Carlos Fuentes and Movie Stars (Intertextuality in a Mexican Drama)

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Semiotics can be defined as a science dedicated to the study of the production of meaning in society. As such it is concerned equally with processes of signification and with those of communication. Semiotics, then, studies the different sign-systems and codes at work in society and the actual messages and texts produced thereby.

The juxtaposition of the word *semiotics* to the terms "theatre" and "drama" in the same sentence in itself may open the way to considerable controversy because of the coding that each word carries within it. Keir Elam proposes a well conceived differentiation, recognized by scholars, between the domains signaled by the epithets "theatrical" and "dramatic";[1] the distinction is germane to any serious approach to a play, in particular to my reading of Carlos Fuentes' newest drama, *Orchids in the Moonlight.* [2]

"Theatre" refers to that interaction and relationship arising between performers and audience during a performance. "Drama" on the other hand, refers to that genre of written fiction designed for representation on the stage and constructed according to certain established conventions. Most observers will agree that the printed dramatic text which one might read in the comfort of one's home becomes transformed into several possible "other" realities when staged by any given director and group of performers. Any dramatic literary text can give birth to a possible two or three distinct and separate entities when performed. In order to limit the scope of this present study, I propose to consider Fuentes' drama purely as a written text, profiting at times from his indications and notations for the mechanics of presentation, which I consider integral to the text. The play has not been staged many times since its opening, in English, on May 9, 1982, at the Loeb Drama Center of Harvard University. I have worked with the Spanish-language script, the only published version as of this writing.[3]

To the myriad approaches already proposed for readings of dramatic and theatrical texts, I propose one more. As a literary text, the drama is

undoubtedly generated in the same manner as those of poetry or narrative and can consequently be discussed in the same terms. Profiting from Michael Riffaterre's work on the semiosis of poetic and narrative texts as a point of departure, I wish to present a description of how meaning is structured in Fuentes' drama.[4] To attempt an approximation to all the possible aspects of the drama would be too diffuse for our present study.[5] It is far more manageable to focus on the *literariness* of the play's text in order to perceive how the vocabulary that constructs the script functions as signs that create a literary representation of reality, also known as mimesis.[6] Because of the shifting nature of signs, when one word "stands for another" (e.g. metaphor, metonymy) the meaning gleaned from this reality that is represented in the text is constantly threatened; i.e., it is contradicted, distorted or a new meaning can be created.[7]

A key function of spoken language that makes it comprehensible and useful for communication is its referential function: the relationship of the word to a corresponding object in the world that we live in. Language in the literary text does this most certainly at the mimetic level by representing one of several comprehensible realities to the reader; these may be semantically unified and homogeneous, or they may be quite diverse and unrelated, yet all of them carry a *meaning* to the reader. At the meaning level, the text is a succession of information units. Underlying the various lexical and conceptual meanings, the contradictions, and denials (or *ungrammaticalities*) in the mimesis of the text, there exists a formal and semantic unity that repeatedly points to "something else" beyond the string of information units: this is the level of the *significance* of the text.[8]

Inasmuch as during the reading of a dramatic text we take into account stage directions by the author that indicate suggested costuming, blocking of a scene, postures and facial expressions to be taken by the performers, and even small details about the elements of the set, it is pertinent to consider some of the ideas put forth by the renowned Prague School of Structuralists in the 1930's and '40's. Peter Bogatyrev, in his influential essay on folk theatre in 1938, proposed the thesis that the stage radically transforms all objects and bodies defined within it, bestowing upon them an overriding signifying power which they lack. A basic tenet for the Prague circle, voiced most succinctly by Jiri Veltrusky, is: "All that is on the stage is a sign."[9] The first principle of the Prague School theory is the semiotization of the object. The very fact of appearance on stage suppresses the practical function of phenomena in favor of a symbolic or signifying role. This tenet is akin to Riffaterre's concept of the signifying value of ungrammaticalities in the text. In Riffaterre's theory, the text always signifies something "other" than what it represents at the mimetic level. Texts always build upon other literary texts, written or spoken, in a way that goes far beyond the notion of influence. The understanding of the concept of *intertextuality,* that is, of one previously existing literary text being included (in an integral or dispersed form) within another text, is essential to our study of *Orchids in the Moonlight.*[10]

Fuentes' drama is a quick-moving one-act piece that develops in Venice, California, supposedly on the day of Orson Welles' death. It uses only three actors: María, Dolores, and a Fan; primarily one scene setting in which

prominently placed in center stage are a toilet with a white telephone sitting on its top, and numerous clothes racks full of women's costumes. The characters should be ideally played by the renowned and aging Mexican film stars María Félix and Dolores del Río, the details of whose public and private careers form the crux of the plot. It must be pointed out that these two actresses, whose professional careers have spanned over fifty years, have acquired mythical proportions in Mexican culture. They are truly the "grandes dames" of the film industry, del Río also being well-known for the many, many roles she played in American films. Any Mexican filmgoer of whatever age has seen one or both of these actresses on screen and is informed to a lesser or greater extent of the colorful details of their public lives. Their public images and lives have been always interwoven within the framework of popular Mexican arts, song, culture, folklore, and even politics. Fuentes could not have better chosen two personalities who have spanned as many generations with as much influence in the areas just mentioned, and yet have remained familiar and accessible to every man on the street for the price of a movie ticket or, most assuredly today, for a couple of hours spent before a television set.

There is little action in the play but much rich dialogue filled with references to the characters' fear of aging and dying, of no longer being prominent personalities (and therefore not being recognized), punctuated by a listing of every film in which each one starred, the related and accompanying background song ("Orchids in the Moonlight" is but one of those) and the wearing of many of the costumes that each actress immortalized in a particular role. The unfolding of their biographies is most significant inasmuch as María always performed in Mexico as the prototype of the popular Mexican character; by contrast, during much of her career, Dolores worked in American films in which she frequently assumed roles of the stereotypical Latin woman. Those career choices made many years ago by each are significant today in the light of Mexico's political and economic condition, and an obvious reason why Fuentes can use these famous characters in pointing to that "something else" outside the text.

Intertextuality

It appears to me that the entire dramatic text is generated from at least four readily observable intertexts that find themselves interwoven through the variety of representations in the drama. Our first clue is in the title of the play, which functions as a dual sign. At the mimetic level the title should point to a story about flowers, or nighttime events that develop under the watchful eye of the moon. After reading the entire text, one sees that the title is not representative of the bulk of dialogue or action; it is therefore deviant or ungrammatical, i.e., a semantic contradiction. The "scandal" arising from this inconsistency points to the significance of the title as a literary preexistent. One discovers it is the name of a song once used in a film; this conclusion and awareness explains all the other italicized song and film titles in the drama and is most fitting in the dramatic world created by Fuentes when dealing with the lives of film actresses. Thus the title guides us to considering

the first major group of intertexts of a group of four that generate this play: the corpus of film titles and roles played by each one of the female characters whose lives are unfolded on stage. The assuming of roles and identities is crucial to the drama inasmuch as one of the *matrices* of the text is that of confused and uncertain identities.[11]

Costuming, posture or gesture, and certain movement are the aids that clue reader and viewer to the role each woman is playing at the moment. In this aspect there is purposeful overdetermination by means of the negation of the representational value of the costume. Dolores del Río is initially presented dressed in the characteristic garb of an Indianate country woman, surrounded by clay figurines, paper flowers, and other Mexican artifacts that should be metaphors of the character María Félix. It is the latter who in reality played very Mexican roles; yet, she is rather confusingly presented in varied and continental costumes, surrounded by elegant artifacts—all of which belong to Dolores' film roles and private life style. From our knowledge of the characters' biographies we know that María Félix was always the super Mexican heroine while Dolores del Río played a variety of roles dictated by the changing needs and tastes of Hollywood film makers. Statements are made about the very convincing nature of the roles the characters played in their careers (on and off screen) by associating them with Orson Welles' impactful reading on radio of *The War of the Worlds.* The reader/spectator is treated to a list of past roles, each accompanied by a stance, gesture or costume that evokes it: *Selva de fuego, Buganvilia, Carmen* (1926), *Ramona* (1927), *Bird of Paradise* (1932), *Flying to Rio* (1933), films in which Dolores del Río played. It is normally the male character—the Fan—or María, who must mention these titles and past identities of Dolores in order to transport her into momentary reverie.

The second major intertext is that of the popular song lyric or title (most of which are still in vogue in Mexico today) which evokes details of the film life or "private lives" of the actresses. "Orchids in the Moonlight" is one of those titles, a tango rhythm to which the two women dance with each other. "Acuérdate de Acapulco, María bonita . . . " "Remember Acapulco, pretty Mary," is a famous lyric from a song composed by one of Mexico's most prominent songwriters and crooners Agustín Lara, in honor of his former lover and wife María Félix. The most telling song is "Canción mixteca," immortalized by famed mariachi singer Jorge Negrete, which tells of a heartrending nostalgia for the homeland.[12] Inasmuch as both aging characters are living in voluntary exile in an artificial invented environment (Venice, California) as artificial as the movie sets they once inhabited, far from their native land at the moment of approaching death, the song is appropriate for both characters; it is also used by Fuentes as a background melody at María's suicide in the final scene. Key words in each of the song texts are "remember," "how far am I," "I want to die of heartbreak," which point to the characters' alienation in their adopted country (voluntary exile perhaps for monetary gain), their impending death (gleaned from their constant references to it), their abandonment of Mexico in a time of financial crisis, the inevitable looking back as one nears life's end and the evaluation of a lifetime of choices.

In the same way the song serves as background, *leitmotiv* and moodsetter in film, in this drama it also serves to trigger a shift in point of view. It most frequently is Dolores who tends to hum lyrics from old tunes in order to escape María's verbal harassment; at the same time she tunes out and escapes into her private and imaginary world—when she was young, famous, well-known, and assumed many identities. Because of this practice we associate Dolores with an escapist attitude, see her as a person who is best suited to live in that fictional Hollywood setting that surrounded her during her heyday. She actually came to believe the fictitious biography that the press and her studios conjured up about her for public consumption. María, on the other hand, is not prone to singing or to reveries about her past roles and triumphs. She acts and speaks as the bitter realist (with tones of cruel pessimism) who forces both characters to face their "here and now" situation. In earthy vocabulary, in frequent and unexpected emotional outbursts of aggression and vulgar speech, she confronts Dolores and the third character—the Fan.

The third major intertext is found in newspaper writing in its varied forms: publicity plants, posed interviews, critics' reviews, and in the cold, detached obituaries. Since theatre is an auditory and visual medium, this intertext emerges in the play in like terms: in the person and speech of the Fan, a young newspaperman, devoted admirer of both actresses, would-be suitor of Dolores, and author of their imminent obituaries. It is this same reporter for the *Los Angeles Times* who has combed the files of his newspaper to gather copies of every one of the ladies' old films, and will force them to watch clips from them. It is he who has written that day the obituary for Orson Welles, a contemporary of the stars, one time lover and director of del Río's films, and he who will also prepare the text for both women's obituaries. The tremendous power of the press both to give life (create new images, new personalities) and to truncate the popularity and career of a performer is embodied in this young visitor to the stars' Venice apartment. He also represents the presence of death or the moment of reckoning for both stars. As he enters, he delivers their afternoon edition of the *L. A. Times,* which the trio will read aloud together in a manner similar to an opera trio. On pages 73-76 of the script, María reads verbatim from that day's edition of the *Times* the notice of Welles' death which includes a listing of all his accomplishments. This obituary only brings Dolores closer to her own death inasmuch as they worked together many years; it transports the trio to the sordid realistic world of María, but also evokes that fictional world of illusion-making—Dolores' world—by recalling Welles' brilliant and credible radio performance when reading *The War of the Worlds.*[13]

As the drama moves closer to its conclusion, the fourth intertext surfaces, one that is more literary, revealing in the drama's composition a progression from very popular culture to a more sophisticated, elitist form of art and representation. The set is transformed into a huge banquet setting wherein the only diner is María, clothed as Egyptian royalty and accompanied by two Nubian slaves who minister to her. Stage directions by the playwright establish a parallel with a setting from the opera *Aida,* while slaves hum the melody from the *La Traviata* aria "Conosca il Sacrifizio." María, after having swallowed a fatal dose of suicidal pills and tasted of her "last supper" (a

banquet composed of the most Mexican of dishes) is at the point of expiring. As Dolores returns upon the scene, cradles the agonizing María in her arms in order to create a feminine version of the *Pieta,* Dolores recites this sonnet by Luis Sandoval y Zapata, titled "A una cómica difunta" (To a Dead Actress):[14]

Aquí yace la púrpura dormida;
Aquí el garbo, el gracejo, la hermosura,
La voz de aquel clarín de la dulzura
donde templó sus números la vida
Trompa de amor, ya no a la liz convida,
el clarín de su música blandura;
hoy aprisioma en la tiniebla oscura
tantas sonoras almas una herida.
La representación, la vida airosa
Te debieron los versos y más cierta,
Tan bien fingiste—amante, helada, esquiva—,
Que hasta la Muerte se quedó dudosa
Si la representaste como muerta
O si la padeciste como viva
Aquí yace la púrpura dormida.

* *

Here lies the purple sleeping and here lie
Elegance and grace and loveliness,
And here that clarion of dulcitude
Whose voice was lent to life's harmonious numbers
Trumpet of love no more thy claimant strain
With sonorous softness summons to the fray;
Now in the tenebrous obscurity
With thine life stricken many a tuneful soul.
Poetry thanks to thee was manifest
And with a fairer sure life endued;
And loving, cold, disdainful thou didst feign
So well that even Death was unresolved
If thou didst simulate him as one dead
Or didst submit to him as one alive . . .
Here lies the purple sleeping
And here lie elegance and grace and loveliness.

The combination of musical background, stage settings, posture of performers, and in particular the sonnet, all point to theatricality, artifice and *representation* (also interpreted as acting). The sonnet states that Death herself was in doubt about the highly credible way in which the actress represented her: was the actress truly Death itself, or did she suffer this state while living out her entire life? In the sonnet, the "sleeping purple" is metonymic for royalty itself, i.e., a reference to a queen, gathered from the feminine ending of "dormida," who is master of the art of representation. Both allusions to royalty and acting ability apply to the character María Félix and serve as a eulogy for her. Such a connection is essential in order to make the sonnet an integral part of the play.

Another element conveyed is the continuous dual and uncertain message about the characters' existences. Throughout the drama there has been confusion in the characters' minds if they still live on or not, if they live in the real Venice (Italy) or in the fake, imitation Venice (California), if they are truly María Félix and Dolores del Río or merely look-alikes, if they have any *one* identity, or that of one or all of the roles they have played during their careers. The matrices that emerge repeatedly throughout the text, which reduce all sequences to their most common denominator, seem to be the age-old confusion between what is real and what is imagined. In this drama each of the two possibilities occupies a pole of a continuum. Performers and readers (or audiences) must slide back and forth on this continuous line. The characters' incapability of defining their true identities from inside and outside of the self is inseparable from their confused vision of the world.

Interpreting the Signs

In reading and rereading the literary text it is important to keep in mind that signs are in constant transformation, that their functions change throughout a text. The cautious reader must go beyond the various meanings offered at the mimetic level to arrive at their significance. When first discussing the title of the drama we noted that there was an evident ungrammaticality in its use for a play about aging and faded actresses. Let us now see how disparate signs that are semiotized can lead to one significance by pursuing further the descriptive systems of the lexeme "orchid" and beginning our rationalizations. The name of the flower is an immediate marker of exoticity, elegance, rarity, extreme beauty. We know that orchids come from tropical climates, or in other areas they grow best in hothouse environments; they have a limited lifespan, are delicate, very prized for their distinctiveness and elegance. They are not a common flower, rather the aristocrats of the plant world. "Moonlight" evokes the last hours of the day, a quiet peaceful time suited for reveries and romance, for revelation of intimacies. Curious things occur by the light of the moon. Passion is unleashed in its creative ways (union of lovers) and in its most destructive (e.g., murders); it is a time of unclear vision where the limits of objects are not easily perceived; under moonlight it is easy to see things that are not truly present.

Most of the characteristics associated above with "orchids" and "moonlight" can be appropriately applied as descriptive of the two principal characters in the play, and of the settings and happenings on stage. Dolores and María are living in a hothouse environment, in their prisonlike Venice apartment, cautious of maintaining their fading beauty through milk baths and ice packs; they are no longer the powerful, domineering women they once were, rather they are in the evening of their years, fading as the light, or the hour, into a world of shadows where nothing that is observed is perfectly clear nor precise (witness the shifting nature of their ages, roles, and interpersonal relationship). In addition to the reference to a once famous musical theme for a film, the title "Orchids in the Moonlight" is most descriptive of the drama that we now have read and reread section by section.

From the first pages of dramatic text, the reader is offered other clues

useful to understanding and reflective reading, and which will ultimately force a reader to rationalize every element read. Every theatregoer, more so than a reader of poetry, knows that the dramatic world he is penetrating is non-factual, although always based on an imitation of recognizable reality; he knows also that he must approach it as such and decode it in order to understand what is taking place. We will mention some of the clues the reader of *Orchids* receives to force this decoding.

A striking inconsistency and contradiction arises in the description of how the two women should appear on stage. As mentioned earlier, in essence their costumes and surrounding props are a reversal of what their entire private and public lives represented. María's allegiances were always with Mexico, and although France was her cultural model, her entire film career evolved in Mexican films. She is costumed, however, in all the clothing made famous by Dolores, whose career was very un-Mexican. On page nineteen, María makes a telling statement about symbolism in the play: "When you see me dressed in black, it's because we're not going to a funeral." In Mexican culture, women in black connote first and foremost a state of mourning. In this one line, the character points to a reversal, therefore, to the shifting nature of signs. Thus in the most atypical and incongruous manner Dolores is to be costumed like a village Indian, barefoot, yet in the habit of sipping afternoon tea in a European tradition. Any follower of her career will remember Dolores del Río as truly an "orchid" among women: a striking, elegant, refined beauty, who contrary to the text of the play was outlived by María Félix.[15]

One sees each woman soon enough as opposites that need each other to survive. We know their identities multiply, fuse into one another, and are reflections of reflections. María makes it clear on p. 32 by saying:

> ¿Las biografías no cuentan, cuentan la Bella Otero que es ella que es ella que soy yo y cuenta Madame Du Barry que es ella que es ella que eres tú, ça va?
> Biographies don't count; those who count are la Bella Otero who is she who is she who is me, and Mme. Du Barry who is she who is she who is you, ça va?

The reiteration of "who is she . . . " explains that the actress on stage is third or fourth in line in assuming the title of Mme. Du Barry. The persons of the historical Mme. Du Barry, the "real" Dolores del Río, as Du Barry, next the historical del Río as herself, all precede the actress that now assumes the identity of del Río for this reading/performance of the play.

These opposite details of character delineated by Fuentes have yet another significance, reiterated frequently throughout the play. Mexico has always been exploited by foreign powers, has even been sold out to such by many of its political leaders and prominent entrepreneurs. By contrasting and opposing the nationalist mindset of María (in her actual biography, her stage speech and behavior) with Dolores' renegade attitude (i.e. a lifetime in the United States, an amassed fortune in dollars—p. 32—the playing of "degrading" roles for the Mexican mentality that portrayed her as an Indian) Fuentes transmits a political message common to many of his works and to that of several other Mexican authors of this century.

There are two markers in the Fuentes play that are heavily coded and serve almost to frame the entire piece in an ekphrastic manner.[16] Stage directions call for the set to be divided equally in half, with the center occupied by the myriad costumes worn by the two actresses in their past films. To either side, and in the appropriate domain of each character there should appear a type of votive altar, in homage to each actress, laden with memorabilia of the stars' movie careers: posters, photos, awards, newspaper clippings. The key element is the altar and what it can represent; the other elements appear at the end of the play. In those final scenes, the playwright indicates that after María has taken the sleeping pills, she dresses herself in Cleopatra's ceremonial gown. She will be attended by two Nubian slaves costumed as Aida in the opera by that name, while singing the chorus from a Spanish operetta titled *Pharaoh's Court.* These should minister to María at an impressive banquet table filled with a wealth of delicacies from a very nationalistic Mexican cuisine. The slaves attend, crown María as queen, and feed her her last meal. Finally the slave girls sing the *Traviata* aria "Conosca il Sacrifizio."

What is the purpose of this profusion of theatricality? The altar, of course, connotes worship, adulation, reverence, supreme dignity worthy of a deity. Built into its descriptive system is the notion of death, sacrifice, immolation, which in many religions has a transcendental significance beyond the surface value of the ritual. Several readings are necessary, as well as knowledge of the conclusion, to understand which of the references of altar are pertinent to the play. We have here a classic case of over-determination to convey the notion that María's death by choice (after her last supper) is a sacrifice akin to those of Christian tradition. She dies for others, regally and dramatically, in a manner befitting her royal and noble stature. The mention of Cleopatra and Aida immediately force the reader to associate those intertexts with the one at hand. By association, one knows what María's destiny will inevitably be. At the mimetic level the relationship between the various representations of altars, banquet table, throne, opera arias, and suicide have little in common. Their unity is in their underlying significance, which unites them structurally and semantically.

Two other icons prominently displayed on stage need to be discussed; on the surface, they seem quite inconsistent with the glamorous lives of two film stars.[17] There are the ever present white toilet with a telephone perched on its top, which occupy center stage through the play. María drowns in the toilet bowl as she kneels, wrapped around it trying to vomit the overdose of sleeping pills.

Both objects require rationalization or explanation to decipher their purpose. Let us notice there are two objects, and everything in the play is structured in terms of dualities in struggle: space, possessions, identities, destinies, freedom, and death. When thinking in "toilet" code, we select those items that are appropriate for this context. A basic one is water, drainage, and sewers. It is also the most banal of human realities, far from anything in a fantasized world. It is the height of artificiality in its shape, design, and construction material, and it readily conjures up a somewhat universal cognate in French of "toilette." This latter daily routine points to an activity familiar to actresses in particular: i.e., applying make-up, and

other related beauty routines. Running water, of whatever condition, is most appropriate for a setting in either Venice (Italy or California—the natural city or the invented one). Might one go so far as to connect the toilet more closely to María than to Dolores? It is more down to earth, more akin to her world-view, her demeanor and vocabulary, and certainly to her unfortunate end, than is the telephone.

This latter gadget enjoys other attributes unknown to the toilet. It is a means of union, communication, outside contact—even though it is an impersonal, detached machine. It is a part of the public media which is so important in the play. It is a source of division and maybe of competition between the two women. María reminds Dolores that no one must touch the phone for it will break the illusion (43). To call out means to escape from their prison-like environment, bringing in another person (the reporter) who forces a life/death choice upon them. The one or two uses made of the phone are disastrous in terms of the dramatic world created by the playwright. These occasions bring crisis, destruction, and death. The phone is Dolores' prop inasmuch as she is the first to use it; it points to her world of fantasy and reverie, of escapism.

So it is that out of a seemingly disjointed series of isolated passages there emerges some unity. The mimetic disparity of symbols, props, speeches and actions can be understood to work together for an overall unity.

While not every element of the text's dialogue has been treated, nor every motif or theme of Fuentes' brought to light, seeking out the semiotic producing signs in the text enables the careful reader to come to a fuller understanding; there is satisfaction in these illuminating moments when diverse elements seem to converge and fit together, as when one finds the key to a mystery. One should not conclude that the text has been so simplified, reduced and homogenized in the process that one single phrase can represent it. Subsequent readings of the text even by the same reader can reveal an initial misreading. The text itself is the best corrector as it demands grammaticalities beyond its boundaries, where none seem to exist. Our attempt is a beginning at description. Undoubtedly there still remains work to be done in interpreting this text—a task which is forever incomplete.

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Notes

1. Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theater and Drama* (New York, N.Y.: Methuen and Co., 1980) 2-3.

2. Carlos Fuentes, *Orquídeas a la luz de la luna* (Barcelona: Editorial Seix Barral, S.A., 1982). This edition, in Spanish, is the only extant published text of the play and is used in all quotes in this manuscript. The English script was used for the play's opening at Harvard University on May 9, 1982, but is unpublished as of this writing.

3. This drama, subtitled "Comedia mexicana" or "A Mexican Play," is the latest work of prolific Mexican author Carlos Fuentes, who has to his credit a lengthy list of novels, short stories, plays, and essays. In much of his writing, Fuentes is concerned with the image and identity of the contemporary Mexican, which are largely rooted in the pre-Columbian cultures that inhabited Mexico, but which are also constantly shaped and threatened by foreign influences.

4. Michael Riffaterre, *The Semiotics of Poetry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978) and *Text Production* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983) are the key works that deal with

semiotics and which have served as inspiration for my study. Riffaterre's work has evolved over many years and stems from the theories of F. de Saussure, C.S. Peirce, and Umberto Eco among others.

5. In the last pages of his book, Elam (see Note 1) offers suggestions for further reading, grouping many of the titles in his bibliography according to the focus taken in regards to elements of theatre/drama. Thus there are texts that study the performance text only, others the body, voice and stage systems; yet others focus on audience roles, on sociological perspectives, on language in the drama, on speech acts, on discourse analysis, or on the dramatic text as a literary entity.

6. A simple definition of *literariness* encompasses all those characteristics of the written text that make its expression unlike that of daily spoken discourse. The elements that constitute the literariness of a work are too numerous to enumerate here inasmuch as they are the subject of that branch of semiotics that focuses on literary studies.

7. M. Riffaterre, *The Semiotics of Poetry* 2.

8. M. Riffaterre, *The Semiotics of Poetry* 2-3. "Ungrammaticality" is a general term used to identify irregularities in the text's meaning (at the representational level) that make it disjointed and incomprehensible. When a reader perceives inconsistent images that hinder interpretation, he knows that those elements are precisely signs that point to meaning elsewhere—at another level: i.e. significance.

9. In Elam, *The Semiotics of Theater and Drama* 7. Elam cites the direct references as: Petr Bogatyrev, "Semiotics in the Folk Theater (1938)," trans. in Matejka and Titunik (1976); Jiri Veltrusky, "Man and Object in the Theater (1940)," trans. in Garvin (1964) 83-91.

10. The pre-existent text can be a popular proverb, a limerick, a song lyric or title, a newspaper quotation or a more traditional 'text' (i.e. lines of poetry). All of these carry within them a context that will surface in the newer text and will color or shape its interpretation.

11. A *matrix* can be as short as a pithy word or two (although it may be longer) that summarizes that "something other"—the significance—of all the ungrammaticalities discovered in the text. It is the key sought by the reader in order to understand fully what is at the core of the text.

12. Jorge Negrete was the handsome interpreter of the "mariachi" ballad (a Mexican country genre) who immortalized this song about feeling very distant from, and melancholy for, his homeland—to the point of death. The chorus line states "should I die far from you, dear and lovely Mexico, let them say I'm only asleep, so that they can send me back to you." When the star tragically died away from his country in the 1950's, his body was flown to Mexico for burial. Every newsreel covered this national tragedy while his recording of the ballad played in the background to remind millions of mourners of their idol.

13. In October 1938, Orson Welles, still a young actor, gained national exposure and fame through a reading of this science-fiction text of H.G. Wells that described a supposed invasion by Martians. The performance triggered a national panic, because of its credibility, that required the intervention of government and military officials to quiet the populace.

14. Luis de Sandoval Zapata, poet, philosopher, theologian, politician, was a direct descendant of the conquistadores in colonial Mexico; he fought for his right of maintaining inherited privileges and properties granted by the Spanish crown. His work dates from the second half of the 17th century, while the English translation of the sonnet is by Samuel Beckett. On pages 107-10 of the text (see Note 2) the actress' recitation of the sonnet is interrupted and interlaced with other dialogue. In reality, Fuentes omits the second quatrain of the poem in his script.

15. In actuality, Dolores del Río died in Mexico City in May 1983, after the play had been written and premiered.

16. *Ekphrasis* is a rhetorical device that has a deictic function in the text by highlighting certain details, stated circumlocutously—usually never directly—that assume an exemplary role in the text. These details are important for unlocking the significance of the text.

17. C.S. Peirce's definition of icons, index, and symbol are very general and overlapping. It seems that of the three terms *icon* can be used most generally in the theatre to indicate similitude (and function as a sign) between objects that "stand for" each other. On this topic also see Keir Elam, in note 1, 22-23.