

## Crossing the Border in Three Plays by Hugo Salcedo

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In journeys made five centuries ago, Europeans crossing the Atlantic treated North and South America alike as territories in which they might seek economic improvement, fulfill ambitions, and enhance their own sense of identity. As one European wrote in 1982, 'The conquest of America prefigures and founds our present identity.'<sup>1</sup> Europe assumed that it occupied the geographical centre, asserted colonial attitudes of hegemony and, behaving as the Self, regarded America as the Other. Writing and publishing confirmed this unequal relationship.<sup>2</sup> According to Latin American perception, the postcolonial era has seen the old hegemonic centre replaced by a new one, the United States, whose own sense of being self as opposed to other is manifest in its own writing. The study of Latin American writers therefore plays a part in the process of restoring an equilibrium, by treating them as the voices of self in communication with their others. Djelal Kadir has allowed the traditional roles to be reversed in his recent book, entitled—not without irony—*The Other Writing. Postcolonial Essays in Latin America's Writing Culture*.<sup>3</sup> According to Kadir, 'otherness,' or "the other" as such, is not an absolute phenomenon but a relational exchange. It certainly is not an alienable phenomenon that occupies an unreachably separate locus. Otherness is part of identity—personal, cultural, national—and its conditions of existence as other reside in difference, in the ways it is differentiated from same and from self. (p. 16) The present article follows in this postcolonial mode: it shows how three plays by the young Mexican dramatist Hugo Salcedo treat the crossing of the Mexican/U.S. border as a symptom of that persisting hegemonic relationship; but it also suggests that they reverse the location of the centre, placing it in Mexico, and explore aspects of Mexican identity through the journey to the other side.

The three pieces collected in *El viaje de los cantores y otras obras de teatro* (1990)<sup>4</sup> highlight an aspect of Mexican relations with the USA that has been notorious for many years but has recently become particularly grave. Labor migration to the North and across the border has a tradition dating back to the nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup> Unemployment, underemployment, vastly inferior wages and

desperate economic hardship are the acknowledged explanations for the phenomenon. In part the migration is internal: a northwards movement from the south of Mexico. But ultimately, for Mexicans from all parts of their country, it becomes an international issue. From 1942 to 1964 bilateral government legislation made it possible for an estimated twelve million men to cross the border as *braceros*, 'some of them returning to the U.S. for a few months each year over a period of ten to fifteen years.'<sup>6</sup> Since then restrictions have been imposed on the number of legal immigrant workers, and in 1986 the US Congress passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA). The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), signed in 1994, was expected by some politicians to reduce the need for migration. But a typical recent study concludes that 'by the early 1990s unauthorised migration from Mexico had resumed on a large scale,' and that NAFTA will not reduce it significantly 'for at least ten years' and may even 'work to accelerate migration, at least in the short term.'<sup>7</sup> Therefore, 'one of the most discussed bilateral issues between Mexico and the USA is that of "undocumented" migration of Mexicans into the United States.'<sup>8</sup>

The primary level of the three plays under discussion is clearly the reflection of this current socio-political issue of migration northwards across the border, which has developed from its economic basis into a form of cultural mythology.<sup>9</sup> The first piece, *El viaje de los cantores*, dramatizes actual events that led to the death of eighteen Mexicans while attempting to enter the United States illegally in a sealed railway wagon on 1 July 1987. Many of the scenes are imaginative re-creations of reported situations: the behavior of the men enclosed in the wagon, the interrogation of the sole survivor, the investigation. In this respect the play is a form of documentary drama. But Salcedo adds a further dimension to the social realism by showing the plight of the bereaved women, the conspiracies that lead to this kind of illegal entry, and the failure of the tragedy to deter young Mexicans from further attempts. His play is therefore a demonstration of the gravity of the people's predicament, which proves a more potent driving force than their awareness of the dangers of the journey, and of the loneliness and distress that they leave at home.

It is important to add that the audience does not watch a mere exposition of the problem. In the final scene, a priest of Ojo Caliente (the home town of five of the dead men) calls upon those attending the funeral service to seek justice, to fight for their rights: 'Debemos luchar por un país más justo' (p. 45). To an extent this is Salcedo's way of representing the spirit of the street demonstrations in which twenty thousand people of Ojo Caliente participated on 8 July 1987. But it is not neutral reporting. The priest, '*completamente exaltado*,' speaks of hope, action, and divine intervention for their cause, unintentionally revealing a contradiction between the message and the lack of actual action ('Yo, señores,

soy simplemente un emisorio de Dios en la tierra, pero ustedes, todos unidos . . .,' he says, unconvincingly). In his summary of the events of June and July 1987 (which precedes the text of the play), Salcedo does not disguise his personal point of view: 'Hay demandas de empleo y de justicia por parte de los familiares y de los jóvenes asistentes; y *como siempre*, aún no ha habido respuestas concretas a estas peticiones . . .'

 (p. 19. The italics are mine). This is a clear sign of anger in a writer with a sense of social responsibility, who is willing to use drama to campaign for change.

An equally important social dimension of the play is its attention to the effects of migration on those who are left behind. Salcedo anticipates the findings of researchers such as V.N.S. Desnyder, in 'Family Life across the Border: Mexican Wives Left Behind' (a study of stress on two hundred and two women),<sup>10</sup> particularly in scenes numbered II, VII and X, focussed on the women. Lamenting the men's departure, feeling their absence, suffering the tragedy of their death, the women seem to propose a set of values based on the family and home. This is one of the roles of Mujer 5: at first isolated by hostile gossip for flouting social convention, she is eventually united with the collective in grief.<sup>11</sup> A more general feature of this psycho-social dimension of the play is the exposition of a prevalent sense of suffering and loneliness among all those who are associated with migration or attempted migration. The Abuela (in scene VII) complements the wives with her stoical suffering, which assumes a greater poignancy when we realize that the grandson whom she reveres is the corrupt agent El Mosco, battered to death by his doomed clients in the railway wagon. Her loneliness is enhanced by the way in which she speaks: in the form of a monologue, her words isolated from those of other people. Solitude is the destiny also of the survivor of the disaster, and in his case too a monologue emphasizes the predicament. His report is presented without the intervention of the interrogator's questions, and when he has finished speaking nobody responds to his cries: '¿No me oyen? ¿Por qué no me contestan?' (p. 29) He is isolated in his difference from those who died, and in the absence of consolation.

In the case of *El viaje de los cantores*, then, the action is based upon a tragedy reported in newspapers. The play shows how the specific tragedy is incorporated into the cultural tradition of a people, converting it into a kind of legend. In the cases of the other two plays legend occurs in other guises—the legendary foundation of a town, and the legendary queues at border crossing points. Although not inspired by individual events, their connection with Mexican reality is no less evident.

*Arde el desierto con los vientos que llegan del sur*, which was awarded the 1990 Literature Prize (Theatre Section) by the Instituto de Cultura de Baja California, bears the postscript: 'Tijuana, B.C., en el primer centenario de su

fundación. Octubre 3 de 1989,' an external acknowledgement of the play's representation of local history. On a first level of meaning, then, *Arde el desierto* . . . concerns social reality. It alludes—though only obliquely—to the origins of the city as a village (in a cattle-ranching locality), in the mid-nineteenth century, but more sharply reflects its image as a place of transit, and its reputation during the 1920s (the Prohibition era in the United States) as a place of recreation, where gambling, drinking, dancing and prostitution were provided to cater for a rootless, fortune-seeking or fun-seeking clientèle from both sides of the border. Its subsequent emergence from that era into the modern age is briefly represented. The audience therefore watches a century condensed into less than one hour's performance time.

*Sinfonía en una botella*, by contrast, captures a moment in time—a typical day at the Tijuana-San Ysidro border, with cars queueing to cross. In this comedy Salcedo adopts an essentially *costumbrista* approach, focussing on the occupants of four cars as a method of presenting a cross-section of Mexican middle-class types. Their reasons for crossing to the north (domestic, romantic and professional) are of less importance to the play than their petty individualism and selfishness. Political comment is made opportunely. The temporary closure of the frontier, ostensibly for security reasons, allows wry allusions to standard examples of tension between Mexico and its northern neighbour. Impatient travellers conjecture about the real explanation for the delay: perhaps drug-smuggling, or an insult to the Mexican flag, or an accident at the San Diego nuclear power plant.

All three plays, therefore, have an important sociological basis. The crossing of the border must first be taken literally. However, in the preliminary instructions on stage design for *El viaje de los cantores* Salcedo offers a clue to the relative importance of social realism and allegorical meaning in the eponymous work: 'Para un tratamiento realista la escenografía deberá contar, al fondo, con uno de los vagones de la línea ferroviaria Missouri-Pacific. [. . .] Sin embargo, prescindiendo de escenografía "pesada," la obra bien puede desarrollarse frente a Cámara Negra' (p. 16). In other words, he leaves to the director's discretion the choice between a set that emphasizes the real social context and one that allows more scope for transcendent interpretations. It may be deduced that he does not intend his inspiration in specific locations and events to inhibit the conveyance of allegorical meanings in performance. A closer study of the three pieces demonstrates how their social and psychological dimensions overlap.

Not without a certain amount of black humor, Salcedo hints strongly at the transcendental qualities of the first play in a scene with Biblical names, José, Jesús and Belem (Scene V). The characters José and Jesús Belem serve to ironize any prospect of salvation, for the Biblical comparison is hopelessly incomplete:

the two men are brothers, not father and son, and José—the schoolmaster—is indirectly implicated in the illegal emigration business. Even the officials investigating the organisation resort to sarcastic innuendo when they refer to the eighteen dead travellers: 'Se los llevó Judas' (p. 33). In another respect, however, the intention is highly serious. If Jesús wishes to cross the border illegally and José is willing to cooperate, then the aspiration gains respectability. It is normalized. This idea is reinforced by the more explicitly messianic figure, El Desconocido, a mysterious traveller who dies with the others and is buried with the five from Ojo Caliente. The priest exalts him as 'un nuevo Jesucristo . . . muerto nuevamente, víctima de la miseria de la humanidad' (p. 45), and the stage directions suggest that his appearance should make the audience think of the traditional figure of Christ in paintings: 'Es delgado, usa barba y melena' (p. 34). If the character with the holy name—Jesús—has the earthiness of a common man, the unnamed stranger is a common man with a symbolic role. Divinity yields to humanity: together, the two characters convey the sense that mankind's natural self leads to tragedy, though it bears within it the hope for future justice. It should be noted that the location, Ojo Caliente, has been chosen partly for the symbolic implications of its name, emblematic of men's burning aspirations to travel to the targeted land. Their need is presented as endemic, the tragic consequences as inevitable. The concept of salvation is an act of will. In this light the play may be seen as an allegory of the human condition, a suffering humanity whose efforts to alleviate its circumstances intensify the pain and introduce a sense of guilt.

The sense that the action of *El viaje de los cantores* represents a recurrent rather than a single episode is instilled in the audience by the order in which events appear on stage. Scene I occurs several months after the tragedy (but shows people to be still almost oblivious of the dangers), and a linear chronology is avoided in the remaining scenes. Moreover, the dramatist's 'Nota para la puesta en escena' offers the option of an order of presentation determined by the drawing of lots. Salcedo explained elsewhere that this device would serve not only to destroy the dominance of any anecdote but also to permit 'una recepción plural en apariencia inconexa pero cuya intención era manifestar la diversidad y la multiplicidad en la búsqueda del sentido.'<sup>12</sup> I propose to take up some additional meanings below.

In *El viaje de los cantores*, then, we find an interrelation between the specific moment in time occupied by the human disaster of July 1987 and the sense of time as a continuum in which the same events are repeated. A more explicit preoccupation with time underlies the second play, *Arde el desierto con los vientos que llegan del sur*. The man who enters La Juana's life three times is untouched by the changing eras that he can foresee. He rides in on horseback

in Scene 1 of Act 1, he returns on horseback in Scene 1 of Act 2, and he carries La Juana away on horseback at the end of the play. 'Usted pertenece al pasado,' she remarks on the second occasion, reinforcing his independence from the laws of time with the further comment, 'Usted está muerto' (p. 68). La Juana moves *with* time and refuses the man's call until she herself is overcome by changing events and, forced to recognize her own anachronism, rides off into the realm of timelessness with him. But the place remains after the founder has left. Its allegorical dimension is manifest in various respects. Most of the customers are identified only by impersonal designations: El Gringo, El Licenciado, El Ingeniero, El General. The visitor whose function is most basic is given the least particularized title of all: El Hombre. The prevailing winds—'que llegan del sur'—are both the northwards drift and the urge to travel on. The place's essential function is to offer the hope of providing the object that is desired. Even Clemente, who stays on to ensure the establishment's survival, is permitted an amusing sense of fulfillment when the flashing lights of a discoteque herald the arrival of a new form of life, descending onto the stage as though from outer space: '¡He alcanzado las estrellas!' (p. 71) *Arde el desierto* . . . presents Tijuana, therefore, as a kind of mythological centre, a meeting-point of past, present and future, where 'desire' seems capable of fulfillment.

The third play, *Sinfonía en una botella*, concerns a moment when time pauses. At the point of crossing towards aspired goals, people's progress is frozen, and their lives are exposed. What is significant about the minor crisis is that it causes people to leave their cars; or in other words, it draws them out of the environment that enhances their individualism and compels them to intermingle. Temporarily imprisoned within a common predicament, they reveal aspects of their social behavior: the willingness to help, for example; or the group's tendency to victimize somebody who is different. With the crisis ended, people return to their cars and resume their individual, self-centered lives. The specific situation—a queue at the border—therefore stimulates the enactment of a more universal human theme.

A highly significant indication of allegorical meanings may be found in the impact during performance of visual and aural devices. The three plays collected in this edition contain devices to ensure that the audience is constantly reminded of the importance of travel, crossing a frontier, and adjusting to a relationship with the culture that lies beyond the border. Obviously, location is one of these features. The audience is conscious of the fact that scenes are located on or close to the Mexican/US border, or in places associated with the railroad that crosses the international frontier. Tijuana, on the Baja California border, is the setting for the whole of *Arde el desierto* . . . (two acts, each of two scenes) and *Sinfonía en una botella* (a single act). In the case of *El viaje* . . . the ten scenes fluctuate

between the border town of Ciudad Juárez (Scenes I, II, V), the railroad town of Ojo Caliente (in the state of Zacatecas) (II, VII, X), the interior of a sealed wagon (VI, IX), the station at Sierra Blanca, Texas (VIII), and an unidentified office.

Dialogue reinforces the sense that the base, the journey, and the destination are crucial matters. The first words of the first play sound a keynote: 'Yo soy de Paredón de Arteaga, en Aguascalientes' (p. 17), thus establishing the idea that the speaker, now in Ciudad Juárez, is on a journey northwards. The conversation develops immediately into a discussion of the generalized tendency to think of crossing the border, and within seconds another character attributes to all people the innate instinct to travel: 'Nomás uno crece y emprende su propio camino.' (p. 17) This kind of conversation abounds in the second play:

EL HOMBRE: Vengo del sur.

LA JUANA: ¿Del sur? Yo nací allá.

EL HOMBRE: ¿Sí? ¿Dónde?

LA JUANA: No la conoce, es un rancho muy pequeño.

EL HOMBRE: He caminado mucho, quizá sí.

.....

EL HOMBRE: Voy hacia el norte.

LA JUANA: Eso se ve.

EL HOMBRE: Pues sí. ¡Qué estúpido!

LA JUANA: Y . . . ¿Qué piensa hacer por el norte?

EL HOMBRE: Me gusta conocer paisajes, gente, vivir aventuras. (pp. 57-58)

In the third play characters are less self-analytical, but the first words to be spoken (by somebody selling newspapers) allude humorously to the more general issues of frontiers between nations, and the difficulties of eradicating their effects: '¡Entérese de las últimas noticias! ¡Las Alemanias se separan de nueva cuenta! ¡Llevan a concurso la construcción del muro de Berlín!' (p.78).

Various props enhance the expression of these and associated issues. Visually, trains and stations dominate *El viaje* . . . , horses bear the two principal characters to and from the tavern in *Arde el desierto* . . . , and cars litter the stage in *Sinfonía en una botella*. In the second and third plays aural support is afforded by the choice of music, which contributes greatly to the audience's overall sense that foreign cultures impinge on Mexican life, attract Mexicans, and are becoming inherent in national culture. (In the case of the first play, music has a different function. It is referred to in the title and in the survivor's report, but it is never heard by the audience. Singing alleviates the pain and unites the travellers in

harmony, but ironically it is a mere diversion from the tragedy that they share.) At the final curtain of *Arde el desierto* . . . the impression of an ultra-modern Tijuana is enhanced by music of the group U2.<sup>13</sup> And in the third play—named with deliberate irony *Sinfonía* . . .—, radios in a queue of cars waiting at the border emit a cacophony of sound to suggest a variety of tastes. Here, music varies (according to the stage directions) ‘desde la voz de Tony Aguilar que al ritmo de tambora interpreta "Tristes recuerdos," hasta la música del grupo Depeche Mode que canta "Personal Jesus" (p. 78), from which it may be inferred that the group renowned for its technomusic (synthesizers, etc.)—English in origin, but popular in the United States—has been chosen to represent the extreme form of cultural influence from abroad. The use of the English language has a similar effect (particularly in the case of the girl who is learning to speak it in *Sinfonía* . . .).

The sets and props therefore ensure that whatever the other themes of these plays, the issues of travelling north, crossing borders, and responding to influences from beyond the frontier are endowed with emphasis and transparency. In the above analyses I have attempted to demonstrate that the three plays are transparently concerned with national socio-political issues—even local issues—and that they are also transparently allegorical in their intent. While reflecting and commenting on Mexican behavior, they explore the human psyche as an amalgam of the local and the universal, or more precisely as an expression of the universal through peculiarly national circumstances. I now propose to develop the argument that the aspiration towards something situated beyond a frontier may be considered not only a response to economic necessity (which is manifestly its first level of meaning) but also an expression of the universal human search for identity, or fulfilment of the Self.

Let us consider the specific nature of the various types of search undertaken by the characters. Firstly, of course, there is the economic motive for migration, which is twice introduced at the beginning of *El viaje de los cantores*:

Mejor vivir de pobres con los gringos, que de ricos en México. (p. 17)

Los gringos nos van a poner casa y hasta trabajo nos van a dar. (p. 19)

When the middle classes are taken into account, it is more loosely the need for *improvement* that underlies most of the journeys. This need may even reduce any sense of belonging to Mexico to a subsidiary level, as is evident in the first words quoted above, or in the response from Graciela in *Sinfonía en una botella*, when Alberto contemplates the prospect of a Baja California taken over by the Japanese:

ALBERTO: ¿Y dejar de ser mexicanos?

GRACIELA: ¿Y qué? Con tal de mejorar, no importa el nombre. (p. 100)

If economic necessity—or, in the case of the middle classes, improvement—is a fundamental motive, another factor given emphasis is the innate tendency to leave home and to search:

No más uno crece y emprende su propio camino. (*El viaje . . .*, p. 17)

Es el asunto de todos los hombres. Dejó a su esposa, a sus hijos, vendió sus tiliches, se despidió de sus amigos, compró una carabina y se trepó a su caballo. (*Arde el desierto . . .*, p. 58)

In the epigraph for the text of *Arde el desierto . . .*, the search is represented as the expression of *desire* (according to Bono's words from U2's song): 'Gonna go where the bright lights and the big city meet/ With a red guitar, on fire/ Desire' (p. 51). In an important respect, *Arde el desierto . . .* offers a clue to the interpretation of this journey in all three plays. La Juana encourages El Hombre to press on as far as Arizona, rather than assume that he has already reached the north; he will not return with empty hands (pp. 58-59). Upon his return he declares that he has found nothing that can be measured in terms of money, but that time appeared to pause while he made discoveries of a different kind: 'Comprendí muchas cosas. Este eterno segundo me ha servido de mucho' (pp. 66-67). And he has returned for her. From this it may be inferred that, if abundant wealth has eluded him, the experience further north has enabled him to develop a new scale of values. 'Desire' (to retain provisionally this term of U2s) has become focussed on human relationships instead of survival or material improvement. El Hombre's crossing to the other side has served only to turn him back to find the object of his search elsewhere. However, he has learned something about himself. In other words, it is not what he has encountered beyond the crossing point, but the crossing itself that counts. Similarly, in *El viaje de los cantores* and *Sinfonía en una botella* the emphasis is not placed on the arrival on the other side, but on the fact that crossings are contemplated, planned, and undertaken.

Across the border, of course, those who travel encounter *difference*. They discover a world and a people at once alien and complementary to themselves. In terms of Kadir's reversal of cultural hegemony—which I introduced at the beginning of this article—this becomes essentially the self's discovery of its other. Significantly, the image of the United States in these plays bears only archetypal traits. First and foremost, of course, is wealth. El Gringo is the

American adventurer who can supposedly lead the Mexicans to the source of gold (*Arde el desierto* . . . , pp. 60-61). Secondly, the US represents extensive state care and protection, as Rigo recalls: 'El mismo gobierno le ayudó a tramitar su residencia' (*El viaje de los cantores*, p. 18). Thirdly, the US vigorously impedes the crossing itself: 'Toda la frontera está bien cuidada' (p. 18). In general, while the characters feel their dependence on the power existing on the other side, and their vulnerability to its influence, there is no expression of resentment, only the reflection of a longstanding tradition, deeply rooted in Mexican culture. And these sketchy impressions are substantiated by the underlying function of the term by which the Americans are always known, 'los gringos'—essentially alienating, a constant reminder of their otherness. From this it may be deduced that the US becomes unimportant insofar as its specific nature is concerned. It is the epitome of the diverse objectives that constitute human needs and aspirations.

In fact, the other country tends to be alluded to in a familiar yet evasive way, rather than being named as the United States. 'Allá a todos en algún momento, nos da por pasamos al otro lado,' says one of the characters of the title play (p. 17). A similar vocabulary, involving reference to a place beyond the present location or on the other side, is used in *Arde el desierto con los vientos que llegan del sur* and *Sinfonía en una botella*: expressions such as 'los que cabalgan al norte' (p. 58); 'ir más allá' (p. 58); 'de este lado' (p. 67); 'que me consiga trabajo al otro lado' (p. 82). As Salcedo would know, there is a lengthening tradition among Latin American writers of treating the notion of crossing from one side to another as an allegory for aspects of self-analysis, aspiration to a more complete experience, and search for identity. One of the most internationally renowned cases is that of Julio Cortázar, who endowed the terms 'este lado,' 'el otro lado,' 'del lado de acá,' and 'del lado de allá' with philosophical weight in his prose fiction.<sup>14</sup> More significantly for the Mexican context, Octavio Paz developed from his interpretation of Zen Buddhism the concept of 'la otra orilla':

Al desprendernos del mundo objetivo, no hay ni muerte ni vida y se es como el agua corriendo incesante; a esto se llama: la otra orilla.<sup>15</sup>

According to Paz, the purpose of the journey to the other shore is to discover the other. But Paz emphasized that the journey is internal rather than external: 'La "otra orilla" está en nosotros mismos' (p. 116). It is a search for something different, or alien: 'Lo Otro es algo que no es como nosotros' (p. 124), but it is a search within the self: 'Ese Otro es también yo' (p. 127). And the result of an encounter with the other is a form of self-discovery: 'La experiencia de lo Otro culmina en la experiencia de la Unidad [. . .] Nos hemos reconciliado con

nosotros mismos' (p. 127). What I hope to have shown in this article is that, whether or not there is any direct debt to Paz, Hugo Salcedo's theatrical use of the border issue ultimately transcends the local reality, and crossing to the other side may be perceived as a metaphor of a fundamental and universal psychological need.

In this trilogy the audience watches exemplary and purgatorial situations, in which discoveries are made concerning personality and identity at both individual and national level. The common denominators of the characters are presented firstly as facets determined by environmental circumstances, but secondly as deeply-rooted needs inherent in the human condition. Economic necessity remains a fundamental motivation, but it is supplemented by natural instinct. As a consequence of the action of each play, at least some of the characters learn about themselves: their restlessness, need, ambition for improvement, self-centeredness, solitude. They also discover how the need to cross the frontier is connected with a dependence upon others. Crossing to 'el otro lado' has different emphases in different plays, but it always implies more than literally crossing the national frontier. The image of the Mexican at the border with the United States is a powerful indictment of international socio-economic inequalities. Ultimately, however, it also evokes the notion of mankind driven by necessity to depart from his origins, of the self's journey from the center in search of fulfillment in the other. It may be interpreted as an expression of the universal need for what psychoanalytic theory has called 'complementarity.' As R. D. Laing put it: 'All "identities" require an other: some other in and through a relationship with whom self-identity is actualized.'<sup>16</sup>

At an international level, Mexico's identity is created not merely by introspection but also by its relations with others. Migration contributes to that identity in various ways. Those who migrate undergo profound influences from the other's culture and pass them back to their friends and relatives in Mexico. Those who remain behind suffer psychological effects, which are communicated to Mexican society as a whole. The need to migrate creates a complex sense of belonging and rejection. Economic inequality between itself and its northern neighbor, and a hegemonic relationship at odds with postcolonial ideology, create a conflict of identity between Mexico as an isolated unit and Mexico as a member of a free trade area. Some of these national and international dimensions of *El viaje de los cantores y otras obras de teatro* are implicit in Salcedo's reply to an enquiry made by the author:

'Es momento de afrontar los cambios en el orden mundial, la política de mercado. En ese sentido, creo, México entraría a una nueva etapa. [. . .] Sin embargo los hechos sangrientos que a diario encontramos en los periódicos y que tienen cita en la franja fronteriza, parecieran no entender de los acuerdos entre

los dos países.<sup>17</sup> And Salcedo's propensity to think at the level of individual psychology is indicated in an article published in a previous number of *Latin American Theatre Review*. He is particularly concerned with the individual in relation to the world at large:

Me inclino por las zonas turbias y nostálgicas del ser humano, por una dramaturgia "subterránea," que potencie la exposición de problemas que atañen al hombre como sujeto individual pero que lo insertan en un contexto social, colectivo.<sup>18</sup>

These words suggest immediately a sense of social commitment, and a belief in the need for solidarity, but they also hint latently at ontological themes. It is not far from this conscious reference to the individual's need to form a link with other people to the concept of the individual's need to cross a border, or—and here I write of the subconscious level rather than of conscious intent—the self's need to discover the other. This multiplicity of levels is what makes Salcedo not merely a gifted playwright, and a skillful advocate of social justice, but a dramatist of substance.

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## Notes

1. Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: the Question of the Other* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987) 14. (Originally published as *La Conquête de l'Amérique. La Question de l'autre*. Paris: Seuil. 1982.)

2. Indeed, as feminist theory maintains, the hegemonic relationship caused male attitudes towards women (men's others) to be transferred to the vocabulary used by writers in their treatment of indigenous peoples. See Helen Carr, 'Woman/Indian: "The American" and his Others,' in Francis Barker, Peter Hulme, Margaret Iversen, Diana Loxley (editors), *Europe and its Others*. Colchester: University of Essex. 1985 (pp.46-60), and in particular the following: 'From the first contact with the New World, the model of the power relationship between men and women has been used to structure and articulate the relationship of the European to the New World inhabitants: here and in other colonized territories the difference man/woman provided a fund of images and topeis by which the difference European/non-European could be politically accommodated.[. . .] Woman is the European man's primary Other: using her as an image for the racial other transfers the asymmetrical power relation embedded in her difference from the dominant patriarchal male.' (pp. 46 and 49) Elsewhere I have explored the role of Europe as Latin America's other. See Peter Beardsell, *Europe and Latin America: the Identity of the Other*, Manchester: University of Manchester (Manchester Spanish & Portuguese Studies, No. 4), due for publication in 1996.

3. Djelal Kadir, *The Other Writing. Postcolonial Essays in Latin America's Writing Culture*. (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press) 1993.

4. Hugo Salcedo, *El viaje de los cantores y otras obras de teatro*. (Mexico, D.F.: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes) 1990. All references are to this edition.
5. Leslie Bethell, ed. *Mexico since Independence*. (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P. 1991) 106.
6. Judith Adler Hellman, *Mexico in Crisis*. (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc.; London: Heinemann, 1978) 87.
7. Christopher Mitchell, 'International Migration as an Issue on Today's Inter-American Agenda,' in *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 36.3 (1994): 98.
8. Martin C. Needler, *Mexican Politics. The Containment of Conflict* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1982) 124.
9. It is worth adding that Salcedo admitted to seeing the north-south divide as ultimately a global issue: 'La radical polarización económica en una absurda división norte-sur: el norte la opulencia y el progreso, el sur la miseria. En el norte los Estados Unidos de América, la Europa unificada; en el sur Johannesburgo, el cartel de Medellín, el hambre en Somalia, las pugnas religiosas de la India, la destrucción irreversible de las reservas amazónicas.' See Hugo Salcedo, 'Dramaturgia mexicana contemporánea: ¿Qué demonios está pasando?', *Latin American Theatre Review* 28.2 (1994): 130.
10. V.N.S. Desnyder, "Family Life Across the Border: Mexican Wives Left Behind": *Hispanic Journal of Behavioural Sciences* 15.3 (1993): 391-40.
11. The second half of the final scene bears a marked resemblance to the ending of Lorca's *Bodas de sangre*.
12. Hugo Salcedo, 'Dramaturgia mexicana contemporánea: ¿Qué demonios está pasando?' *Latin American Theatre Review*.
13. The Dublin group U2 became popular in the United States particularly between 1986 to 1988. Their song 'Desire,' played here and quoted in the epigraph, is said to have been written in a US hotel room. The significance of this choice of song is discussed below. Salcedo's application of music to the theatre deserves careful consideration. Two of these titles use musical terms ironically. In *Los cantores* . . . the singing—referred to in the survivor's report, though not heard by the audience—alleviates the pain and unites the travellers, but is a mere diversion from the tragedy that they share. In *Sinfonía* . . . the elegance of the title is belied by the cacophony of sound, which includes various types of music playing simultaneously. Besides Tony Aguilar and Depeche Mode the audience hears Berlioz's *March to the Scaffold*, mocking the sense of gloom when the loudspeakers make their first announcement, and Ray Coniff's orchestra soothing the nerves with *Savoy*. In *Arde el desierto* . . . the group U2 not only provide the special effect at the final curtain but also the lyrics (sung by Bono and quoted in the epigraph to the play) on the key theme of desire.
14. The novel *Rayuela* (1963), for example, includes a first part set in Paris headed 'Del lado de allá,' and a second part set in Buenos Aires headed 'Del lado de acá.' The stories 'La noche boca arriba' and 'Queremos tanto a Glenda'—to mention but two—use the terms 'pasar al otro lado' and 'huyendo [. . .] de lo de este lado' to designate the idea of crossing over into the alternative world of dream and imagination.
15. Octavio Paz, *El arco y la lira* (Mexico/Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1956)
116. (In this instance Paz is quoting D.T.Susuki, *Manual of Zen buddhism: From the Chinese Zen Masters*, London, 1950.) Other references are to this edition.
16. R.D.Laing, *Self and Others* 2nd ed. (London: Tavistock Publications, 1969) 66.
17. Letter to the author, September 27, 1994.
18. Hugo Salcedo, 'Dramaturgia mexicana contemporánea: ¿Qué demonios está pasando?' *Latin American Theatre Review*, 131.

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