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## Musicalized Metatheatre: The *Bolero* as Intertext in *Quintuples* by Luis Rafael Sánchez

Sarah Piazza

Akin to the ballad, the *bolero* is a popular Latin American musical genre that constitutes a public expression of intensely intimate emotions, such as pain over a lover's infidelity. At the height of its popularity in the 1940s and 50s, the *bolero* even served as an intermediary between lovers; asking a desired person to dance to a particular *bolero* transmitted an affective message (Évora 21-23). Masterful *boleristas* like Agustín Lara, María Grever, and Daniel Santos interwove melody, instrumental accompaniment, and lyrics in a way that illustrates the ideal symbiotic relationship between the *conjunto* [musical group] and the dancing audience; the audience members are not merely spectators, but active receptors who give social significance to the intimate content of the *bolero*. The present essay analyzes the ways in which the drama *Quintuples* (1984) by Puerto Rican playwright Luis Rafael Sánchez uses the *bolero* as an important intertext while seemingly limiting the *bolero* to ambiance music.<sup>1</sup>

We will first trace the parallels between the *bolero* as a culturally syncretistic musical genre and *Quintuples* as a metatheatrical fusion of dramatic and narrative elements. The play's narrative elements that we will analyze include the incorporation of an author figure, monologue, and metaliterary comments. We will then examine how spectator and reader involvement in *Quintuples* relates to the *bolerista's* affective communication with the audience, which converts listeners into performers. Although Papá Morrison and each of the quintuplets (Dafne, Baby, Bianca, Mandrake, and Carlota) at some point delivers a monologue, the body of analysis focuses on the play's three most ostentatiously melodramatic characters –Dafne, Mandrake, and Papá Morrison–, who reveal connections to the entertainment industry and enact different characteristics of the *bolero*. The monologue uttered by Dafne

Morrison, which constitutes the first scene, imitates the *bolero's* monologic, confessional discourse on love. In the fourth scene, Mandrake the Magician's verbal and corporal *mise en scène* seeks to seduce the audience in the same way that *bolero* performances engage the audience by invoking a collective amorous discourse, promising future pleasures, and featuring a glamorous star. In the sixth and final scene, Papá Morrison enacts a melodramatic parody of sentimentality and reveals how a *bolerista* star taught him his philosophy on love and marriage. Throughout the monologues, the characters deconstruct the act of performing, a process that culminates in a demasking of the actors. As a whole, the play invites us to reflect on the nature of theatre and on the necessary complicity between actor and spectator, writer and reader.

Since its emergence in Cuba in the late nineteenth century, the *bolero* has been characterized by cultural syncretism (Évora 39). The original *boleros* were composed for a vocalist, the *bolerista*, with guitar accompaniment, and were influenced by Andalusian songs and Afrocaribbean rhythmic structures, most notably the *cinquillo* (38). The *cinquillo* is an Afrocaribbean rhythmic unit that originated in Haiti and migrated to other islands after Haitian independence in 1804 (Johnson 35). It constitutes the rhythmic base for the *bolero's* ancestors, the *contradanza cubana* and the *danzón cubano* (Évora 42). *Boleros* for guitar and vocalist eventually evolved into compositions for entire orchestras that blend Afrocaribbean instruments, such as the *bongó*, the *claves*, and the *maracas*, with string instruments typical of European ensembles (26-27). The same cultural fusion that characterizes the *bolero* corresponds to the generic fusion and confusion that take place in *Quintuples*.

In the same way that the *bolero* combines African and European elements, Sánchez's play combines characteristics of drama and narrative, thereby challenging traditional genre distinctions. Sánchez opens the drama with a prologue by the (fictional?) author figure L.R.S. By including a prologue that describes *Quintuples'* fusion of theatrical genres, the desired role for readers and spectators, and the play's structure, a "*pieza teatral en dos actos y seis escenas*" ("Prólogo" xv),<sup>2</sup> Sánchez asserts the presence of a mediating, authorial figure akin to a narrator in narrative text. In "Voice and Narration in Postmodern Drama," Brian Richardson challenges theoreticians who draw an impermeable boundary between drama and narrative. He contends that "drama, like fiction, often contains a complex mix of diegetic and mimetic modes" (691). Similarly, John Kronik questions the generic divide between drama as the art of imitating reality and narrative as the art of storytelling (26). He argues that playwrights, like novelists, can choose

to make storytelling visible (28). In addition to including an author figure who delivers the prologue and gives detailed stage directions and extensive narrative descriptions of characters, *Quintuples* makes storytelling visible through the use of monologue.

The monologue showcases drama's ability to be both performative and representational by allowing for a first-person exposition that converts the act of storytelling into a performance (Richardson, "Point of View" 201). In *Postmodern Theatric(k)s*, Deborah Geis states, "by virtue of its status as a **performative discourse**, the monologue becomes a particularly compelling means for the playwright to imprint a dramatic text with a narrative voice" (emphasis added) (1). Following the prologue, *Quintuples* is comprised of six monologues delivered by an actor and actress who each represent three characters. The characters are members of the performing family of adult quintuplets whose father, *Papá* or *Divo* Morrison is the empresario as well as a charismatic performer. The layers of performance proliferate. Sánchez's prologue and extensive italicized comments comprise a narrative performance, while the actor and actress perform the roles of fictional performers who are in the process of performing (supposedly improvising their monologues). The author figure and each of the characters deliver dazzling verbal performances that emphasize discourse over action, blurring the conventional separation of drama and narrative that Richardson, Kronik, and Geis call into question.<sup>3</sup>

In the metaliterary comment that concludes the prologue, Sánchez explicitly connects *Quintuples* to musicalized theatre and highlights the piece's position as a humorous amalgam of theatrical genres: "*Quintuples es un vodevil, un sainete de enredos. Es, también, la parodia de una comedia de suspenso. Y, finalmente, una aventura de la imaginación, una obra dentro de otra obra*" ("Prólogo" xv). The author's description of *Quintuples* underscores a general playfulness that will require the reader's interpretive participation. The use of vaudeville and *sainete* as descriptors invites readers to interpret further the relationship between these genres and *Quintuples*. Patrice Pavis defines vaudeville as a show with songs, acrobatics, and monologues whose modern-day iterations include comic pieces with a popular spirit (436). The *sainete*, which means "playlet" or "sketch" in English, originated as a comic, burlesque *entremés* in classical Spanish theatre and evolved into an autonomous theatrical genre designed to amuse the audience through social satire, music, and dance (Pavis 345-46). Today the term often refers to an extremely short piece played by amateurs (346). As Pavis' definitions reveal, *vodevil* and *sainete* both share popular appeal, little intellectual pretension, a humor-

ous spirit, and the use of music and dance. Hortensia Morrel also signals the relationship between these two genres and the British music hall theatre in which “legitimate” theatre’s traditional division between the audience and the stage disappears as the spectators become active participants (48).

Unlike *vodevil* and the *sainete*, however, *Quíntuples* does not merely elicit laughter. The monologic nature of the Conference on Family Matters causes us to question the family members’ ability to communicate with one another, while the actors’ final demasking also challenges the possibility of theatrical or artistic communication (Meléndez, *Politics* 192-93).<sup>4</sup> *Quíntuples*’ iconoclastic mixture of high culture and popular references, its pastiche of literary genres, and its tendency to self-parody lead Priscilla Meléndez to interpret the play as a farce, an inherently contradictory genre: “In this world of contrasts and contradictions, the spectator of *Quíntuples* is forced to deal with issues of identity and is confronted with the dilemma of reacting with a burst of laughter to the extremely humorous scenes and characters, or reacting with bewilderment before the tragic connotations of their existence” (211).

At the same time that *Quíntuples*’ contradictory messages require the reader and spectator to think critically, Sánchez uses the prologue to insist on the spectators’ literal participation as supposed members of the Congress on Family Matters. During their monologues, the characters address themselves to the actual spectators as though they were conference attendees. Sánchez disrupts the illusion of dramatic autonomy and the absolute separation between stage and spectator to which realist drama aspires by immediately interpellating the real spectators as the interdiegetic spectators who comprise the attendees of the Congress on Family Matters: “*Aunque no lo sabe de inmediato, el público espectador de Quíntuples interpreta al público asistente a un Congreso de Asuntos de la Familia*” (“Prólogo” xiii) According to Geis, a monologue addressed directly to the audience “includes the spectators in a more direct way than otherwise and reasserts their very powerlessness (14).” In other words, the spectators’ powerlessness derives from their inability to intervene in the conventional theatre.

In *Quíntuples*, direct addresses to the audience paradoxically heighten the audience’s involvement and constitute a form of manipulation. Spectators are forced to play specific roles at certain moments in the play, such as when Papá Morrison orders several “buenos samaritanos” to pick up the photos of his deceased wife (vi: 73). Yet Sánchez simultaneously denies spectators access to the author’s narrative asides, which are included only in the text version of the play. He distinguishes between the drama as performance and

the drama as text and consequently between the viewing audience, who is invited to participate in the congress, and the reading public, who has exclusive access to the prologue, notes, and stage directions:

*La prolijidad de las acotaciones, su literaturización consciente, quieren servir como reflexión de los temperamentos, de las actitudes, de las máscaras preferidas por los personajes; servicio puesto a la disposición exclusiva del director, la actriz, y el actor, los diseñadores del vestuario, la luz, y el maquillaje. De ninguna manera, bajo ningún pretexto de experimentación, distanciamiento o muestra de originalidad, deberán dichas acotaciones ofrecerse al público. Son, pese a su apariencia, un código de señales para que la palabra y el gesto proyecten la plenitud de los contenidos que se les han asignado, para que la atmósfera específica que el autor imaginó mientras construía su pieza teatral se realice. (“Prólogo” xiv)*

While this passage from the prologue could be interpreted as parodying the playwright’s desire to control what each gesture and word communicate (Vásquez Arce 83), Sánchez’s metatheatrical consciousness also approximates his drama to narrative by assigning the reader an important interpretive function. As Kronik remarks in his analysis of *Quintuples*, narration in the play has a destabilizing effect (34).<sup>5</sup> The author emphasizes the reader’s privileged position, but the play’s competing monologues cause the reader to question the reliability of the author and the characters. By gaining access to the playwright’s notes and directions, the reader assumes an interpretive responsibility in the same way that the director of a *bolero conjunto* interprets the composer’s score in order to make the musical performance come to life.

The different active roles designated to spectators and to readers in *Quintuples* mirror the way that the listening audience participates in creating a *bolero* performance, whether live or recorded. In *Performing Rites. On the Values of Popular Music*, Simon Frith describes how receptors of popular music engage in a pleasurable performance as they listen: “The musical pleasure lies in the play we can make of both being addressed, responding to a song as it speaks to us [...] and addressing, taking on the voice as our own, not just physically [...] but also emotionally and psychologically [...]. In taking on a singer’s vocal personality we are, in a sense, putting on a vocal costume, enacting the role that they are playing for ourselves” (198). The *bolero* as a genre tends to maximize the clarity of its lyrics in order to engage listeners (Zavala, *El bolero* 114-15).<sup>6</sup>

Like the *bolero*'s engagement with the audience, *Quintuples* insists on spectators' active participation. Indeed, the prologue prescribes how the actors should effectively incorporate the audience: "*los actores deberán incorporar al público a las peripecias de la trama mediante el lenguaje visual [...]. Dichos envolvimiento y dinámica agilizan los ritmos narrativos de los monólogos que se convierten, entonces, en diálogos para una voz*" ("Prólogo" xiv). The actors' involvement of the audience through "visual language," including smiles and gestures, makes use of melodramatic tactics designed to heighten the clarity of expression and the emotional impact on spectators (Brooks 47-48). Like the conventions of the melodramatic mode, the *bolero* seeks empathetic communication with the audience and invites a dialogic exchange between singer, musicians, listeners, and dancers: "El bolero, un golpe bajo al corazón, suele ser una comunicación hermosa entre los que expresan: compositores, arreglistas, instrumentistas, vocalistas [...] y los que reciben: oyentes, bailadores [...]" (Évora 24). This communication between performers and audience members takes place thanks to the *bolerista*'s musicalization of a discourse on love that is familiar to the audience. Castillo Zapata underscores how the *bolerista* must understand the audience since he or she not only expresses personal emotions through song but also interprets the sentiments and love language of the community (42-43).<sup>7</sup>

Within the *bolero*'s amorous discourse, however, love is reduced to a monologue because the desired interlocutor is always absent. Castillo Zapata argues that the *bolero* enacts failed love because the *bolerista* "no es capaz todavía de representar al otro como interlocutor activo de un diálogo donde la única voz no sea la suya [...]" (133). Deliberate ambiguity in the use of pronouns allows receptors to imagine themselves as the *tú*, the absent lover, addressed by the *bolerista* (115).<sup>8</sup> Through melodramatic tactics such as exaggerated gestures and tone of voice, visually assaulting costumes, and direct addresses to the audience, the actors in *Quintuples* seek to convert their monologues into dialogue with the audience, just as the *bolerista*'s amorous monologue interpellates the listener. An analysis of Dafné Morrison's attempt to seduce the audience with her histrionic exposition on love and personal identity highlights the parallels between *Quintuples* and the *bolero* as both a mode of discourse and a performance.

Dafne Morrison fully exploits the melodramatic potential of visual elements; everything about her, from her *nearly* indecent dress (i: 2) to hand movements that express ecstasy (i: 5), aims to provoke the male members of the audience. With feline ferocity bordering on hysteria,<sup>9</sup> Dafne employs

each suggestive smile and ripe glance to engage the audience in a dance that is at once verbal and physical. She descends from the stage and literally struts between audience members: “*Con el teatro inolvidable que es su sonrisa Dafne Morrison sonríe, uno por uno, a los trescientos espectadores o congresistas*” (i: 2).

In addition to deploying her intentioned body language to attract spectators, Dafne addresses the collective audience directly. In the midst of telling a story about her persistent and piquant fans, Dafne interrupts herself apologetically, “La palabra nalga espero que no desentone en esta actividad” (i: 4). She boasts that she has painted her nails and adorned her fingers with rings just in case any of the congress participants would want to kiss her hands (i: 5). Dafne even compares her game of seduction to a verbal tango: “casi estoy hablando en tango, casi estoy gardelizando [...] acusen a Libertad Lamarque” (i: 5).<sup>10</sup> Sánchez crudely describes Dafne’s proud and coquettish parade through the audience as “una danza para pingas” (i: 7).

Dafne, together with Sánchez’s narrative asides, reveals her flirtatiousness to be an act, a performance of coquetry. Endless layers of representation and cosmetics conceal Dafne. She is an actress who imitates certain aspects of famous film stars and musicians: Catherine Deneuve, Sonia Braga, Jane Fonda, María Félix, Bette Midler, Diana Ross. Even her physical beauty is possibly false: “*Si Dafne Morrison no fuera tan bella —más bella que nadie— no importaría demasiado. Porque la menor imperfección física habría sido, astutamente, combatida por los esplendores del maquillaje que luce*” (i: 2). Dafne herself concedes that “algunos fingimientos nos complacen, nos agradan” (i: 7). Amidst the accumulation of falseness, imitation, and pretending, Dafne centers her monologue on the question of identity and self-definition: “¿Qué más soy, qué más soy? [...] ¡Soy aspirante a mito!” (i: 5). Her self-presentation merely pretends to be a dialogue, sometimes with the audience and sometimes with people in her life, as when she effectively imitates a recent conversation with her new lover.

The *bolero* offers the audience access to the performer’s amorous intimacy and inflects a confessional tone (Castillo Zapata 42). Accordingly, Dafne’s self-definition culminates in a confession that she has decided to secretly abandon her father’s performing troupe in order to join her lover, the dwarf Besos de Fuego, in El Gran Circo Antillano. Rather than performing as herself, the eldest of a family of quintuplets, she will now perform in the circus as a Cuban *rumbera* named Melao, Sensual y Bandolera. She reveals her discontent over this new role, which might impede her ascension to

myth: “¡Nadie es lo que quiere ser! Ni siquiera la gran Elizabeth Taylor que no quiere ser gorda” (i: 16). She instructs the audience that no one is to think that she is ruining the *Quíntuples Morrison* or her own career. Of course no one responds, because Dafne’s monologue is a *bolero* for one voice.

While Dafne’s seductive and confessional monologue mirrors aspects of the *bolero*’s amorous discourse, it also incorporates references to popular music, including tango, the romantic song “Quizás” by Toña la Negra, and the *rumba*. Mandrake el Mago and Papá Morrison also incorporate popular music references into their monologues. Despite Sánchez’s use of musicalized genres like vaudeville and the *sainete* to describe *Quíntuples* in the prologue, he limits the explicit use of music to a *bolero* played only during the intermission: “La única música incidental se escucha a lo largo del intermedio, un bolero enérgico y convidador de Pedro Flores o de Rafael Hernández” (“Prólogo” xiii).<sup>11</sup> The *bolero* grows progressively louder as Bianca dramatically ends the third scene by capitulating to her desire to smoke, and it continues playing in an “*apoteosis infinita*” throughout the intermission before abruptly stopping when Mandrake el Mago makes his grand entrance (iv: 43): “Cuando Mandrake el Mago entra en escena el bolero enérgico se interrumpe, bruscamente. Con teatralidad y efectismo Mandrake el Mago da tres palmadas netas para llamar la atención del público retrasado o todavía por acomodarse en sus butacas” (iv: 44).

The *bolero* is suddenly silenced to give way to Mandrake’s highly theatrical, self-important monologue. Mandrake’s verbal and corporal performance, which approaches the *tango* without actually breaking into dance, illustrates how *Quíntuples* uses the performative potential of speech to enrapture the audience.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, a heart-wrenching *bolero* performance seduces audience members by expressing a sentimental code that is at once intimate and collective (Castillo Zapata 23). Castillo Zapata describes the *bolero* as “una puesta en escena verbal, una estructura discursiva gracias a la cual, como el espectador frente al drama representado en la Grecia Antigua, se siente el que ama reflejado, confortado simbólicamente, llamado —en una lengua que conoce” (30-31). This passage directly links the *bolero* and theatre by describing the *bolero* as a verbal *mise en scène*, which is precisely the nature of *Quíntuples*.

An analysis of Mandrake el Mago’s discourse, titled “Tango para un hombre irremediamente bello” (iv: 43), reveals how the play’s effervescence and intensity come from the characters’ verbal performances, which are intertwined with the verbal virtuosity that Sánchez displays in his own



comments. Like each of the scenes, the fourth scene devoted to Mandrake opens with Sánchez's detailed description of Mandrake's hyperbolically elegant appearance: "*La elegancia con la que viste Mandrake el Mago es apabullante*" (iv: 44). After detailing Mandrake's flirtatious costume, which consists of a egg-yolk yellow suit, white shoes, an electric blue tie, and the most elegant Panamanian hat, Sánchez engages in a delightful dance in which his descriptive asides alternate with Mandrake's direct addresses to the audience.

Sánchez's detailed descriptions emphasize the extreme verbal and corporal vitality that Mandrake projects toward the audience: "*Mandrake el Mago carcajea, levanta las manos como los caudillos, después las extiende mesiánicamente. Nunca, desde luego, abandona el manejo y el dominio de la palabra*" (iv: 45). As this narrative aside illustrates, Mandrake's messianic hand movements reinforce the dominion of his words. Sánchez reiterates the power of the Magician's words by describing how their force fills the theatrical representation: "*Mandrake el Mago permite que la fuerza expresiva de la palabra abarrote la representación. El movimiento de las manos se maximiza. El movimiento del cuerpo se minimiza*" (iv: 47). Mandrake's calculated economy of body movement relates to his coquettish hints at tango dancing.

Sánchez evokes how Mandrake's body movements and posture "insinuate" that he is perpetually on the verge of dancing a tango: "*Mandrake el Mago se vuelve con el golpe corporal chulísimo del tango [...] No es remotamente bailar el tango. Es insinuar que el tango arranca*" (iv: 48-49). The ritualistic promise of a tango that is always about to begin but never danced relates to the continual postponement of pleasure in the *bolero*: "En el bolero reposa siempre la promesa del placer" (Évora 21). The *bolerista* dramatizes this eternal promise of pleasure in his or her performance by continually searching for a lover who will embody a past, idealized, probably imagined lover (Castillo Zapata 73, 77). Castillo Zapata significantly describes the *bolero* as a "glosa infinita del deseo, encadenamiento de un amor que persigue siempre a otro amor que lo antecede y se desplaza por su camino marcado" (73). Due to the idealized lover's continual absence, the audience fills in as sympathetic interlocutors for the *bolerista*'s search for love.

Similarly, Mandrake's near tango is a "Tango para **un** hombre irremediabilmente bello" (emphasis added) (iv: 43). We can translate the "un hombre" as "one man" or "a man." In both translations, Mandrake's solitude resounds. Despite the majestic tango pulses that give cadence to his steps, he has no partner with whom to actually dance. In the absence of a partner,

Mandrake universally seduces all audience members, men and women, just as the *bolero*'s popularity crosses gender lines (Zavala 166): "*Mandrake el Mago recorre con la vista el público asistente al Congreso de Asuntos de la Familia. La conciencia de su irremediable belleza la delata la coquetería —viril— desde luego —con la que intenta asesinar a hombres y a mujeres por igual*" (iv: 50). Mandrake's exaggerated seductiveness subtly transgresses heterosexual norms, although Sánchez's insistence on virility turns out to be a performance void of authenticity beneath a handsome exterior.

From the moment he enters on stage, Mandrake is described as a performer or imitator of handsomeness; his eccentric dandy-like elegance is really a "*napolitanismo apócrifo*" that borrows from Italian film stars (iv: 43-44). Even his name is borrowed; it originates in the comic strip hero Mandrake the Magician.<sup>13</sup> In his own addresses to the audience, Mandrake proceeds to deconstruct the art of improvisation and even art in general:

Que en arte todo es premeditación y alevosía. (*Chulísimo, con un golpe corporal de tanguista.*) Hasta la espontaneidad. Hasta la improvisación [...] ¡Ya empecé a improvisar! Así es cómo se improvisa, inventando las peripecias sobre la marcha, dejando que el cuento se construya a sí mismo, ajustando un nudo que amarro regularmente, reservando el buen golpe que deja aturrido a quien escucha, observa y se interesa. (iv: 45-46)

Ironically, Mandrake's deconstruction of improvisation reveals how even supposedly spontaneous discourses are premeditated; the performer consciously reserves the big impact for the right moment in order to stun the attentive spectator. The narrator's descriptions of Mandrake's body movements are so detailed that it is as though readers were watching the performance of *Quintuples* in front of the family congress attendees: "*Mandrake el Mago interrumpe la palabra y calcula el efecto de lo dicho [...] Con donosura de bailarín, —los brazos arqueados de quien se arranca por tango— Mandrake el Mago voltea, lenta y ritualmente alrededor de los topos*" (iv: 49).

At the pinnacle of the suspense he has created through his carefully calculated verbal pauses and dramatic *tanguero* movements, Mandrake reveals that his entire show, from his attractiveness to his supposedly magical moles [*topos*] are a complete sham: "Son prestados los topos. Es prestada mi belleza irremediable [...] Me los prestó un fulano que quería comer del pan que yo comía" (iv: 52). By revealing the calculation behind improvisation, the premeditation and lies that create art, and the falseness of his own show, Mandrake demasks the art of performing and questions the possibility

for authenticity in art as well as in identities, which are performances after all. By referencing the gypsy Melquíades' parchments from Gabriel García Márquez's celebrated novel *Cien años de soledad* (1967), Mandrake also obliquely questions the possibility of textual originality.<sup>14</sup> If, as Meléndez argues, "improvisation and its link to orality, characterized by the quintuplets, establish a counterpoint with the written word, represented by Papá Morrison's scripts and by Sánchez's own play" (*Politics* 190), then we must question how the false, staged nature of improvisation in *Quintuples* affects the drama as a potential counterpoint to textuality.

What are the consequences of the impossibility for authenticity in all art forms, including performance and writing? Mandrake asserts, twice, "¡El cuento no es el cuento! El cuento es quien lo cuenta" (iv: 46; 50). This assertion suggests that the original content of a performance, a novel, or a song is unimportant, or perhaps even impossible; what matters is the storyteller's charisma. Mandrake's emphasis on the storyteller's personality parallels the mythical status accorded to *bolerista* stars like Daniel Santos, whom we will meet in Papá Morrison's discourse.

While the *bolero* accumulates love tropes from diverse sources, including modernist poetry (Zavala, *El bolero* 66) and constitutes a "práctica estética comunitaria" (Castillo Zapata 33), the *bolero*'s individual interpreters are celebrated as cultural icons.<sup>15</sup> *Boleristas* work within the *bolero*'s thematic and musical conventions, such as a song's division into sixteen beats in a minor key followed by sixteen in a major key (Évora 37). The *boleristas*' unique voices, however, make each song memorable and give the singers their mythical personae.<sup>16</sup> Castillo Zapata describes reverence for *bolerista* stars in religious terms: "el cantante es, sin duda, el sacerdote que celebra la fiesta sagrada de un culto, el culto amoroso característico del Caribe hispanoamericano y sus alrededores" (43). The worshipped *bolerista* is thus positioned to transmit a sentimental education to his or her audience.

"El Gran Divo" or "El Gran Semental," Papá Morrison is himself a parody of the *bolerista* stars who educate him on love. His dress (he dons an "impeccable" jacket with a camellia in one lapel), his speech (his voice crescendos "hysterically like Wagner"), and his behavior (he provocatively scans the audience for select female faces) all contrast humorously with the fact that he enters the stage in a wheelchair and carries an oxygen tank under one arm. If Dafne and Mandrake boast a certain melodramatic flair in their coquettish dress, sensual movements, and outrageous anecdotes, Papá Morrison carries melodramatic tactics to the extreme, seeking to appeal to the audience

first as a renowned entertainer and Don Juanesque seducer, then as a single father, widowed when his wife died giving birth to quintuplets, and finally as an invalid whose impassioned monologues culminate in coughing fits. Papá Morrison is a practiced master in the art of achieving melodramatic effect. Upon mentioning the name of his deceased wife, Soledad Niebla, "*Papá Morrison se compunge con una manifiesta afectación de divo operístico. De debajo de la manta saca un pañuelo y se recompone*" (vi: 70). Yet this emotive image of his love for Soledad begins to humorously crack as Papá Morrison reveals his inability to be monogamous; he describes his "obligación masculina" to try to seduce any woman, beautiful or unattractive (vi: 71).

In the midst of his affectedly emotional remembrance of Soledad, Papá Morrison reveals the divide between the illusion of performance as a stunning, polished product and the reality of an ongoing process that demands exertion from all participants, actors and spectators alike. When the scene's emotional intensity provokes a violent attack of coughing, Papá Morrison interrupts his performance to complain about the difficulty of improvising: "¡Oxígeno! El corazón me galopa como un potro. ¡La locura de Dafne Morrison de improvisar! [...] El esfuerzo de la improvisación, la tensión de estar frente a ustedes sosteniendo el personaje, entreteniéndolos, amenizándolos" (vi: 71-72). Like Dafne, who solicits kisses and apologizes for her language, and Mandrake who seduces men and women with his feline *tanguero's* grace, Papá Morrison is conscious of being a performer and of the fictional audience that he addresses.

After making use of his oxygen tank, Papá Morrison interrupts his romantic portrayal of love with an outburst: "*¡El matrimonio es una institución penitenciaria! Espero que el estallido intempestivo no ofenda [...] Estoy, lo sé, hablando ante un Congreso de Asuntos de la Familia*" (vi: 72). *El Gran Divo* is a hyperbolic example of a man whose philosophy on love and marriage contrast hilariously with what we would expect from a presenter at a Congress on Family Matters. Papá Morrison's amorous education seems to come principally from *bolero* stars, notably Daniel Santos, a Puerto Rican icon from the 1940s and 50s.

*El Gran Divo* nuances his description of marriage as a prison by revealing that Daniel Santos taught him the necessity of marriage despite its limitations: "El matrimonio es una institución penitenciaria. Pero, hay que matrimoniarse aunque las doñas nos peleen. Como me repetía el Inquieto Anacobero Daniel Santos, testigo ocular de mi accidente, mi desgracia" (vi: 75). We can assume that Papá Morrison's "disgrace" is his marriage to Sole-

dad. If Santos counsels marriage, the *bolerista* also provides Papá Morrison with the remedy to matrimonial entrapment: infidelity. *El Gran Semental* describes how he hears the voice of Santos encouraging him as he pursues an adulterous romance: “El Inquieto Anacobero Daniel Santos me exhortaba, cómplice y dichoso: Adelante, hombre enamorado [...] el mundo es de los que no tiemblan [...]” (vi: 76). Despite Daniel Santos’s encouragement, however, Papá Morrison’s unsuccessful attempt at marital infidelity causes the accident that confines him to a wheelchair.

As he finishes describing his failure to climb up the long braids of his beloved Jamaican *mulata*, the same actor who played Baby and Mandrake abruptly springs from the wheelchair. He declares that he cannot sustain the performance any longer: “Yo tampoco puedo más. No puedo fabular más. No puedo armar más imaginaciones con palabras. No puedo construir más peripecias de unos quintuples inventados y del Padre también inventado que los acompaña” (vi: 77). The Actress, who has played each of the three female characters, appears on stage in her robe, removing her makeup, whereupon the Actor confesses to the audience, “No queremos ahondar más en la magia porque le dañamos la magia. Porque se arriesga la hermosura de su mentira. Una mentira que es como una maroma entre ustedes, el público y nosotros, los actores [...] Y el teatro es, por más que lo embelesquen, una maroma audaz, un feroz riesgo” (vi: 78-79). The Actress offers him some of her makeup remover, and together they clean their faces as the original *bolero* grows louder and louder: “*El bolero enérgico y convidador sube, impera, arrasa*” (vi: 79).

The literal unmasking of the show reveals the physical and emotional taxation of entertaining the audience and invites us to reflect on the nature of performance and its multiple interpretive possibilities.<sup>17</sup> The fact that *Quintuples* ends with the recorded *bolero* suggests that Sánchez is not establishing a hierarchical relationship between reader and spectator, or between recorded music and live music. It was, after all, recording technology that allowed listeners to internalize their favorite songs and thus allowed the *bolero* to take hold in the collective imaginary (Castillo Zapata 43).<sup>18</sup> Similarly, the ability to read and analyze the print version of *Quintuples* has the potential to enhance its live reception. Like carnival, the *bolero* is tied to a festive time of relaxation in which social and sexual norms are temporarily lifted and dancing bodies can freely express themselves (Castillo Zapata 38-39). The use of a *bolero* to conclude the play evokes a momentary suspension of reality.

Just as the actor and actress oscillate between meta-comments that reveal their consciousness of acting and moments of enraptured representation,

such as when Dafne deftly imitates a conversation with her lover, “*repartíendose el diálogo con gracia y efectividad*” (i: 12), readers and spectators do not have to choose between a critical stance and sheer delight in the performance experience, as the latter is not a passive role in this case. Kronik observes that “narration underscores the theatricality of the stage event while it creates in the spectator the distance necessary to provoke both critical scrutiny and increased esthetic pleasure” (42). As a narrative musical genre, the *bolero* expresses the pleasure of storytelling. Even though the *bolero*’s discourse on love becomes a monologue in the absence of the lover, the sympathetic presence of listeners and dancers gives the *bolerista* an interlocutor. In a similar manner, the Congress on Family Matters addressed by the Morrisons does not actually exist, but our ability to creatively read and spectate *Quintuples* has the capacity to transform monologue into dialogue. Just as the *bolero* synthesizes lyrics and melody, African and European influence, intimacy and collectivity, *Quintuples* blurs the line between drama and narrative, performance and the deconstruction of performance. This liminal space invites critical reflection and augments the play’s entertainment value by assigning us the active role of deriving meaning and pleasure from the performance experience.

*Yale University*

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> All citations come from the 1985 edition published by Ediciones del Norte and are identified by the scene followed by the page numbers. In 2012, the Editorial Cultural published a new edition of *Quintuples*, edited and introduced by Ramón Luis Acevedo.

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that the narrative elements in the play, including the descriptions at the beginning of each scene and the stage directions, are set apart from the actual content of characters’ monologues by italics.

<sup>3</sup> Manfred Pfister marks the general distinction between dramatic and narrative texts as the absence of a mediating, narrating figure in dramatic pieces (3). Similarly, in her analysis of the range of authorial presence in different kinds of literary texts, Carmen Vásquez Arce describes theatre as a genre in which the author tends to disappear (82).

<sup>4</sup> “In the case of *Quintuples*, incest and farce aim to subvert the traditional formulae of familial and theatrical communication” (Meléndez, *The Politics of Farce* 192-93).

<sup>5</sup> Geis argues that in postmodern drama, “monologue does not necessarily emerge from one coherent ‘voice’ or ‘self’; the monologic texts, rather, are similarly fragmented and given multiple voices” (33), which is certainly true for *Quintuples*.

<sup>6</sup> “Para comunicar sentimientos y emociones la letra *clara*. La articulación perfecta. Si el mensaje melódico aspira a persuadir y a seducir, el contenido del lenguaje del deseo debe ser nítido [...]

El espacio del bolero es la superabundancia de la claridad para jugar a la elipsis del placer, del erotismo en tanto que actividad puramente lúdica” (Zavala, *El bolero* 114-15).

<sup>7</sup> “El [cantante] no expresa solamente sus sentimientos al enunciar una canción; expresa, en un mismo movimiento, los sentimientos de la comunidad a la que interpreta” (Castillo Zapata 43).

<sup>8</sup> En el bolero, “el tú puede ser una persona real, un receptor imaginario o, incluso, el auditor concreto” (Zavala, *El bolero* 115).

<sup>9</sup> “*Dafne Morrison ataca sus líneas con la ferocidad de una soprano dramática que interpreta una pantera enferma de histeria terminal*” (i: 2).

<sup>10</sup> Carlos Gardel (d. 1935) was a renowned Argentine tango composer, singer, and actor. Libertad Lamarque (d. 2000) was a famous Argentine tango singer and actress who immigrated to Mexico, where her stardom flourished.

<sup>11</sup> Pedro Flores (1894-1979) was a well-known Puerto Rican composer and singer of *boleros*. Rafael Hernández (1892-1965) was also a renowned composer of popular Puerto Rican music.

<sup>12</sup> John Perivolaris identifies some of the “moments of rapture” in the play that reveal the pure joy of performing (53).

<sup>13</sup> Meléndez notes that Mandrake *el Mago* is also a reference to Machiavelli’s play, *Mandragola*, which refers to an herb used to promote fertility and is believed to have magical properties (*Politics* 197-98). According to Meléndez, this double reference “illuminates the implications of art as mysterious and magical (and false?), and lays emphasis on the character’s dual intertextual identity” (198-99).

<sup>14</sup> Towards the end of *Cien años de soledad*, we learn that what we have been reading is actually a translation from Sanskrit into Spanish of Melquíades’ history of Macondo, which one of the characters has managed to decipher.

<sup>15</sup> During the early twentieth century, many romantic songs borrowed verses from the modernist poetry of figures such as Amado Nervo and Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera (Zavala, *El bolero* 66).

<sup>16</sup> “así el cantante, que se debe por completo a lo que el compositor ha registrado en el bolero que enuncia y a una retórica más o menos convencionalizada, imprime a su canto toda la fuerza identificatoria del intransferible timbre de su voz” (Castillo Zapata 44).

<sup>17</sup> According to Geis, one of the theatrical consequences of the postmodern fragmented subject is the tendency for actors to acknowledge their superimposed roles as characters and as actors/people (37). Postmodern theatre is paradoxically antitheatrical in that it reveals the theatricality of reality (39-40), undermining the idea of a reality that is not a performance.

<sup>18</sup> “Es gracias a la audición sostenida de estas interpretaciones que el disco, con su registro invaluable, permite que el bolero se arraigue en el imaginario del amante hispanoamericano” (Castillo Zapata 43).

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