedding dress, and stands there, taking in the scene. Everyone downstairs freezes when they see her.

Sara This isn't what it looks like.

Rita I'm not sure what it looks like.

Nelly Don't worry, Rita, he's not being untrue.

Sara Not about his love for you, at least.

Honor It's nothing to worry yourself with. We're just trying to help him escape from the angry man.

Rita Cuál hombre? *(She comes quickly downstairs. To Christy.)* What man are you trying to escape?

Christy remains silent.

Rita *(To Christy.)* Say something!

V.Q. Tell her, mijo.

Christy He's alive.

Silence.

Rita You lied?

Christy Not exactly – not at first.

Rita How long have you known?

Christy *(Broken.)* Nearly as long as I've been here.

Rita So, I'll be neither a bride nor a widow, today.

After a silent moment, the Foreman bursts through the door, with Juan just behind. The Village Girls scatter. Christy and Rita stand in the same positions as when Miguel gave them his blessing. The Foreman crosses and stands between and upstage of them. Both Christy and Rita stand their ground. The Foreman rips the veil off Rita's head. He grabs Christy and drags him out through the door, kicking and shouting, and reaching out for Rita. Rita drops to the floor. Juan runs to her side.

Village Girls Cobarde! You coward!

Sara How could you lead him here, Juan Caballero?

Juan I did no such thing! I was trying to keep him away. I am a man of honor. (He *helps Rita to her feet.*) And I've come to reclaim you. (*Rita searches his face, still in shock.*) We can be married now.

Rita pulls away from him. She walks down center.

Rita I belong to no man. Lo perdí. "I've lost the only playboy of the western world."

End of Play

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