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Artículo recibido: 30/10/2011 - aceptado: 15/11/2011

TEACHING THE OTHER: CULTURE WITH A DIFFERENCE

To Ana Antón Pacheco and Félix Martín

RESUMEN:

Al enseñar obras de la literatura hispánica a estudiantes angloparlantes, el instructor tiene que formular estrategias para introducir no sólo los textos mismos sino también una serie de contextos culturales e históricos. Como profesor, he buscado maneras de presentar una introducción que ayude a los estudiantes a comprender las materias y que posibilite, a la vez, una lectura relativamente espontánea. Cuando se me presentó la oportunidad de enseñar dos seminarios sobre literatura y drama norteamericanos a estudiantes de posgrado en la Universidad Complutense de Madrid, hice uso de las técnicas que suelo emplear en los Estados Unidos para iniciar el proceso de lectura y discusión de textos. Son distintos los detalles, pero la enseñanza de «lo Otro» en los dos sistemas académicos tiene puntos de contacto en cuanto a la aproximación metodológica.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Pedagogía, el Siglo de Oro, literatura y drama norteamericanos contemporáneos, los marginados, los márgenes literarios

ABSTRACT:

When one teaches Spanish and Spanish American literature primarily to native speakers of English, it is important to develop techniques of introducing not only texts but cultural and historical contexts. My goal as an instructor is to present important elements as background materials, while allowing the students to experience the literature in a spon-

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taneous way. When I had the opportunity to teach contemporary American literature and theater to native speakers of Spanish, in graduate seminars in Madrid, I was able to take advantage of the pedagogical lessons learned from teaching Spanish in the United States. The «Other» changed, but the approach remained essentially the same.

KEY WORDS: Pedagogy, Golden Age, contemporary U.S. literature and theater, the outsider, the literary margins

This is an essay about several levels of adaptation, about, if you will, the customizing of pedagogy. It could perhaps be subtitled—to borrow from Miguel de Unamuno—«amor y pedagogía,» the product of labors of love. The results may be a bit «all over the map,» but I hope that readers will find that reasonable, given the context.

There is a concept known as «Bizarro World» which had its origins in the DC comic books—home of Superman—in the early 1960s. In the planet Htrae (Earth spelled backwards), everything occurs in opposite form from the earthly norm. The Bizarro Code, fittingly in bad English, states, «Us hate beauty! Us love ugliness! Is a big crime to make anything perfect on Bizarro World!» («Bizarro World»). I bring up this silliness because I feel that, in the fall semester of 2010 and thanks to a Fulbright grant, I experienced, in a wonderful way, something like Bizarro World when I taught two graduate seminars in American literature at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid. In the United States, at Vanderbilt University, I generally teach courses in early modern Spanish literature—*la literatura del Siglo de Oro*—and other literature classes in Spanish, to students whose first language is most often English. Now I would be teaching courses in English to native speakers of Spanish. I first had studied in Madrid in the academic term of 1968-1969, during my third year in college, and I took classes in Spanish literature at the Complutense. To be invited to teach at the university, in the literature section of the Departamento de Filología Inglesa, was something that I could not have imagined, and I was exceedingly grateful to have this opportunity.

When I applied for the grant, which was classified under «American Literature and Cultural Studies,» I realized that I would not be an obvious choice, since I am not an Americanist and American literature is only rarely an area of my publications. I hoped to combine my background and teaching experience in Spanish literature, comparative literature, and theory with my strong interest—from about the age of ten or eleven—in reading and studying plays and criticism on drama. I wanted to mix techniques from my courses in the U.S. with different sets of texts and contexts, in this opposite-yet-analogous environment. While hardly a member of the show business community, I had published an adaptation of Lope de Vega's comedy *La dama boba*, titled *Wit's End*, which was presented by

Vanderbilt University Theatre, and I was working on a translation and another adaptation. Throughout my student days and in my career, I have recognized that I would never be a native speaker of Spanish, nor would I have the direct long-term knowledge of the culture of one whose formative years had been in Spain. I have tried to compensate by being the best (long-term) student that I could be and by using my «learning curve» to help my own students. Just as I can empathize with language learners due to shared struggles, I believe that I have a sense of what background information can be edifying and valuable; that is, I can identify frames that will help to prepare students for reading of unfamiliar materials. In sum, as an instructor I aim to facilitate second-culture acquisition by supplying just the right (in quality and quantity) data and examples.

Let me offer a specific case. When I teach *Don Quijote* to undergraduate students, I recognize they may know relatively little about early seventeenth-century Spain. I devote the first part of the course—a *Quijote* class in Spanish or a class on «*Don Quijote* and the Development of the Novel» or «*Don Quijote* and the Experimental Novel» in English—to ways of introducing key elements, through readings and brief lectures (usually with an interactive component). Topics include the concept of the Golden Age, the Habsburg dynasty, blood purity, the Inquisition, honor, class distinctions and geographical divisions in Spain, the principal characteristics of the baroque (in contrast to the Renaissance), the role of women in society, theological polemics, challenges to authority, New World exploration, and major currents in literature, theater, and the arts. I also bring up Cinquecento theory, debates on the origins of the novel, contemporary narrative theory, metafiction (and metatheater), intertextuality, and the broad bases of cultural studies. This analytical frame is not precisely a guide to the text of *Don Quijote*, but rather an aid to reading and comprehension. I want students to experience the text and to learn to respond to the initial confrontation with Cervantes's words and his protagonist's discourse and circumstances. Because the supplied information (geared to facilitate comprehension) joins with an individual reading, I use the oxymoron «directed spontaneity» to describe the method because it is, in a sense, a setup for discovery. For the groups in Madrid, the paradigm is essentially the same. I depended on my knowledge of Spanish culture and my approach to the teaching of literature to transfer the base to the twentieth century in the United States. My example will be the seminar called «U.S. Drama, U.S. Culture.»

The introduction to the course includes a glimpse into the following topics, which will become the foundation for discussion of the individual plays and criticism: the concept of a distinctly American culture; intersections among history, politics, society, and the arts; majorities and minorities, texts and subtexts; «high culture» and popular culture; literature, theater, film, and television as reflectors and refractors of U.S. society; aspects of society: the family, race, gender, gender

identification, class, ethnicity, religion, economic status; the «normal» vs. the «abnormal»; forms of prejudice and discrimination (including affirmative action and «reverse discrimination»); the practice of «political correctness»; critical techniques and approaches to the analysis of culture: literary and dramatic models; the origins of American theater; theater from the 1930s: center to margins; Broadway and beyond; major playwrights, trends, and innovations; theater history as cultural history and as academic discipline; social issues, aesthetics, entertainment, and commerce in theater, film, and television; and U.S. culture as seen from abroad. In presenting the introduction, I work with what I hope will be a clear and concise explanation of the time frame: the Depression; World War II; the post-war period; Cold War politics; the civil rights movement; Vietnam; student activism; women's rights; gay and lesbian issues; AIDS; regionalism, demographics, and immigration; Hispanics and other minorities; the academy, theory, deconstruction, and cultural studies; and markers of the new millennium. Similar to the framing of early modern Spanish society and culture, the framing of U.S. culture provides a context for the readings, selected for their artistic qualities, their social significance, and their diverse themes and techniques. My goal was to introduce American drama (1) as art, (2) as a commentary on social customs and concerns, and (3) as part of a tradition (or of many traditions) in theater history. My work in Spanish literature has attuned me, I believe, to consider with care the target audience and the importance of establishing a framework for reading, discussion, and, needless to say, for comprehension of the «foreign» materials. I was very anxious for this «teaching in reverse» in Spain to yield positive results, and I looked forward to teaching what was familiar to me via a process of defamiliarization, in which I could inspire students to recognize trends, attitudes, point of view, polemics, and social issues that form the fabric of American life and its transference into art.

If one looks at the acknowledged great American plays—which would have to include Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night*, Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*—theater in the United States would seem to involve variations on the theme of the dysfunctional family. Husbands and wives, parents and their offspring, sibling rivalry, and related matters are natural subjects for dramatic conflict. As the nuclear family has evolved into an assortment of combinations and permutations of the earlier, the ideal, and the simpler model of father, mother, and 2.5 children, society and the experience of being married and growing up have changed accordingly. In the first decade of the twentieth century, three plays about dysfunctional families won the Pulitzer Prize for drama: *Dinner with Friends* by Donald Margulies in 2000, *Rabbit Hole* by David Lindsay-Abaire in 2007, and *August: Osage County* by Tracy Letts in 2008. In 2010, a most unusual play was the recipient of the Pulitzer Prize: *Next to Normal*, a

rock-inflected musical, by Brian Yorkey and Tom Kitt, about the effects on a family of the mother's struggle with bipolar disorder. *Dinner with Friends* is about the breakup of a marriage, and the couple is seen together and separately with their closest friends, who were there when they met. *Rabbit Hole* shows the effects on a marriage of the tragic accident that kills the couple's young son. (Lindsay-Abaire's *Good People*, of 2011, is a razor-sharp depiction of the socio-economic divide in the U.S.) *August: Osage County* takes the template of previous works and shows the influence of playwrights such as Beth Henley, Sam Shepard, and Lanford Wilson—to name but a few—who put forth a blend of family drama, a regional air, and, most of all, eccentricity. Jon Robin Baitz's *Other Desert Cities* (2010), winner of the Outer Critics Circle Award for Outstanding New Off-Broadway Play, superbly juxtaposes family conflict with addictive behavior and with the extreme and often ferocious polarities that currently mark politics in the United States (and Spain).

There is, in addition to this corpus of plays about the American family, a set of dramas about substitute or surrogate families. Frequently, in these plays friends replace family. The protagonist of Wendy Wasserstein's *The Heidi Chronicles*, of 1989, for example, is associated with a community of women, pursues an academic career (in which she makes the case for writing women into art history), and is conspicuously unmarried. She becomes a type of poster child for Women's Liberation before attitudes toward women are labeled post-feminist. August Wilson's epic Pittsburgh cycle—ten plays that cover each decade of the twentieth century—retrieves, and makes dramatic poetry of, African-American history and experience. The Civil Rights Movement, the Women's Movement, and a growing consciousness of the need to admit and respect difference extends, of course, to gay and lesbian rights, and, not surprisingly, theater reflects the social change. Mart Crowley's *The Boys in the Band*, of 1968, is a landmark play, followed by other worthy dramas, and the AIDS epidemic, beginning in the United States in the early 1980s, had a crucial impact on gay life and on theater. Tony Kushner's two-part *Angels in America*, first produced in the early to mid-1990s, must be added to the list of great American plays, by virtue of the breadth and richness of its themes and characterization, the beauty of its language, and the audacity of its technique, style, and, one should add, spectacle.

A thesis of my approach to links between U.S. literature and drama and U.S. culture is predicated on the poststructuralist concept that one can locate the center from the margins, through a process sometimes called *decentering*. The phenomenon is not a mere theoretical tool, or ploy, but a means of access to deep structures, sometimes concealed. To stress the interrelation of the two «movements» that I have been comparing, I would point to the weighty margins of early modern Spanish literature, which the picaresque antiheroes and antiheroines,

Don Quijote and Sancho Panza, the female narrators and characters of María de Zayas's novella collections, the women and the *graciosos* of the *comedia nueva* inhabit. Practically everyone in this authoritarian, claustrophobic, intolerant, and inflexible society was, in some way or another, on the outside of something, and subject to fear, denunciation, censorship, or reversals of fortune. Even the articulate and aggressive women of comic plays, who find success in marriage, become victims in serious plays, when the saturnalian spirit cedes to the mimetic—to reality—and, having left fathers and brothers for husbands, they are subjected, with unwavering consistency, to the laws of subordination. An ironic symbol if the art of exclusion is baroque poetry, much of which strives for an elitism through which only the privileged and the gifted would be capable of comprehending the concepts and conceits that are mounted with baroque intensity and an elusive rhetoric.

Margins certainly take center stage in U.S. drama, where conflict disrupts the ideal, the longed-for normality, and the escapism or nostalgia for (perhaps always) absent values. To exemplify my point of view, I would like to focus on three works—a play about AIDS, a play about women, and a play about African-Americans—from the period of 1985 to 1992. They are William M. Hoffman's *As Is*, Wendy Wasserstein's *The Heidi Chronicles*, and August Wilson's *Two Trains Running*, and they are each part of theater history and cultural history. They are intimately connected to where we were then and where we are today.

As Is, which I would place with Larry Kramer's *The Normal Heart* and its sequel, *The Destiny of Me*, as primary intertexts of *Angels in America*, underscores the devastating consequences of AIDS. The protagonists are Rich and Saul. Rich—a writer and conspicuous intellectual—has abandoned his long-term companion Saul—Jewish, self-deprecating, with a sharp sense of humor—for a younger, better-looking man. Rich contracts AIDS, and his lover, family, friends (male and female), and business partner, with the notable exception of Saul, desert him. Actors in supporting roles play a number of parts and help to create a comprehensive picture of the pandemic known as the gay plague. Arguably, however, the strength of *As Is* lies in the relation of, and the dialogue between, Rich and Saul, flawed and human characters caught unexpectedly, like many others, in a maelstrom. The disease seems to spring from nowhere and to move incredibly quickly, although not quickly enough to spare its patients from agonizing suffering, which comes doubly from a broad variety of symptoms and from rejection by individuals and by society at large. There seems to be a supreme ironist at work in the timing of AIDS. Homosexuality pretty much had been deleted from the list of illnesses by the medical establishment, more people were feeling comfortable about coming out, sexual conventions were changing to allow for greater freedom of expression, and gay men in the United States were

enjoying a hedonism that formerly had been denied them. Trite but true: love was in the air. Sexually-transmitted diseases certainly were out there, but they could be treated and cured. Then, suddenly, almost imperceptibly, came AIDS, which destroyed blocks of gay men and others, but mostly gay men. They were the new lepers, new pariahs, among us. Hoffman, sensitively and passionately, captures this spirit: the panic, the denial, the pain, the separation, the heartbreak, and the guilt of AIDS. The play's title comes from the realm of sales. One typically purchases a «pre-owned» item—such as a car—«as is,» used and often damaged or defective, with no warranty, no guarantee.

As Is records the mindset of its dramatis personae. The playwright does not gloss over the physical aspects of gay life in the 1970s and 1980s, when the men represented here seemed to be less interested in emulating heterosexual marriage and monogamy than in relishing their new-found options for what some arbiters of taste would call gratification and others would call promiscuity. Alcohol and drugs regularly accompany sex. Saul, who like everyone in his circle has experimented, loves Rich and the routine of a live-in relationship, whereas Rich feels somewhat cornered by the routine. His new lover Chet serves as an object of beauty and as a muse. Rich has sold his first book and is a successful caterer, until he is diagnosed with AIDS and left stranded, by everyone but Saul, who is willing to disregard their «divorce.» A number of scenes take place in Rich's hospital room. At one point, Rich asks Saul to get a stash of pills for him, should his condition worsen to the extent that he would want to commit suicide. Saul goes so far as to purchase the pills, but then throws them away. This leads to a key exchange:

- Saul. Maybe I'm being selfish, but I want you here. I need you.
Rich. My future isn't exactly promising.
Saul. I'll take you as is.
Rich. But what happens when it gets worse? It's gonna get worse.
Saul. I'll be here for you no matter what happens. (Hoffman 90-91)

This story of love in the age of AIDS includes a sweet and intimate moment between the two, and ends, as it begins, with the commentary of a hospice worker—a former nun—who, not surprisingly, expresses some disillusionment with her job, which, it could be said, is more concrete and less abstract—that is, dirtier and less spiritual—than she had imagined. In her concluding remarks, she speaks of «Richard,» whom she classifies as soon to leave the stage of anger to move to that of denial. She calls him a «fighter» but reserves the bulk of her praise for «his lover,» who defends him against all obstacles. Rich and Saul personalize the battle against AIDS. They—and those whom they symbolize—probably would not want

to be seen either as *innocent* or as *victims*, but perhaps rather as players in the mystery of life and death. The theater accommodates their struggle.

Larry Kramer's exceptionally important, well-crafted plays, partially autobiographical, are far more politicized than *As Is*. *The Normal Heart* and *The Destiny of Me* show, among other things, how the national and local governments—headed, respectively, by the polar opposites President Ronald Regan and New York mayor Edward Koch—resisted a speedy and direct attack on AIDS. Relatively little was done when those afflicted were judged as part of an undesirable Other. Only when the illness became more widespread—a potential danger to all—did the public begin to support prevention, treatment, and research. What Hoffman and Kramer both emphasize, nonetheless, is the eradication—the erasure—that came with the disease and that wiped out people of all stripes, prominently among them members of the creative and artistic community. Art stands as witness to its own loss. The scale of the works by Hoffman and Kramer is purposely limited; staging is ingenious but hardly elaborate. That pattern changes radically—*dramatically*—with *Angels in America*, which depends on its precedents while expanding the boundaries to include more of earth, along with heaven. In this «Gay Fantasia on National Themes,» as *Angels in America* is subtitled, homosexuality becomes the center of the universe, but with AIDS as the all-encompassing antagonist. The world changes again and again as the new millennium approaches, but issues and wounds remain open. Even under the social liberal Bill Clinton, the gays in the military are required to follow a policy of «Don't ask, don't tell,» which—wittingly or unwittingly, or conceivably some of each—connotes second-class citizenship: the label is a negative label, the identity an inferior identity. The fight for equal protection under the law and for common decency is not over, and, in the twenty-first century, playwrights have continued to raise their voices. It would be hard to imagine *Angels in America* without its precedents, without its intertext. In the twenty-first century, Moisés Kaufman's *The Laramie Project* (2000) and Richard Greenberg's *Take Me Out* eloquently, and in very different ways, continue the tradition. Kaufman (born in Venezuela and a resident of the U.S. since 1985) and the group known as the Tectonic Theater Project went to Laramie, Wyoming, the site of the killing of a gay university student, Matthew Shepard, to interview residents and created a play from their interviews and encounters, including the trial of the accused murderers. The collaboration represents a unique vision and a unique show of perspective. *Take Me Out* links the American pastime of baseball with homosexuality as a way of confronting the myths and taboos of society. Greenberg's play also emphatically disputes, and perhaps inverts, the image of the gay man as victim, while providing no easy solutions to questions (including the topic of gay marriage) that remain unresolved and bitterly contested in public discourse.

Wendy Wasserstein's *The Heidi Chronicles* highlights another conflict, the cause of women's rights. Wasserstein wrote the play at a moment in which women were experimenting with new paradigms, one of which was the objective of doing everything: career, marriage, and motherhood, in short, an engaged and qualified independence. The acceptance of the truly professional woman—in business, law, medicine, and higher education, among other fields—had not been a given for more than fifteen years or so when the play was first produced. Barriers were being broken, often at a reduced speed. It was hard for women to convince men—and themselves—that cooking, cleaning, ironing, changing diapers, parenting, and running a household were not «naturally» feminine tasks. Change brought the need for compromise. In the transitional period, there emerges not only the married professional woman but the professional woman who remains single but who, like Heidi Holland and Wendy Wasserstein herself, does not rule out having children. Popular culture enthusiasts will recognize the premise of the situation comedy *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*—known in Spain as *La chica de la tele*—which ran from 1970 to 1977 and did not include babies, and *Murphy Brown*, which starred Candace Bergen, ran from 1988 to 1998, and did include a baby for the unmarried Murphy. The show gained a wonderful dose of notoriety when Vice President Dan Quayle, in a speech on family values, specifically on the «poverty of values,» complained that «it doesn't help matters» that Brown, «a character who supposedly epitomizes today's intelligent, highly paid professional woman» is depicted as «mocking the importance of fathers, by bearing a child alone, and calling it just another 'life-style choice.'» The *New York Daily News* headlined the event «QUAYLE TO MURPHY BROWN: YOU TRAMP!» («Dan Quayle»). *The Heidi Chronicles* opened in 1988 and transferred to Broadway in 1989, when all manner of controversy was in the air. The play won both the Pulitzer Prize and the Tony award for best drama.

The two acts cover the years 1965 to 1989, and each begins with a prologue in which Professor Heidi Holland of Columbia University is lecturing on women artists who traditionally have been excluded from the canon. This topic is at the heart of the play. Women—forgotten or ignored—are now being written into history, into literature, into the plastic arts, and so forth, and women are entering professions from which they had been marginalized. Academia, on the one hand, responded by moving en masse to convert same-sex schools into coed schools, and, on the other, to create new disciplines, such as Women's Studies (now more commonly Gender Studies), along with Black Studies (now more commonly African-American Studies), and film studies, and to incorporate women and significant others into the standard areas of study. In 1989, Heidi Holland's research on women artists, if done well, would have gotten her tenure. Twenty or twenty-five years earlier, it might not have. Thirty or thirty-five years earlier, a dissertation committee might not have allowed her to work on the topic. One has

to see, and appreciate, changes wrought by time and travail. There is an advertising slogan that encapsulates the idea of the long journey for women's rights, with much accomplished (yet with miles to go): «You've come a long way, baby.» The slogan was used from the 1970s forward for a brand of cigarettes, Virginia Slims, designed especially for the woman's hand and taste. I trust that you do not need me to indicate the presence of irony in this ad campaign.

Scene 1 takes place at a high school dance in 1965 in Chicago. The situation seems to be what is called a mixer, where people from several schools are brought together; in this instance, boys would be brought in to a school for girls. Heidi and her friend Susan discuss the psychology of men and the strategies of women, as «The Shoop Shoop Song,» made famous by Betty Everett, can be heard in the background. That song contains the immortal lyrics

Does he love me, I want to know.
How can I tell if he loves me so?
(Is it in his eyes?)
Oh no, you'll be deceived.
(Is it in his eyes?)
Oh no, he'll make believe.
If you wanna know if he loves you so, it's in his kiss.
(That's where it is.)

At the dance, Heidi meets Peter Patrone, whose sarcasm does not disguise his good will. They will remain friends for the duration. In scene 2, at a dance in Manchester, New Hampshire, in 1968, the country is in the throes of a national election. Heidi, a supporter of Eugene McCarthy, meets Scoop Rosenbaum, who will also stay in her life. He invites her to go with him to pick up Paul Newman from the airport and then to a press conference with Senator McCarthy. Heidi sees through Scoop, but she is intrigued by him. Scoop describes himself, perfectly accurately, as «arrogant and difficult» but «smart.» He again notes correctly, «So you'll put up with me» (Wasserstein 17). One may wonder why. Scoop, who could be billed as a Jewish-American prince, has the habit of giving things a grade; McCarthy is a «C+ Adlai Stevenson» (15), for example. Heidi has the best line in the scene, about confidence: «I was wondering what mothers teach their sons that they never bother to tell their daughters» (17). Scene 3 shifts to 1970 and to Ann Arbor, Michigan, and the meeting of a «Consciousness Raising Rap Group» attended by Susan and Heidi, who is visiting her. Among those present is a lesbian physicist named Fran. When Heidi, now at Yale, describes her research concentration as «images of women,» Fran asks, «A feminist interpretation?» When Heidi answers, «Humanist,» Fran's rejoinder is «Heidi, either you shave your legs or you don't» (Wasserstein 28). When Susan volunteers to the group that «My

friend Heidi is obsessed with an asshole» (presumably Scoop), Heidi admonishes her, «... that's personal,» to which Jill, a colleague, replies, «'Personal' means I know what I'm doing is wrong, but I have so little faith in myself, I'm going to keep it a secret and go right on doing it» (29). Aretha Franklin's version of «Respect» plays in the background.

Scene 3 takes place in 1974 at the Art Institute in Chicago, where Heidi is participating in a demonstration against the museum, which displays the work of only two female artists. The scene seems to coincide with President Nixon's resignation. Peter Patrone, now an intern who describes himself as a «liberal homosexual pediatrician» (38), comes to see her. She confesses that she is still in touch with Scoop, who is clerking at the Supreme Court, but she notes, «I'm not involved with him anymore. I just like sleeping with him,» to which Peter responds, «What a perky Seventies kind of gal you are! You can separate needs from emotional dependencies» (37). In the conversation, Heidi mentions that Susan has decided to give up clerking—she was working with Scoop, whom she detests—to become a «radical shepherdess/counselor» on a collective in Montana and to announce that she prefers women. Scene 4 reunites the four principals, in 1977 at Scoop's wedding at the Pierre Hotel, on Central Park at Fifth Avenue in New York City, where some very important people are assembled. Susan and Peter act up a bit, verbally. The bride, Lisa, a children's book illustrator, in a few moments and in a few lines, shows that she is too good for Scoop. Heidi informs Scoop that she is «sort of living with someone» (51), a book editor. He tells her that he «couldn't dangle» her any more (56), but adds «I love you, Heidi. I'll always love you» and exits to the lyrics of Sam Cooke's «You Send Me (Honest You Do)» to dance his first dance with Lisa as husband and wife (59).

The opening scene of Act 2, all of which is set in New York, places Heidi at a baby shower for Lisa after having attended a memorial for John Lennon in Central Park. The year is 1980. Susan is back in New York, but she has accepted a position in Los Angeles as the executive vice president for a new production company: «They wanted someone with a feminist and business background. Targeting films for the twenty-five to twenty-nine-year-old female audience» (68). Lisa's sister Denise, who majored in women's studies at Brown University, laments the dearth of eligible men and alludes to the ticking of her biological clock. When Lisa leaves the room, the women bring up Scoop's philandering, and Denise observes, «Oh, Lisa knows. She was being really cheerful. That means she knows» (72). As it turns out, Heidi saw him with the other woman in the park. In scene 2, in 1982, Heidi, Peter, and Scoop have agreed to appear on a television interview show called «Hello, New York,» as arranged by Denise, Scoop's sister-in-law. The topics include «the Sixties, social conscience, relation-

ships, Reaganomics, money, careers, approaching the big 4-0. Scoop: opinions, trends. Heidi: women in art, the death of the ERA [Equal Rights Amendment], your book. Peter: the new medicine, kids today, and ... the further you can take your sexuality, the better. Our audiences enjoy a little controversy with their coffee» (76). What is most notable about the interview, perhaps, is that the two men are loquacious and clever, in a self-congratulatory way, and Heidi is pretty much silent. Scene 4 is in a trendy New York restaurant, in 1984, with Susan, who has become a successful executive in Los Angeles, and Denise, who now works for Susan. Heidi comments that she is seeing a lawyer: «He calls me 'angel' and says he loves me, but he doesn't like me to call him after ten o'clock» (85). Susan and Denise want Heidi to serve as a consultant for a «half-hour show about three women turning thirty in a large urban area,» all of whom are connected in one way or another with the art world (87). In the course of the dialogue, Susan makes the following statement: «I'm not political any more. I mean, equal rights is one thing, equal pay is one thing, but blaming everything on being a woman is just passé» (88). Denise compares her 'generation' with Heidi's: «... a lot of women your age are very unhappy. Unfulfilled, frightened of growing old alone. ... I can't imagine my life without my husband or my baby Max. My friends want to get married in their twenties, have their first baby by thirty and make a pot of money. It's just much more together than your generation» (89). Heidi declines the offer to consult on the pilot.

Scene 4 is set in the Plaza Hotel in 1986, where Heidi has been invited to speak as a distinguished alumna of Miss Crain's School, on the topic of «Women, Where Are We Going?» I doubt that this is what Wasserstein was striving for, but the rather smug, self-absorbed, and inappropriate talk hardly would endear one to Heidi, who concludes, «I'm just not happy. I'm afraid I haven't been happy for some time. ... I don't blame any of us. We're all concerned, intelligent, good women. It's just that I feel stranded. And I thought the whole point was that we wouldn't feel stranded. I thought the point was that we were all in this together» (94-95). Scene 5 takes place on Christmas Eve in 1987, in the children's ward of a hospital. Heidi has stopped off to drop off some gifts and to say goodbye to Peter. She will be moving to Northfield, Minnesota, where she has accepted a position at Carleton College. Peter is noticeably depressed, affected, naturally, by the illness around him and by the friends he has lost to AIDS, and saddened by the imminent departure of his confidante. Heidi considers postponing the appointment. She begins to sing «The Shoop Shoop Song.» The last scene, in 1988, is in Heidi's new apartment. Scoop, who has been extremely successful as magazine editor, of *Boomer* (as in *Baby Boomer*), visits. He has just sold the magazine, and she has just adopted a baby from Panama and is dating an editor. Scoop drops the news that he may be running for Congress. He exits, and she holds up her daughter, as she sings «You Send Me.»

The Heidi Chronicles, as its title suggests, is a cultural artifact that documents a twenty-five year period in American history and in the history of the Women's Movement. Heidi Holland begins as a hopeful teenager and ends as a less-than-contented but newly hopeful professional and mother, and it is motherhood—paradoxically, perhaps—that gives her the hope. The one man that she loves is a man that she does not admire, and he is unattainable on multiple levels. She may hold men to a difficult ideal, but, Scoop is not only *not* ideal, but he is hypocritical, pretentious, vain, and ultimately uncaring. And, as a dramatic character, he could scarcely be more annoying, with his self-congratulatory air and his letter- and numerical ratings. He may have his charm, and he is definitely flourishing, but he is a weak man, and while the perceptive Heidi acknowledges his flaws, she cannot completely break away from the emotions that she feels for him. That is human, but it is not *feminist*. The same goes for his wife Lisa, who accepts his philandering. Heidi's perennial friend Susan is, in contrast, a post-feminist. She goes after what she wants, in a series of stages and experiments. She moves, symbolically, from the East coast to the West coast, and triumphs. The series about three women artists in a Houston loft, we find out, has become a hit. Susan has entered the male world and, with drive and capitalist aplomb, forges a new identity without compromising her principles. Although she has to go through several rites of passage, Susan knows what she wants: self-fulfillment. Heidi, while more *focused*, is less self-assured. She is, in the phases of her development, often «lost.» She seems to have made a difference as an art historian, redeeming other women, but cannot quite save herself. She seems destined to remain in the margins, first by destiny and then by a type of passivity, by not practicing what she preaches. Her speech to alumnae of her school in Act 2, scene 4, is moving in its way, but I think that it is a substantial miscalculation on Heidi's part—and, further, on Wasserstein's part—to inflict anguish on the two audiences in this particular mode. The scene accentuates Heidi's tendency toward self-doubt and non-action, and it follows her pronounced silence in the interview in scene 2. In scene 5 of Act 2, Peter summarizes this feeling when he describes to Heidi the repeated funerals and memorial services that he has attended for men of his age who have died of AIDS: «And we listen for half an hour to testimonials, memories, amusing anecdotes about a son, a friend, a lover, ... handsome, ... usually my own age, whom none of us will see again. After the first, the fifth, or the fifteenth of these gatherings, a sadness like yours seems a luxury» (103). The speech is spot-on, but it seems to undermine the characterization of Heidi and the feminist thrust of the play, to situate the protagonist awkwardly in the margins. It may be more accurate, however, to say that *The Heidi Chronicles* exhibits the difficulties inherent in the feminist movement. There is resistance—after all, society has its norms, and men will be men—and, like the painters that she resuscitates, Heidi is, to an extent, at least, a pioneer. Denise recognizes that she and her peer group have it easier because other women have entered into unexplored territories, with some discomfort and failure along the way.

Wasserstein uses pointers—events, places, presidents, and songs—to evoke the movement of history and individual advancement through time. One can imagine a costume designer having fun with hair and wardrobe, and, in this regard, the seventies cast a spell all its own. *The Heidi Chronicles* conveys an era of transformation of women's hopes and dreams. The process demands sacrifice and a willingness to expand one's horizons and a willingness to clash with the status quo. The only good man in the play—or the only good man who actually appears on stage—is, whether coincidentally or emblematically—gay, and Peter Patrone becomes a choral figure, of sorts, and, ironically, a *raisonneur* or part of a team of *raisonneurs*. Heidi, Scoop, and Peter are extraordinarily articulate, witty to the point of excess—the saying «too smart by half» would seem to apply—which gives the play a rhetorical loftiness that is commendable and entertaining. The air of incompleteness of *The Heidi Chronicles*—and of Heidi Holland—is fundamental to the text, which defines its protagonist as a work-in-progress. Young women—and young men—may have some trouble empathizing with the challenges faced by the female characters, while those of a certain age may understand more clearly the *uncharted* aspects of the social scenario, which, needless to say, is still being played out. Coincidentally, the first Pulitzer Prize for drama, in 1918, was awarded to *Why Marry?*, by Jesse Lynch Williams, a male playwright and Princeton graduate who embraced feminism and the emancipation of women before women were granted the right to vote. *Why Marry?* espouses ideas that were ahead of its time and that resonate in ours. When read with *The Heidi Chronicles*, it seems, simultaneously, anachronistic and amazingly fresh.

The Heidi Chronicles proved to be an especially illustrative example, since it relates to a twenty-five year period in the battle for equal rights and, correspondingly, to a solid block of U.S. history. Wasserstein's play not only has a back story and a future story, but the text itself is conscious of internal ironies. More than any of the other plays that I used in the seminar in Madrid, *The Heidi Chronicles* references specific details of popular culture, politics, and events of the time under scrutiny. There is, in a kind of homage to Roland Barthes, a semiotics of clothing in the play. I gave the students, whose knowledge of English was impressive, a four-page list of notes to help with the reading, and the generation gap certainly would call for a similar aid for students in the U.S. Every play says something about the time in which it was written. Wasserstein takes the time capsule idea a step further by showing the protagonist and her associates in distinct phases of their personal development.

Theater has dealt with issues of *race* in a variety of manners. One of the early Pulitzer Prizes was given to Paul Green's *In Abraham's Bosom*, of 1927, a play about prejudice, injustice, and the terror of the Ku Klux Klan in the South.

The groundbreaking *A Raisin in the Sun*, of 1959, by the African-American playwright Lorraine Hansberry, is built around the theme of upward mobility versus equal opportunity. A black family is set to buy a house in an exclusively white neighborhood and faces resistance from potential neighbors and discord among a strong matriarch, her son, and her daughter. Prior to August Wilson, a Pulitzer recipient in 1987 and 1990 and a frequent nominee, two African-American playwrights, Charles Gordone for *No Place To Be Somebody*, of 1969, and Charles Fuller, for *A Soldier's Play*, of 1982, won Pulitzer Prizes, and Suzan-Lori Parks, in 2002 for *Topdog/Underdog*, and Lynn Nottage, in 2009 for *Ruined*, have followed. Pulitzer recipients Howard Sackler's *The Great White Hope*, of 1969, and Alfred Uhry's *Driving Miss Daisy*, of 1988, deal—tragically and affectionately, in turn—with relations between blacks and whites. Bruce Norris synthesizes precedents in a play about bi-generational racial conflicts in the 2011 Pulitzer winner *Clybourne Park*, which summons—and serves as an ironic sequel to—*A Raisin in the Sun*.

August Wilson's *Two Trains Running* was the last to be produced—in 1990—of the three plays that I am foregrounding here, but it takes place in the year 1969, in a small restaurant in Pittsburgh. From the perspective of social history, one can identify the Civil Rights Movement as a model for women's rights and gay and lesbian rights. The legacy of slavery lingered—and lingers—and the suffering and scars are infinite. I would strongly recommend the fourteen-hour PBS (Public Broadcasting Service) documentary *Eyes on the Prize*, from 1987 and 1990, available on DVD, as the most comprehensive survey of the Civil Rights Movement. It can be noted—in the context of *As Is* and *The Heidi Chronicles*—that the Stonewall riots, deemed to be the stimulus for the gay rights movement, took place in June of 1969, and that this was the time when the National Association of Women was campaigning tirelessly for an Equal Rights Amendment to the United States Constitution, finally approved by the House of Representatives in 1971 and by the Senate in 1972, but eventually ratified by only thirty-five of the necessary thirty-eight states.

August Wilson occupies a special and revered place among American playwrights. Two of the plays of the Pittsburgh cycle—*Fences* and *The Piano Lesson*, were awarded the Pulitzer Prize, and each of the ten plays has been acclaimed. The plays are masterfully crafted, with a brilliant and unique dramatic discourse, and they are filled with signs of the African-American heritage, mythology, humor, and, logically and legitimately, anger. The plays are, in my opinion, gripping, thought-provoking, and fascinating, but not easily accessible, by the author's choice, I would guess. I have chosen *Two Trains Running*, in part because the play is inflected by the assassinations of the civil rights leader and defender of nonviolence Martin Luther King and crusader Robert Kennedy in 1968, by the political ideologies that were being debated, and by the plight of urban African-

Americans as the consciousness-raising decade of the sixties was coming to an end. I believe that Wilson wants to present a «slice of life» rather than a calculated microcosm, and to give his audience something to which it is unaccustomed: scenes from black life, the representation of black life on stage, or both. There is remarkable depth and sophistication to the play, a depth that is carefully apportioned and manifested without a great deal of fanfare, but, indeed, with a great deal of pride and dignity. It is, with all this, lighter than some of its companion pieces. The individual plays of the Pittsburgh cycle unquestionably stand on their own, while the cumulative intensity gives the collection a special historical and aesthetic value.

The title of *Two Trains Running* derives from traditional song lyrics associated with Muddy Waters and the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, which in some versions go, «Well, there's two trains running / But there's not one going my way» (see «Two Trains Running»). Monumental changes are taking place in the world, but things, in fact, are moving slowly for the majority of characters in the play, who gather in the restaurant owned by Memphis, in the playwright's words, «a self-made man whose values of hard work, diligence, persistence, and honesty have been consistently challenged by the circumstances of his life. His greatest asset is his impeccable logic» (Wilson 1). Memphis comments on his solitude, because his wife of twenty-two years has left him, for reasons he cannot fathom. Risa, who works for Memphis, «is a young woman who, in an attempt to define herself in terms other than her genitalia, has scarred her legs with a razor» (3). The cast of characters come and go from the restaurant. Wolf is a numbers runner who «enjoys his notoriety»; Memphis warns him to conduct business elsewhere. Holloway, «a man who all his life has voiced his outrage at injustice with little effect» (5), enters to describe the line of people at West's Funeral Home, across the street, to see Prophet Samuel. West himself becomes the topic of conversation. It is suspected that part of his wealth comes from items that do not get buried with the deceased. Memphis says that West has offered to buy the site on which the restaurant stands. The city wants to tear down the area for renovations, and Memphis declares that he will not part with the property for less than twenty-five thousand dollars. The mentally unstable Hambone appears, crying his much-repeated «He gonna give me my ham.» He is referring to Mr. Lutz of Lutz's Meat Market, down the block. Some ten years before, Mr. Lutz, a white man, had Hambone paint his fence, promising him a ham if he did the job well and a chicken otherwise. Lutz was not content with the job and offered the chicken. Hambone has claimed the ham ever since. Sterling, who has just been released after a five-year prison term for bank robbery, realizes that Risa is the sister of a good friend and begins to come on to her. She resists. Sterling laments that he has been unable to find work. Holloway counsels him to visit the legendary Aunt Ester, a recurring figure in Wilson's plays, supposedly three-hundred twenty-two

years old, who, according to Holloway, «don't do nothing but lay her hands on your head. But it's a feeling like you ain't never had before. Then everything in your life get real calm and peaceful» (24). Aunt Ester accepts no money, but asks her clients to throw money into the river as part of the ritual.

Memphis explains at one point that he had been driven out of his hometown of Jackson, Mississippi, in 1931 by white men who had stolen farmland that was rightfully his. He vows, «I'm going back one of these days. I ain't even got to know the way. All I got to do is find my way down to the train depot. They got two trains running every day» (31). The conversation shifts from Risa to Sterling's job search to the exploitation of African-Americans, who cannot seem to get ahead no matter how hard they work. West offers Memphis fifteen thousand dollars for the restaurant and is turned down. Sterling announces a rally in honor of the birthday of Malcolm X, a tremendously influential and controversial leader once affiliated with the Nation of Islam, who had been assassinated in 1965. Memphis expresses his views on black power, which he sees as misguided: «There ain't no justice. Jesus Christ didn't get justice. What makes you think you gonna get it?» (42). He turns down the offer of fifteen thousand dollars from the city for his property and shortly thereafter an offer of twenty thousand from West.

Although he keeps trying, Sterling remains unsuccessful at finding a job. He wins a numbers game, but Wolf informs him that the family who runs the game has cut the winnings. Sterling has visited Aunt Ester and, following her advice, has thrown twenty dollars into the river. He continues to pursue Risa, who seems attracted to him despite his history and her common sense. Memphis asks for directions to Aunt Ester's house. Meanwhile, Hambone has been found dead. In the play's final scene, Memphis enters, in a celebratory mood. He had followed Aunt Ester's instructions to throw twenty dollars into the river, and he shares the news that the city will be paying him thirty-five thousand dollars for the restaurant. His wife has returned, but he has moved out for the time being. He has told Aunt Ester his life story, and she has advised him «to go back and pick up the ball» (109) and he plans to go back to Jackson and defend his rights. He gives Risa money to buy flowers for Hambone's funeral and adds, «Put on there where it say who it's from ... say it's from everybody ... everybody who ever dropped the ball and went back to pick it up» (110). He makes known his plans to open a big restaurant on Centre Avenue, a more upscale location. The play ends as follows:

(Sterling enters, carrying a large ham. He is bleeding from his face and his hands. He grins and lays the ham on the counter.)

STERLING. Say, Mr. West ... that's for Hambone's casket.

(The lights go down to black.) (110)

Two Trains Running might be described as a realistic portrait gallery. Hambone, a modern-day Tantalus, symbolizes the frustrations of blacks who can never seem to win against «the man.» Holloway represents a kind of practical cynicism, but a faith in change shows through his weariness (and his wariness): «Whatever's out there in the way of opportunity, sooner or later it has to pass through. You can't find what's out there sitting at home» (103.) The same is true of Memphis, who in the fable-like ending finds that good things come to those who wait. Sterling has some luck also, but his future is up in the air. Risa, the sole female character to appear on stage, is, perhaps intentionally, underwritten. She has few options and may be forced to «settle.» If three centuries of oppression lie at one end of the spectrum, the mysterious magic of Aunt Ester, with its measure of wish-fulfillment, lies at the other. Memphis stands in the center, of the two extremes and of the play's structure. The conclusion of the play veers from realism in a way that strikes me as absolutely warranted. The happy ending not only comes at a price, but no one will leave the theater thinking that society's problems have been resolved. Alas, it will take more than few strokes of poetic justice—more than a modest theatrical gesture—for that to happen. A quotation from Wilson, found on the back cover of an edition of the play, summarizes the message:

There are always and only two trains running,
There is life and there is death.
Each of us rides them both.
To live life with dignity,
to celebrate and accept responsibility
for your presence in the world
is all that can be asked of anyone.

As a historical document, the play presents a vision of the late-sixties that is rarely seen, because its characters and their circumstances are off-center, but they epitomize the African-American community and its polemics: the rich and the poor, the successful and the unsuccessful, the contemplative and the rash, the solid citizen and the criminal. The references to Malcolm X and other facets of the text introduce the disagreement over peaceful protest versus militancy as sociopolitical strategies. Wilson seems to argue—with the ironic distance of some twenty years—that change moves, for some, at a snail's pace. An ongoing subject of *Two Trains Running* is disillusionment: with the government, with the economic picture, with pledges made only to be broken, and with deception from without and from within. The North should signify possibilities unavailable in the South, not a new style of disenfranchisement in a slum or ghetto; the move should be an escape, not another form of discrimination and disparity (see Bogumil 94-118, esp. 96). The illusions have not yet translated into realities, and the prospects are not optimistic. There is, nevertheless, a lot of life and even a

confidence in dreams in the play. Hambone functions as a scapegoat or sacrificial victim, who in death accomplishes what he cannot do in life: he defeats his tormentor. The play closes on this note of optimism, but it is an indisputably cautious optimism that reigns throughout.

In *As Is*, William M. Hoffman brings AIDS to the stage, along with an unconventional love story and comedy born of suffering and survival. It is the play of a committed artist, and one must underline both *commitment* and *artistry*. In *The Heidi Chronicles*, Wendy Wasserstein, like Heidi Holland, wants to revise history, writing women into spaces in which they have been excluded. It is to the playwright's credit that her protagonist is successful but not triumphant, not completely satisfied with her life, while the despicable Scoop Rosenbaum has the world—and women—at his feet. This is part of Wasserstein's stab at realism. In *Two Trains Running*, August Wilson creates a compelling dialectics between the social and ideological momentum of the late 1960s and the stasis in which many African-Americans found—and find—themselves. Wilson invents a new theatrical idiom, which extends well beyond language. In these plays, the families are figurative, metonymical, and what they evoke is—and is *at*—the heart of America.

Having reflected for many years on how to present early modern Spain and, more generally, Spain and Latin America, as sites of culture and history to students in the U.S., I found models for a transposed agenda with respect to America and Americana. Much of my teaching and research brings me into the range of ironic distance and the intricacies of perspective. Preparation of a «learning experience» for my students became a truly invigorating series of lessons for me. Using the dysfunctional family as a starting point, I found a common denominator for exploring U.S. drama, and from there I moved to the themes and implications of portraits of surrogate families. Stated rather broadly, *family* becomes analogous to *honra* in the Spanish *comedias* that I study with great frequency: a spine or backbone, whether explicit or implicit, to dramatic production and dramatic sensibility. Belonging, identity, associations, security, and the individual's status in society are intimately tied to well-being and happiness, as is *honra* in the early modern plays, both comic and serious. Economics, class, region, and the desire for upward mobility are factors in the American repertoire. Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* (1938) shows that, even in close-knit and loving families, tragedy inevitably will strike; life and death are intimately bound. Wilder's successors emphasize ruptures in family dynamics. As life becomes more complex, playwrights move to questions of race, gender, sexual orientation, and new permutations of the family unit. These may be seen as variations on tradition, as opposed to breaks in the dramatic continuum.

My search for the «heart of America» turned out to be a different kind of pedagogical journey, one that involved heavy doses of empathy and defamiliarization.

To present readings and discussion in Spanish, I can relate to my own experiences in learning about language, literature, culture, and history from ground zero, and thinking of myself as the representative sample. I call this the «Ginger Rogers mode,» akin to dancing backwards and in high heels. Now I had the chance to play Fred Astaire, to lead, but also to follow, as it were, the choreography that I had developed in my Spanish classes. The margins, on several levels, became my center and unifying element. Texts are social and aesthetic documents, and eminently so. Despite the radical differences in time, place, and specific content, the two sets of materials were unpredictably, and satisfyingly, similar. If teaching is an amalgamation of sharing information and models, of facilitating the acquisition of knowledge, and of respecting the learner, my mission in Spain was the same as in the U.S. Having taught Spanish culture from abroad for several decades, I found clues for teaching American culture abroad. The level of satisfaction in each country has been essentially the same, and I am indebted to my colleagues and students on both continents for that.

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