

DIRECTING A PLAY BY RUDOLFO ANAYA: UN RECUERDO Y MUCHAS MEMORIAS

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Although I consider novels my principal genre, I have always been fascinated with the stage. In my secret, imaginary life, I have seen myself as an actor. I did play the role of a shepherd in a fifth-grade Christmas play long ago. I described that scene in my novel, Bless Me Ultima. Alas, that was the beginning and end of my acting career.

(Anaya, *Who Killed Don José ix*)

ABSTRACT

In 1987 I had the honor of directing the world premiere of Rudolfo Anaya's play, *Who Killed Don José?* for La Compañía de Teatro de Albuquerque¹. Much has been written about the import and impact of Anaya's novels and other writings but very little has been published about his plays. In his "Comments from the playwright" preceding his collection titled *Billy the Kid and other Plays*, Anaya wrote, "I was a drop in the bucket of the Chicano Theater movement that came alive during the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 70s." (Anaya, *Who Killed Don José x*). He then reminds his readers that performances and rituals have been a part of the of the indigenous, Spanish and mestizo cultures of New Mexico for centuries. Indeed, *Los Pastores* is undoubtedly the play in which a fifth-grade Rudy Anaya played that shepherd, a play that was brought to the *Américas* by the Spanish colonizers. It was only natural that this man of many voices should turn his gaze to the stage as another platform on which to bring to life his fellow Nuevo Mexicanos, their history and cultures.

KEYWORDS: Anaya, Chicano theater, culture, *Who Killed Don José?*

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Let me begin by telling the reader how I, this Chicano born in 1942 in East Los Angeles, became interested in the cultures and theatrical practices of New Mexico. Like Anaya, I began my teaching career as a high school teacher. It was during that period that I first witnessed the group that inspired the Chicano Theater Movement: Luis Valdez and the Teatro Campesino. The year was 1968, when Mexican-Americans from California to Chicago began to call themselves Chicanas and Chicanos, tired of “living on the hyphen,” looking for their history as Mexicans living in the US. The Teatro Campesino performed at the University of California, Riverside and that performance changed my life forever. Although I had earned my B.A. and M.A. in Dramatic Arts, I had never been exposed to plays by and about Mexicans or Mexican-Americans. But here were these vibrant, passionate Chicanos in a moving performance with music as Luis Valdez recited the iconic poem, “I Am Joaquin,” by the late Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzalez, while slides of the Chicanos’ troubled history were projected onto a screen to underscore the poet’s passionate, angry and prophetic words.² I was curious to know what was being written about this thing called Chicano theater; was there a history I could explore?

Two years later I began my doctoral studies in Dramatic Art at the University of California, Santa Barbara. I went to the university library eager to learn about what was termed “Theater: Mexican-American” in the subject and card catalogues. There were no plays about Mexican-Americans in print and most of the articles and dissertations were about Spanish religious folk theater. Further, many of these resources had been published in the 1930s by anthropologists who had “discovered” the centuries-old Spanish religious folk plays of the Southwest. Indeed, the first play performed in what would become the Southwest was performed by Spanish soldiers on their way to found Santa Fe, Nuevo Mexico. Little is known about that performance, dated April 30, 1598, but three months later they performed *los moros y los cristianos* in Santa Fe (Johnson 35). Much more has been written about Spanish folk theater in the US beyond New Mexico and Texas but back then, I felt like I had “discovered” a part of my Spanish, indigenous, and Mestizo theatrical past. What fascinated me most was the fact that much of the information I read was about New Mexico as a major source of Spanish religious folk theater.

1. THE FIRST STAGES OF CHICANO THEATER 1965-1978

While the Spanish religious folk theater was not limited to New Mexico, its presence was not as strong in California, where Luis Valdez was born and raised. Records show that Spanish-language plays were recorded in the mid-1880s onward, especially in Texas and California. But those productions were often performed by touring troupes from Mexico, Cuba and other Spanish-speaking countries. Further, the plays were either Spanish classics or plays from the old country³. By the early 20th century popular entertainments were abundant, especially the Mexican *carpas* or tent shows that featured musical acts as well as comic sketches that preceded and inspired Valdez in developing the Teatro Campesino's early aesthetic. The first members of the Teatro Campesino were actual farmworkers, fighting for a union being organized by Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta. In a word, the early Teatro was "*rasquachi*" a colloquial Mexican term that denotes something unsophisticated, brash and raw, but not without spirit. The early Teatro could thus be described as having a "rasquachi aesthetic;" simple but not simplistic. The early Teatro Campesino and Valdez's leadership inspired other mostly young student activists to form their own teatros, mirroring the *actos* that Valdez and his troupe had developed in their first five years.

2. PROFESSIONAL TEATRO COMES TO NEW MEXICO

A young Rudolfo Anaya was in the middle of this emerging Chicano Movement as a high school teacher, university professor and as a writer. He was there in the very beginning as inspiration to all New Mexicans and was, himself, also motivated by the Teatro Movement. Confirming this, Prof. Cecilia Aragon wrote me: "Tio Rudy would always refer to El Teatro Campesino whenever we would have serious talks about Chicano teatro" (Aragon, Cecilia. E-mail to the author 22 February 2021). By the late 1970s professional theater dedicated to the Nuevo Mexicanos' history and themes was coming to Albuquerque. In 1976 the country's leading Spanish-language theater company, *Repertorio Español*, based in New York City, was touring the US and performed in New Mexico. A member of the cast was José Rodríguez, a brilliant actor born in Puerto Rico, who had trained at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London. David R. Jones quotes Rodríguez: "I had never seen mountains that big with so much

space around them.” Continuing, Jones writes, “[Rodríguez] later recalled, ‘It felt like a spiritual gift had been given to me. It felt like being home’ ” (Jones 14). Rodríguez was so taken by New Mexico’s history, traditions and cultures that he left a very promising career with the *Repertorio Español* the following year and returned to Albuquerque to find his place as a cultural worker. In 1979 he became the founding Artistic Director of *La Compañía de teatro de Alburquerque* (hereafter referred to as *La Compañía*). That same year, Rodríguez commissioned three New Mexican playwrights to each write a one-act play reflecting on the themes of “*Leyenda, Realidad y Fantasía*.”

Naturally, Rodríguez invited Maestro Anaya to contribute to this inaugural event, titled *A New Mexican Trilogy*, along with Denise Chavez and E.A. Mares, well-known New Mexican writers. In Anaya’s words, “He [Rodríguez] had read my novella, ‘*The Legend of La Llorona*,’ and recognized its dramatic potential. So I wrote *The Season of La Llorona*, and with his guidance my first play was produced” (Anaya, *Who Killed Don José* ix). While people have compared the persona of La Llorona to the Greek *Medea*, in the words of David R. Jones, Anaya dramatized the legendary story “by following the myth about New Mexico’s favorite bogey-woman back to Cortez and the Aztecs” (Jones 15). Anaya witnessed the audience’s reactions to his *La Llorona* adaptation and his playwriting was unleashed. If he couldn’t be an actor, he could create roles for actors, reaching living audiences beyond the page.

3. BEYOND *ULTIMA*

Like so many others, I was introduced to the wonders of New Mexico by Anaya’s writings, beginning with *Bless Me Ultima*, which was published in 1972 while I was “becoming a Chicano” in graduate school. As the years passed, I also became fascinated with New Mexico by a collection of poems by Leo Romero, a native of New Mexico. In his volume of poems, titled simply, *Celso*, Romero introduces the reader to a simple man, Celso, *el sinvergüenza del pueblo*, who is a trickster and the village drunk. With Romero’s blessings, in 1985 the late Ruben Sierra invited me to collaborate on an adaptation of Romero’s poems, creating a one-man play under my direction. Together, Sierra and I would bring Romero’s poems and

characters to life. We titled the two-act play “I Am Celso;” Celso relating his tall tales to the audience as if to a single observer. We organized the themes of each poem to reflect memories of moments in his life about love, loss, and his love of cheap wine, women and the beauty of New Mexico. The play was a great success and Ruben Sierra toured the country from 1985-86 performing the character of Celso to great audience appeal.⁴

In our adaptation Celso reveals how he had been unwittingly seduced by a beautiful woman but that when he awakened after a night of passionate love-making he saw that she was a *calavera*, *La Sebastiana*. He tells us that he ran out of the house and that as he ran:

I noticed that the mountains seemed to be dancing but it was a slow patient dance done by black-veiled widows. A dance to make the heart grow cold! I crossed my heart and said ‘Blessed is the Virgin, and so is her Child’ but I couldn’t escape the strange feeling that the mountains were in procession to a funeral. For who? For who? I thought frantically. If someone could have touched my heart at that moment he would have felt something so cold that it would have burned (Romero, “A Widow’s Dance” 83).

4. ON DIRECTING PLAYS IN NEW MEXICO

It was also during the mid-1980s that I had begun to direct readings and fully-mounted plays for *La Compañía* and had fallen in love with “The Land of Enchantment.” By now I had met Anaya; he was already a legend himself, in this land of myths, legends and fantasies. Around 1985 Anaya and his wife, Patricia, and I had attended an international conference in Paris and we had enjoyed a good time talking about literature and theater and drinking French wines, of course. I have in my files a type-written letter Anaya sent me after that Paris conference. It is dated April 14, 1986 and in it he writes:

You mentioned you would like to do something of mine, so I am enclosing “Death of a Writer.” I also have ready to go (except for rewriting a bit of the ending) a two-act murder mystery, “Who Killed Don José?” set in New Mexico, contemporary, it is about the last of a patrón, high tech, love, double crossing at the state capitol, probably great for New Mexican audiences.”

Of course, I immediately read “Death of a Writer,” but it was too short for an evening in the theater so I asked Anaya to send me a copy of his script for *Who Killed Don José?*, eager to work with such a generous, loving Son of Nuevo Mexico. After a first reading of the play, I knew that I wanted to direct it. My experiences working with *La Compañía* were always very rewarding and introduced me to a community of people who were serious about theater; a theater that reflected the lives of the people in the audience.

According to David Jones, Anaya was partly inspired to write *Who Killed Don José?* during a visit to London when he and his wife, Patricia, saw a production of Agatha Christie’s murder mystery, *The Mousetrap*. As Jones tells it, “Walking from the theater, Anaya turned to his wife and said, ‘I could write a Chicano *Mousetrap!*’” (Jones 199). And he did. As Anaya stated in his letter to me, *Who Killed Don José?* is just that, a murder mystery. Jones described the first version as “a ‘whodunit’ in which the title character, shot at the first act curtain, returned at the play’s end to expose his enemies and marry his mistress.” I was fascinated by this play about a New Mexican Patrón. In an interview preceding the opening of the play I told Jones, “I do not know of a [Hispanic] aristocracy in California. Sure, we have multimillionaires but they’re basically nouveau-riche” (Jones 200). And I remind the reader that the majority of young people involved in the early Chicano theater movement were mostly working-class activists, the children of hard-working Mexican parents and the first in their families to attend college. Therefore, the actos and plays that were being produced reflected what they knew. If there were upper-class Chicanos or Mexicans in their dramatic works, they were stereotypically “the enemy,” not real people. But the theatrical scene was about to transform.

5. CHICANO THEATER GOES PROFESSIONAL

Always at the forefront, in 1978 Luis Valdez altered the face of the American theater when he wrote and directed his now-classic play, *Zoot Suit*, with a fully-professional multicultural company in Los Angeles and New York. A new stage in the evolution and development of Chicano dramaturgy and praxis had begun: professionalism. This production opened the doors to professional and community theaters across the country inspiring Latinx theater artists to seek training in

theater departments across the country. The teatros, too, were reflecting this trend and women's voices came to the fore as Latinas began to express their realities in plays that challenged the producers to find professionals to direct, design and act in their productions. In his "comments from the playwright," Anaya writes: "Latino USA was marching onto the stage sporting a new language, Spanish mixed with English, and new themes....*Zoot Suit* led the way. Me? I was still loyal to my native earth, and if my themes and characters didn't fit Broadway, I didn't care. My gente loved my plays. That's what mattered" (Anaya, *Who Killed Don José?* x).

In the mid-1980s *La Compañía* had become my artistic home in New Mexico and having witnessed the appreciative audiences in Albuquerque, I knew exactly what Anaya was talking about and jumped at the chance to direct *Who Killed Don José?* After a series of artistic directors, Irene Oliver-Lewis had taken the helm as Artistic Director/Producer of *La Compañía* and invited me to direct Anaya's murder mystery. So off I went, back to New Mexico with my student assistant director, Jesse Longoria, and began the process of bringing this play to fruition. I recently asked Oliver-Lewis why she chose this play and she responded:

In rereading the script I am reinforced on why I believed it was an important play for *La Compañía* to produce by a writer *who was the soul of New Mexico* (italics mine). Rudy was so instinctive of the changes that technology could bring for the economic and professional benefits for Chicanos—jobs, self-resilience, and education. What a crazy idea he [Don José] had: to support a bullet train and a computer factory that would hire Chicanos as workers and engineers on land that had been in his family for years (Oliver-Lewis, Irene. e-mail the author 3 March 2021).

In their "Afterword" to Anaya's collection of plays, Profs. Cecilia Aragon and Robert Con Davis-Undiano give the following assessment of his first play, *The Season of La Llorona*, which takes place in the present as well as the past; a play within a play. They write: "Anaya's use of the archetypal figure of La Llorona/Malinche has many theatrical functions, as she reflects the Mexican-American oppositions of fact/fiction, past/present, oppression/freedom, natural/supernatural, and reality/illusion as well as a "both/and"

blended cultural reality.” (Anaya, *Who Killed Don José?* 372). In effect, this one-act sets a tone for Anaya’s dramatic output to come. Further, in their discussion of *Who Killed Don José?*, Aragon and Davis-Undiano echo Oliver-Lewis’s appraisal: “Anaya shows how the promise of shared cultural knowledge may motivate people, and he calls for his audience to empathize with New Mexican characters whose history is marked by conquest and exploitation, violent politics, intercultural politics and pressing rural/small-town community conflicts” (Anaya, *Who Killed Don José?* 374).

6. THE PLAY

Anaya was not new to dramatic literature and *Who Killed Don José?* reflects his knowledge of dramatic structure, in the tradition of the “well-made play.” The playwright builds suspense as the plot unfolds with rising and falling action, minor crises and complications, and a major crisis at the end of Act One. It was fun to read and even more fulfilling, working with an internationally recognized Chicano author. The action takes place in Don José’s hacienda and as described by Anaya in the stage directions, the setting evokes a mood and a sense of foreboding:

It is a cold and windy October night in Santa Fe County. The spacious living room of Don José’s ranch is decorated in old, traditional New Mexico style, including large fireplace, brick floor, Indian rugs on the walls, table with drinks, and comfortable sofa and chairs, all covered with well-worn Chimayo rugs. Outside the wind moans, dogs bark and the distinct bleating of sheep can be heard (Anaya, *Who Killed Don José?* 79).

Anaya was very particular in his description of the visuals. Recalling the designs for our *Compañía* production, Irene Oliver Lewis wrote me:

The New Mexico cultural arts were also highlighted in the set design. It was very important to include examples of our carved Santos, tin work, adobe construction, weaving, and pottery...I asked my dad to recreate the carved woodwork that he learned as a young man in the art of traditional territorial woodcarving in 1939 in the Works Progress Administration (WPA). The set... was a tribute to our New Mexican arts and crafts (Oliver-Lewis, Irene. E-mail to the author 6 March 2021).

There are eight characters in the play, each with distinct histories and objectives that make them interesting and keep the audience wondering: if somebody is going to kill Don José, who will it be? The first characters we meet are Maria, Don José's daughter, and Tony, a sleazy car salesman who lusts after three things: money, power and Maria. Maria has returned, having graduated from UCLA and isn't sure what her next steps are. Enter Don José, a wealthy Hispanic, a Patrón in the tradition of New Mexican *hacendados*. He is portrayed as a good man, eager to bring the future to New Mexico with computers—we are talking about 1987, long before today's technological wonders. Thus, he is a visionary, working with Ramón, a computer nerd who appreciates the potential import and impact of technology. Ramón is also interested in Maria. The competition for Maria's attention between Tony and Ramón becomes humorous as the plot takes twists and turns and we meet all of the players. In contrast to these three characters are Doña Sofia, the housekeeper and her son, Diego, the foreman of the sheep ranch. Diego lends humor to the play, a lovable oaf who drinks too much.

Completing the cast are Ana, Don José's lover, and the Sherriff, known only as the Sheriff. As the first act unfolds, we learn about each characters' relationship to the title character. Essential to the plot, we learn that Don José has a computer disk with damaging information about Santa Fe politicians having stolen Foundation funds meant to help the community. Don José has learned that the state has chosen to build a bullet train that will cut right through his land, making him an instant millionaire. He also knows that the Foundation leaders know that he holds the key to their malfeasance and have a threatened to "get rid of him." The suspects line-up in our minds—everyone has a motive to kill Don José!

As in any good mystery, guns are at the center of our attention from the very first scene, when Maria takes Tony's pearl-handled revolver from him. She tells Tony that Don José's father was shot and killed, therefore he doesn't allow guns in the house. She then hides the revolver in the telephone table. As I learned decades ago, do not put a gun onstage *unless you plan to use it*. The gun and the table will play important roles in the action, as will other guns, meant to confuse everyone in the play. As other guns appear and change hands the audience enjoys watching the fast-moving action unfold.

Further, do not put a computer onstage unless it plays an important role. To wit: by the end of the first act, when Don José tries to find the program disk (which we've seen the Sheriff put in his pocket). Suddenly the lights go-out:

“Damn! The lights!” (*Don José's outline appears in the glare of the monitor screen He senses someone in the room.*) “Sheriff? Is that you? There is a gunshot, a flash of fire, a moan as Don José falls to the floor. A woman screams. The shadow of a figure runs across the monitor screen, footsteps sound, the woman screams again (Anaya, *Who Killed Don José?* 105).

A moment later the lights come on and Maria appears at the door and sees Ana standing over Don José's body with a pistol in her hand. Then the Sheriff runs-in as Maria rushes to her father's limp body. Doña Sofia runs in from the kitchen, followed by Tony, who stops and slowly removes his gloves. Maria accuses Ana of killing her father and Ana calmly says “No, I didn't.” The Sheriff shouts “Don't nobody move!” Then Tony shouts, “Listen!” *All pause and turn to the voice that comes from the computer. The screen is flashing wildly. A computerized voice is heard: Mary had a little lamb. . . little lamb. . . little lamb. Mary had a little lamb. . . whose fleece was white as snow.* END OF ACT ONE (Anaya, *Who Killed Don José?* 105).

One of the joys of a murder mystery, when well-constructed, as is this play, is trying to solve the mystery. The second act is dedicated to revealing the murderer as we slowly follow the logic. The action starts right after the blackout of act one, the Sheriff taking charge of the “investigation.” During the intermission we decided to ask the audience members to submit their candidate of who was guilty, which the audiences loved. To Anaya's credit, people didn't always choose the culprit. As I stated earlier, every time a character's motive for killing Don José was revealed, there was a contradictory answer. At one point, even Maria is accused of the murder, however weak the accusation. After much deliberation and accusations we finally learn that Tony is the killer. End of the mystery and end of the play.

7. ON THE COLLABORATIVE PROCESS

One of the highlights of collaborating with Anaya and Patricia was going to their wonderful “mound house” in Jemez Pueblo to work on

the script. By mound house, I mean this house was constructed in such a way that the roof was actually grass. Thus, the only exterior wall faced outward to a beautiful New Mexican mountain landscape⁵. An incredible place to let one's imagination flower. Our first challenge was to change the ending of the play, as Anaya had indicated in his letter to me. I could not remember why he changed the ending so I asked Oliver-Lewis if she remembered and she responded:

“If Don José stayed alive we wouldn't have the next generation of New Mexican progress being led by a woman—his daughter Maria, a college graduate with traditional ties to the culture and the land. This was very important to the new dynamics of Chicano power and wealth” (Oliver-Lewis, Irene. e-mail the author 6 March 2021).

Anaya, the proto-feminist.

8. THE PRODUCTION

After working with Anaya on the script, we were ready to audition actors. It is a given that the level of experience varies widely when directing for community-based theater companies. Having directed actors from *La Compañía's* core of actors I knew that we had the talent to cast the play. José Rodríguez had laid a very solid foundation of professionalism during his tenure as artistic director. During the 1979 season and *A New Mexican Trilogy*, Rodríguez wrote: “Whatever we do, it must be with a seriousness of purpose. We're doing real theater, not just quaint, folklorish, picturesque garbage”. Rodríguez made quite an impact on everyone involved in *La Compañía*. Succeeding artistic directors, Ramón Flores, Marcos Martinez and Oliver-Lewis continued to build on the foundation Rodríguez put into place.

9. THE ARTISTS SPEAK

Through e-mail correspondence with two of the actors involved in that production, so long ago, I was reminded of the joys and challenges of working with inexperienced actors. Of the two actors I was able to contact, Michael Blum and Pedro Garcia, the former had experience but the latter was new to acting. However, *La Compañía* inspired them to continue in the theater and both are working actors and directors today. Blum is based in Seattle, Washington and Pedro Garcia went home to Pharr, Texas, where he founded his own theater company *Nuestro Teatro*.

Ironically, Blum's first acting role in an Anaya play was in *The Season of Llorona*, which the reader will recall was Anaya's first produced play, inspired and guided by José Rodríguez. Blum writes:

I basically played a soldier who had seen the woman kill her children. I was 19 but it was an exposure to Rudy Anaya. He was there at rehearsal, more so than with "Don José" and so I got to know him... and his work... He was one of the smartest people I had ever met and the insights he had--not just the plays--but literature in general. I grew up exposed to Shakespeare, etc. And I remember having a conversation with Rudy about structure and the meaning of great writing (Blum, Michael. Taped e-mail to the author. 2 February 2021).

In response to my question "What are the 'fun' experiences you had, acting in this play" Blum writes:

When I auditioned, I was first slated to play the Sheriff but the actor that you cast as Don José was not very strong so you cast me as Don José; the first time I had a lead role! And, the fact that I died at the end of act one so I could basically goof-off for half the show. Delightful! Also the camaraderie of doing the play and in particular my good friend Pedro. A few years later I directed *Who Killed Don José?* and it was fairly successful (Blum, Michael. Taped e-mail to author. 2 February 2021).

In response to the rehearsal process, Blum writes,

Rudy was delighted but then he'd go off and whisper to you and we're all thinking 'he hates it!' but he was very complimentary and for Rudy that was unusual because he wasn't a very complimentary person but it was very nice that he would take the time to say 'I like what you're doing. I appreciate what you're doing (Blum, Michael. Taped E-mail to the author 2 19 21).

Blum's good friend, Pedro Garcia was effusive about his participation in the premiere of this play. Originally from Texas, 1987 he was working in a local radio station in Albuquerque and had never been in a play. He reminded me that I had originally cast him as the understudy to the actor playing Diego:

...and about a week before opening, the guy playing Diego stormed out of the theater and you looked at me and said, 'Are you ready?'

and I said, ‘yeah, I’m ready.’ I had been a good understudy. I had learned all my lines so I played Diego (Pedro Garcia e-mail to the author February 17, 2021).

Early in Act One Doña Sofia tells Diego Diego that they are both in Don José’s will, which gives them each a reason to see the man dead. In response to “fun moments” in the play, Gracia writes, “One of funniest moments playing Diego was when he says, “I want my CHAIR, meaning share—Not *chair*! I don’t want my chair to sit! I want the money!” (Garcia, Pedro. E-mail to the author 17 February 2021).

On the question of whether this play would be appreciated outside of New Mexico, Garcia wrote the following:

When I directed *Who Killed Don José?* in Pharr [Texas] 20 years later, I dedicated the play to his late wife and he was very grateful for that. I remember casting that play and the fun characters.... the audience having to guess, during the intermission, who killed Don José. A lot of them got it wrong. I had local actors and the actor who played Tony was really, really good and they were surprised to find out that it was the car salesman that killed Don José. The audience really loved the show and the theme of up-and-coming computers and how that was going to revolutionize the world. It was ahead of its time. We produced it in October with Halloween coming-up and Mr. Anaya, knowing that we were a community theater said ‘I am going to waive my rights’ (Garcia, Pedro. E-mail to the author. 17 February 2021).

10. AUDIENCES’ RESPONSES TO THE PLAY

The premiere production of Anaya’s murder mystery was not without controversy. It should surprise no one from the still-evolving teatro movement of the 1980s that a play about a wealthy New Mexican rancher would raise eyebrows and cynical criticism. Recall that this was what fascinated me about the play as well as the play itself. I think Irene Oliver-Lewis says it best:

There were a number of *La Compañía* veterans that opposed and criticized this play, my decision to produce it, and felt Rudy betrayed his culture. What they didn’t acknowledge is that Don José, despite his wealth, was the quintessential Chicano rooted in myth, tradition, political justice, language, economic equity, and love of the land and

heritage. He was very much like Rudy who never forgot the relevance of our cultural roots in spite of all the fame, travel, and abundance that he experienced (Oliver-Lewis, Irene. E-mail to the author 6 March 2021).

In his introduction to this play, Prof. David Jones, a professor of English at the University of New Mexico and literary manager for the New Mexico Repertory Theatre, writes: “The play’s premiere production had only a limited artistic success, but it ran for three weeks to good houses in the summer 1987.” Concluding his narrative, Jones points-out the fact that *La Compañía* always took their plays to the South Broadway Cultural Center in Albuquerque’s poorest neighborhood for a free performance. “Connecting with ‘the community’ may sound like cheap literary talk but I saw it illustrated in the starkest light,” he writes, describing the audience at that performance”

Out in the big world, I had been hearing too much from sophisticates, both Anglo and Hispanic, about the problems or contradictions of Anaya’s play but now I stood at the rear of the Center watching that audience as they watched that second act....These people, I decided, were the living reasons I needed to include *Who Killed Don José?* in this anthology (Jones 201).

11. ANAYA’S WORK LIVES-ON IN THE PEOPLE

Working with Rudy on this play was a life-changing experience for me as well as for the many theater artists he inspired with his plays. People like Dr. Cecilia Aragon, Michael Blum, Pedro Garcia and Irene Oliver Lewis and so many more, have become leading professionals in the field. Anaya’s spirit lives-on in the thousands of people who have participated in an Anaya production as actors, directors, designers, technicians, but above all, the audiences; people who have heard the stories of their people in their languages. Prof. Cecilia Aragon, who knew Anaya all her life, wrote me:

I remember going to see the production of *Bless Me, Ulitma* with Rudy at the National Hispanic Cultural Center. After the show, he commented and said to me, “I never realized how many deaths there are in *Bless Me, Ulitma*...Wow, theatre really gives life to literature! I saw new things that I never saw before in my novel” (Aragon, Cecilia. E-mail to the author 21 February 2021).

Remember that “Death of a Writer” was Anaya’s first play. Was it his death he envisioned? Thinking back, I am reminded of Celso’s New Mexican mountains “like black-veiled widows in procession to a funeral. For who?” he asks. “For who?” And now I know. They are in procession and always will be, in honor of Rudolfo Anaya, the soul of New Mexico. Rudolfo Anaya, ¡PRESENTE!

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NOTES

- 1 The founders of *La Compañía* purposely used the original spelling of Albuquerque, adding the first “r” in recognition of the original inhabitants.
- 2 Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzalez’s poem, “I am Joaquin,” is in his book, *Message to Aztlan* (Arte Público Press, 2001):16-29. The poem was first published in 1967.
- 3 See Nicolás Kanellos, *A History of Hispanic Theatre in the United States: Origins to 1940*. (1990).
- 4 Leo Romero, *Celso*. Arte Público Press, 1985. The play, *I am Celso*, adapted for the stage by Jorge Huerta and Ruben Sierra, is not published.
- 5 According to Prof. Aragon, “It was their second home, a writing retreat for Rudy. Also, Rudy and Pat established another home for writers in Jemez, called La Casita de Jemez. I had a residency in La Casita during the summer of 1999” (Aragon, Cecilia. E-mails to the author 22-26 February 2021).