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Three pioneering women in Nicaraguan theater: Dona Gladys Ramirez de Espinoza, Socorro Bonilla Castellon, and Lucero Millan

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**THREE PIONEERING WOMEN IN NICARAGUAN THEATER:
DONA GLADYS RAMIREZ DE ESPINOZA,
SOCORRO BONILLA CASTELLON,
AND LUCERO MILLAN**

by

Maria-Tania Bades-Becerra

**Bachelor of Arts
San Jose State University
1995**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the**

**Master of Arts Degree
Department of Theatre Arts
College of Fine Arts**

**Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
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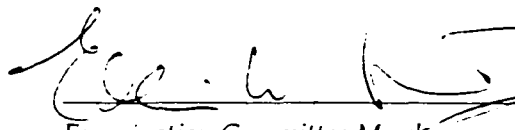
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Master of Arts


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ABSTRACT

Three Pioneering Women In Nicaraguan Theatre: Dona Gladys Ramirez de Espinoza, Soccorro Bonilla Castellon, and Lucero Millan

by

Maria-Tania Bandes-Becerra

**Dr. Jeffrey Koep, Examination Committee Chair
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If it is true that theater reflects the human condition, then it can be said that for three decades Nicaragua has been struggling with its own humanity. Some would argue this has been the case since the Somoza dynasty in Nicaragua which ended in 1979. As the Theater of Nicaragua is interwoven in its politics, this paper will bring the reader a closer view of that reality. In an analysis of the history of the theater of Nicaragua, three women have stood out. These three women --- Dona Gladys Ramirez de Espinoza, Socorro Bonilla Castellon, and Lucero Millan, have made the theater we are familiar with here in America possible and accessible to the Nicaraguan people. This thesis closely examines the lives of these three women and their particular contributions to Nicaraguan theater and to the country as a whole.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Theater and politics share a vehement marriage. Theater, in a Third World country is politics. As evidenced in the cited interviews to follow, each political event affects the theater in a very direct way.

Interviews comprise nearly 80% of research for this thesis. As the topic of theater in Nicaragua has not been comprehensively studied by anyone in depth, and more specifically how women have affected the theaters in Nicaragua, two visits to Nicaragua were undertaken for primary research. Each visit lasted a months' time. That time permitted sufficient interaction with members of the theater community and access to information. Because the interviews were conducted in the nation's native language of Spanish, the author, whose primary language is also Spanish, translated the interviews as needed. In many ways, this is a virgin subject matter and it was very exciting discovering the evolution of Nicaraguan theater. On the other hand, because this topic has been obscured for such a long time, there is a wealth of information that has yet to be collected and the subject deserves further study.

This thesis will give a brief history of theater in Nicaragua and will focus on the powerful women who gave birth to this art form and who have fought a difficult battle to ensure its survival in a country where theater is not a priority. Antonin Artaud said

“the world is hungry and not concerned with culture, and that the attempt to orient toward culture thoughts turned only toward hunger is a purely artificial expedient.

(Artaud, 7)

These women may believe parts of that statement to be true, but they have not given up on the magic that theater brings to life and the hope that it can inspire.

These pioneering women made different contributions at different times in history. Their backgrounds are varied but they all have something in common...their perseverance.

Through perseverance, they have survived not only the day to day challenges a woman has to face in a patriarchal third world nation, but have survived a revolution, and, worse yet, its aftermath. It could even be said that without these women, traditional theater would not exist - traditional theater referring to theater in the Western tradition with its roots deep in the Greeks and Shakespeare, Oscar Wilde, Becket and so on.

Theater indigenous to Nicaragua exists as well and deserves to be mentioned and respected on its own merit. Modern playwrights of Nicaragua, although few, are included in the first grouping, as their plays are performed at other times besides religious celebrations.

The first chapter will give the reader a brief history of theater in Nicaragua, from indigenous to the present. The second, third, and fourth chapters will focus each on an individual woman. Each chapter will give a brief history on the woman's life and her contribution to theater. The fifth and final chapter will point out other companies that have contributed to the survival of the theater and offer concluding statements by this writer.

CHAPTER 2

THE HISTORY

According to Daniel G. Brinton's introduction for The Gueguense or Macho Raton (Brinton, 23), performance in Central America, including Nicaragua, is divided in five stages of development: simple dance, dance with music, dance with prose, dance with dialogue (one actor only), and complete dramas with music, dance, dialogue, and costumes. Only the first three are truly pre-Hispanic. The two remaining are a direct result of the amalgamation of two cultures: Spanish, and the indigenous people of Nicaragua.

Simple dance and dance with music correspond directly with rituals and human sacrifice. Dance with prose, also ritual, can be seen in the ritual of *El Volador*, or The Flyer. *El Volador* is described by Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo y Valdez:

"In the middle of the plaza a stick would be planted with about 80 palms on top. On the very top a painting of the idol Cacahuat would be placed. Beneath him a shape of a square with several sticks where two boys of seven or eight years old would hang. One of the boys would hold an arch in one hand and arrows in the other. The other boy would hold a fan made of feathers in one hand and a mirror in the other. There would be a very thick rope that would go around the stick so that the boys would

have the impulse and would then turn all the way down to the earth. "

(Olivedo y Valdez , 430)

According to Brinton (27) the boys symbolize messengers sent from the God on the top of the pole (usually the God of fertility) and the arrows represent lightning sent from the sky. The fan, made of feathers, characterizes the birds while the mirror is representative of water and rain. The ritual corresponds with harvest time, which was believed to correspond with the fertility of people. Several other Latin American cultures have a tradition similar to El Volador. In San Salvador, there is a similar pole planted during the time of the harvest but it requires four adults instead of children. Guatemala and even Mexico also share in this traditional spectacle and still perform it once a year.

The theatrical pre-Hispanic period in Nicaragua ended in the late 18th century. The play for which Nicaragua is best known evolved toward the end of the Missionary period, which began immediately after the conquistadors came to Central America and took the upper hand religiously and financially. Missionary Theater itself was a purposeful event. It was fabricated to convert non- believers to Christianity and to teach Castellano, or Spanish. In order to accomplish this, the Spaniard had to allow the indigenous people of the Americas to keep certain traditions and beliefs. Part of that included allowing the indigenous inhabitants to retain certain words in their native language of Nahuatl in the texts. Spanglish here in the United States bares a strong resemblance. Luis Valdez's play Zoot Suit has several characters, specifically the Pachuco, who uses both words in Spanish and English throughout the script. This is a demonstration of defiance. The oppressed culture partially concedes, but refuses to giveup their language all together. Here is an example of Pachuco's defiance in the prologue of Act II:

Watchamos Pachucos

Los batos

The dudes

Street-corner warriors who fought and moved

Like unknown soldiers in wars of their own

El Pueblo de Los was the battle zone

From Sleepy Lagoon to the Zoot Suit wars

When Marines and sailors made their scores

Stomping on Nazis on East L.A. ...

Pero ¿saben que?

That's later in the play. Let's pick up in the prison.

We'll begin this scene

Inside the walls of San Quintin.

In this example, Spanish is the native tongue while English is the oppressor's tongue.

The Pachuco uses the Spanglish words, a mix of Spanish and English, in the English text in order to emphasize certain words or feelings evoked by those words. The use of these words demonstrates defiance to the oppressor's culture in addition to pride in the native culture. The political implications of Zoot Suit are not just about language, but also what holding on to that language represents: separatism. Why assimilate to a culture where one will never be accepted? In Nicaragua, Nahuatl, a derivation of Aztec, was the native tongue while Spanish was the oppressors. Spanish has come full circle. Although there are other full works that have survived from the same period such as, Loa de la disputa del Diablo y la mujer ante el portal and Las doce pares de francia en Niquinomo, El

Gueguense continues to be unique. It is truly the only play left that reflects the duality of a conquered people in this area of the world. The duality is not completely evident in the content of the text, which explains the Spaniards allowing it to be performed. It is however evident as we see the oppressor's language, Spanish, and the oppressed language Nahuatl being used in the text.

The text was obtained in Nicaragua by Dr. Carl Hermann Berendt. When he died, there was no translation of the text found in any of his papers, therefore the responsibility fell on Daniel Brinton. The Gueguense or Macho Raton is considered a musical comedy. According to Brinton, the term "gueguense" comes from the Nahuatl "huehue" meaning old man. Although generally used to describe influential old men, the gueguense (the character) in this case is anything but respectable, and thus the comedy.

There are still strong traces of Missionary Theater in Nicaragua. To begin, each town has a patron saint. Once a year, that saint is paraded around the streets while children dance and celebrate. At a specific point in the ceremony, appointed individuals will reenact the stories of specific religious tales such as Judas' betrayal of Christ or *La Gigantona* (another religious tale). It is theater at its most raw and it is beautiful because of its richness of history and elaborate spectacle. The entire town knows the story but they wait with anticipation for the event every year.

Other traces of Missionary Theater are the *purisimas* and *griteria*. *Purisimas* are a mixture of prayer, devotion, and festivities. The tradition of the *purisima* began during the missionary period when the Franciscan priests didn't have enough space to let everyone in to pray for the celebration of the Immaculate Conception. For practical reasons, they decided to allow prayer to be hosted by individuals in their homes. The

people hosting would then be responsible for making an altar honoring the Immaculate Conception and guiding prayer. December 7th is considered the pentacle of the *purisima* and *griteria*. On that night people visit the various altars and yell outside the host's home "*Quien causa tanta alegria?*" (Who causes such joy?), "*La Concepcion de Maria*" (The immaculate conception) is answered by the hosts of the *purisima*. Some question whether this is theater or simply a religious ceremony. However, once one participates, there is no question the event fits the traditional definition of theater.

Theater as an event in its own right began to emerge in the late 19th century. By the late 1800's theaters in Masaya, Granada and Leon, major cities in Nicaragua, sustained substantial companies and facilities while small theater companies emerged all over the country. The municipal Theater of Leon was established in 1885 while the Theater of Granada was established in 1889. In Granada, there were works by Moliere being performed as well as musical adaptations of Moliere by Marcelo Lacayo Rodado, a local musician. (Arrellano, 37) There were also Spanish companies that performed and toured all over Nicaragua.

This escalation in theater continued through what is referred to as The Golden Era, *La Epoca De Oro*, during which the dictatorial Somoza Government (1951-1978) ruled. Somoza was not necessarily a theater enthusiast but he also didn't really concern himself with what was being produced. (Socorro Bonilla Castellon, personal interview #2, June 1999) He allowed theater to flourish not by encouraging it directly, but by turning Nicaragua into a capitalist society. During WWII, Nicaragua aided the United States with food and soldiers thus allowing Somoza to establish a strong bond with the US government. The Nicaraguan cotton boom of 1960 produced great economic growth.

Additionally, the death of Somoza Garcia in 1956 reinforced not only a capitalistic society, but allowed his predecessor to encourage a democratic style government that established social security and agrarian reform. Thus, the Somoza regimes' strategy of industrialization aided to the growth of the arts. During this era the most successful theater troupes were established.

In 1951, the playwright Pablo Antonio Cuadra's, Mascaras Exige La Vida (Life Requires Masks), was produced in order to raise money for the Cancer Institute. The women involved in the production of this piece in Managua, the capital, later became the funding members of the TEM (*Teatro Experimental de Managua*) or Experimental Theater of Managua). We will explore the TEM in Chapter 3, as it is the longest running theater Company in Nicaragua. In 1953, Adan Castillo, whose reputation is well respected in Nicaragua, funded the Company TALIA. In addition to works by Lorca and Pirandello (whom Castillo admired greatly), the company produced works by local Nicaraguan playwrights like Cuadra.

Simultaneously, at the National School of the Arts and directed by an Italian, Lucho Ranucci, another experimental troupe surfaced and performed works like Ha Llegado un Inspector (There has come an Inspector), by J.B. Priestly and La Barca Sin Pescador, (The Boat Without a Fisherman), by Alejandro Casona. Ranucci was thrown in jail the same day Anastasio Somoza Garcia was assassinated, the 21st of September, 1956. Gorge Eduardo Arellano explains in his (Theatrical Inventory of Nicaragua (Arellano, 88) that Ranucci's incarceration was the result of an announcement of his upcoming production of Tobarich, a play about the Russian dynasty. The announcements said "ESPERE EL 21 DE SEPTIEMBRE" (Wait for the 21st of September). This statement

made the government think he planned the assassination. Ranucci was forced to escape to Costa Rica, literally by foot. He crossed the border to Costa Rica and, as a consequence, Costa Rica benefited from Ranucci's artistic visions. It is evident that because of Nicaragua's political environment, even then, the country has suffered a deprivation of qualified artistic talent like Ranucci and the many others that left the country in later years because of political unrest.

Another individual born of this era was Rolando Steiner whose contributions as a playwright and critic merit special attention. Steiner's first piece, judit, written in 1957, is only the beginning of this man's lengthy career. He then followed with Antigona en el Infierno, (Antigone in Hell) in 1958. Consecutively he wrote Un Drama Corriente (A Common Drama), and La Pasion de Helena. Both these plays were written in 1963. In 1968, La Puerta (The Door) was written and became an immediate hit. Arellano describes the piece:

The drama is neither vulgar nor erotic, although the author subtly insinuates the quality of the conflict by putting as only piece of furniture on the stage, a bed, where the wife has waited for her husband for three years of marriage. In essence, the door never existed as the two actors develop dialogue face to face through the door frame, although it appears, by their distance, that there was a physical door between them." (Arellano 95)

Steiner went on to publish several other works in the 1970s, one being a story of his own life in one act, Estado de Culpa (State of Guilt).

Among other groups that had impact during this time was *La Comedia Del Arte*, headed by Adan Castillo. Castillo directed and produced provocative works during the years between 1960-68. But, sadly, he died in 1973 and, tragically, for the Nicaraguan people, was unable to continue his contributions to the Nicaraguan Theater.

In 1965, Socorro Bonilla Castellon, upon her return from Spain, began *La Comedia Nacional de Nicaragua* (The National Comedy of Nicaragua). Not only is her company the second oldest in the country, but she is known to be the most involved individual in the theater in Nicaragua today. She is the greatest advocate for the stage. *La Comedia Nacional* will be explored in greater detail in Ch. 3.

There were other smaller companies and theater groups that sprang up in this era. This was a wonderful time to be in the arts in Nicaragua. When there is money, people want to spend it, and the arts benefit greatly from this mentality. Sadly, the next few years in the history of Nicaragua were challenging in all aspects of survival. The next decade brought with it deterioration and conflict.

July 19, 1979, marks a day that some Nicaraguans celebrate, others curse. That day marks the triumph of the Sandinista government. Suddenly, there was no longer a capitalistic government in place but that of a communist regime. The idealistic mentality was that of “for the people” where things would be fair and the line between rich and poor would not be so severe. A middle class would exist and education would be provided for all people who wanted it. Theater became a tool for education and it became accessible to everyone. On the surface that sounds like a positive endeavor but in reality, it was probably what began the rapid deterioration of the theater, and subsequently the nation.

In the first few years after the revolution, there was a huge focus on making culture accessible to people all over Nicaragua. The *Ministerio de Cultura* (Ministry of Culture) was established to that end, and the first thing it did was establish the *centros populares de cultura*, (popular centers of culture). The centers focused on poetry, art, dance, and theater. Socorro Bonilla recalls,

"The ministries of Culture held classes, formed groups, but their biggest success was the poetry. They really helped to develop the desire to do art in general." (Bonilla Interview #1)

This time in Nicaragua was difficult for all members of society. On one hand you have vast opportunities available because the citizens felt free to act due to the Sandinista regime promising freedom. On the other hand, money was scarce and so were daily necessities. It is difficult to stay focused on art when you are hungry. Marisela Rodriguez recalls:

"I remember we had to go to the store and everything was rationed. They would give you a bar of soap for each family member for the month. There are three people in our family so we got one and half bars of soap. I swear! I had to wait till they cut it right there in front of me" (Marisela Rodriguez, personal interview, June 1999)

The Sandinista government had ambitious intentions when it came to the arts, but unfortunately ambition did not result in quality theater. Theater was used to educate and to instill national pride. The performances taught basic hygiene, medical issues, and social issues. The revolution brought with it a new independence for women and a step apart from the "machista" attitude. Those trains of thought had to be instilled somehow

and theater played a major role. In addition, people who had never been interested in theater before and had no education in it were given the opportunity to put on small productions. Despite the generosity inherent in the principle, theater as a whole suffered from the lack of good solid scripts. As a matter of fact there are only a handful of scripts that have survived that era and retrieving them is quite difficult.

Salomon Alarcon, head of the National School of the Arts in Nicaragua, can only laugh at the time when refined sugar was not available in Nicaragua. The country did not have money to refine sugar so they began writing scripts and performing them all over the country teaching the locals that refined sugar was incredibly bad for you and that brown sugar is what was needed to remain healthy. Alarcon laughed at how theater was used...and the fact that it worked. All over Nicaragua people believed they were using brown sugar simply for health reasons.

The fact is that there were incredible amounts of theater during this era, more so than during the time of Somoza. There were theater conferences in Nicaragua and the arts in general were in full bloom.

In retrospect however, this era did not deliver solid works of theater that would later become points of reference historically or aesthetically. This surge in theater was temporary. Arellano titles his chapter on the Sandinista era "*In Between Euphoria and Deterioration*" (Arellano 161). The euphoria comes as Nicaragua had just triumphed over the dictator. Possibilities were endless. Though there were many young people interested and excited about the possibilities, the lack of staff and literary education became the demise of the movement and the enthusiasm. The focus was on political reform and socio-drama and the literary text was secondary. Arellano comments:

"Because of the absence of that (dramatic text) and the promotion of spontaneity in improvised collective creations there would be consequences. And so, before there were words in these creations there were actions --- the actors, young men and women with out a single drop of literary sensibility threw themselves to do sketches, sociodrama, revolutionary ideology..." (Arellano, 163).

The revolution could have brought with it the beginning of a whole new Theatrical era as Chicano Theater did here in the United States. Luis Valdez, following Brechtian thought, also began with sketches and unquestionable political drama. Education was also a very big part of Luis Valdez' purpose as he wanted to educate the migrant farm workers on their living conditions. The difference was that Luis Valdez believed in the dramatic text and its implications.

The theater group Justo Rufino Garay, is one of the few that has remained constant since that era. Beginning in television, they began to do theatrical workshops. Soon after, the founder, Lucero Millan, took advantage of the funding from the Sandinista government and received a grant to fund a physical theater space. Today, she heads the only company that has their own theater. We will study her and her company in a later chapter, since she made a significant contribution to the pool of actors in Nicaragua.

The groups that were funded during the Golden era were not completely gone after 1979. The TEM and LA COMEDIA were both putting on productions and continuing their advocacy for non-political Theater. Dona Gladys Ramirez de Espinoza, one of the original founders of the TEM, recalls:

"We still had productions. We didn't need their money so we still did what we wanted. If we wanted to put on Lorca we would, or well...anything we wanted. They didn't get involved"

(Dona Gladys Ramirez de Espinoza, personal interview #1, February 2001).

Bonilla recalls some similar sentiments:

"They didn't get involved (referring to the Sandinistas). They offered us money to do things for them but we didn't get involved in all that political stuff. We lost many opportunities (financially) during all of that but I think that in the end it went better for us."

(Bonilla, Interview #1)

The change in presidency in 1985 didn't have much of an impact on the theater. Violeta Chamorro, or Dona Violeta as the pueblo lovingly calls her, didn't improve things dramatically, although those involved in theater believed that during her government there was greater freedom in the expression of the arts. The individual companies were able to put on whatever production they desired with no pressure from political agencies. Not enough time has elapsed since her governing however to really take account of all events. Aleman, the president after Chamorro, also didn't make a huge impact. Both presidents, Chamorro and Aleman, appreciated and encouraged theater, but during both governments there were more pressing matters to deal with than the arts. In order for the arts to flourish, there must be a certain amount of nourishment available; financial and otherwise. Here are some statistics: In the National School of the Arts, headed by Salomon Alarcon, all of the arts are housed: music, dance, theater,

and art. In the music department there are 180 students, art 120, dance, 60 and theater 16. There are so few students in the theater department that they are no longer going to have it as a major. Students will be able to receive workshops there and certificates which show they have completed approved workshops, but the funding simply does not exist anymore to have theater as a major and very simply, the students graduating have no jobs upon graduation, thus making the major obsolete.

Since the Somoza dynasty, theater in Nicaragua has not had the opportunity to thrive. Although the Sandinistas made a courageous attempt, theater has been on a decline since the early 80's. The later presidencies, that of Chamorro and Aleman, were not able to rescue theater from its rapid waning. Although both presidencies have made enormous strides financially for the country, it has not been enough to give the theater the life-saver it needs to become a popular venue for the Nicaraguan people. If you ask Alfredo Valessi, who once headed the National School of the Arts and directed often with the TEM, he will say, "*there is no theater in Nicaragua today.*" To agree or not is a personal choice. As for this writer, theater would be dead if it were not for the three women who have withstood the challenges that have continually been devoted to the art they love. Socorro Bonilla, Dona Gladys and the women in the TEM, and Lucero Millan hold the key to the survival of theater in Nicaragua.

CHAPTER 3

DONA GLADYS RAMIREZ DE ESPINOZA

The TEM or *El Teatro Experimental de Managua* (The Experimental Theater of Managua) had an advantage over the other small theater companies of the time. The TEM was funded by Gloria Pereira de Belli, Gladys Ramirez de Espinoza, and Adelita Pellas de Solorzano, who happened to be members of Managua's high society. They did not have to work, although some did, and they could dedicate all of their energy on the theater and their families. The ladies either had the money on hand for productions or, because of their influence and connections, had a way to get the funding for all of their projects. This created an advantage, especially during the years after the revolution when money was the scarcest if you were not working directly with the Sandinistas. Socorro Bonilla recalls:

"The TEM is a group of women, very qualified who worked intensely for social works of Theater. Because of their economic condition none of the actors got paid, or any one involved for that matter. Once in a while if they brought an outside actor but that was not very common."

(Bonilla Interview #3)

Dona Gladys explains that although that was true, they did however charge admission (Ramirez de Espinoza, interview #1). All of the money they collected was considered donations to whatever cause presented it.

"Before each production I would have 10 different organizations asking for the money to be donated to them. We did the best we could," said Dona Gladys during her second interview. The money collected at admission was not a profit for the organization but a contribution to the community. At the same time, their inability to pay actors put an incredible strain on the company; They felt conflicted making demands on people who were not drawing salaries.

"Most of our actors are professionals. That is difficult because it takes us at least three to four months to get a production on its feet. We have an actor working on our current production who is a doctor, the other is a lawyer; it's been a challenge to get an actual rehearsal scheduled because of professional engagements."

(Ramirez de Espinoza, Interview #2)

The TEM was officially funded in 1961. The seeds were planted in a 1951 production of a play called Mascaras Exigen La Vida (Masks Demand Life). The actresses involved in that production, Adelita Pellas Solorzano to name one, later became the TEM. In 1960 the group, who had not yet taken the name TEM, received the *Gueguense de Oro* (similar to a Tony as the competition in those years was stiff) for 'Best Company' and Mimi Hammer who worked with the group as an actress received "Best Actress" for her performance in The Constant Wife. The 60's were a wonderful and busy time for EL TEM. During those years, they were producing plays regularly.

1962-1963 were considered the best years for the TEM. Esquina Peligrosa, (Dangerous Corner) was mounted in 1962 under the Direction of Tacho Sanchez. That year the production took almost all of the *Gueguenses de Oro*. The TEM was not just

Their most renowned work however was La Zorra y Las Uvas (The Fox and the Grapes) by Guillermo Figueiredo and directed by Tacho Sanchez, which won them a *Gueguense de Oro* for best actors. 1964 brought Puebla de Las Mujeres (City of the Women) directed by the duo of Gladys Ramirez De Espinoza and Pereira de Belli who often directed together. They also team-directed Hamlet and Romeo and Juliet. As a matter of fact, Dona Gladys says that their artistic unity is something she misses incredibly. *"We directed together most of the time. Co-directors. We worked so well together that it always worked. She is passed away now and I miss her input."* (Ramirez de Espinoza, interview #2).

The company grew and continued to bring forth theater on a regular basis until 1978. Their purpose during those years as stated by Gladys Ramirez de Espinoza was:

"To use theater as a vehicle of culture. We funded it first to awaken a love for the theater that at that time did not exist...we wanted to put on theater that had a positive message and moral values that we also possessed, and we wanted to introduce to the Nicaraguan people international theater."

(Espinoza, Interview #1)

During the first years of the revolution many people left Nicaragua.

"You know that during the revolution a lot of people left. Some came back but not all. Some came back right after the initial offset, others waited a little."

(Espinoza, Interview # 1)

While many of the educated people of Managua left for the United States with the commencement of the Revolution, as did Dona Gladys, many of those same people began lives abroad and decided not to return to Nicaragua. Dona Gladys came back as soon as

While many of the educated people of Managua left for the United States with the commencement of the Revolution, as did Dona Gladys, many of those same people began lives abroad and decided not to return to Nicaragua. Dona Gladys came back as soon as she thought it safe to return. Today, Dona Gladys is a widow but she and two of her three children reside in Nicaragua. During the years after the revolution the TEM still did productions but not as frequent as they did in the 60's and early 70's. The political climate was very different. *"During the Sandinista Government there was a lot of attention to the cultural sector but at the same time they wanted to use it."* (Espinoza, interview #1) Specifically, they used theater to educate, encourage and inspire revolutionary thought. *"There was more diversity, more participation, but less quality."* (Espinoza, interview #1) As discussed in the History Chapter, there was less quality because there was less attention paid to the script. The actors became more important than the script. The script became a sort of guide. It consisted of ideas and situations while the dialogue was spontaneous. Isidro Rodriguez, who is a theater activist and theater critic for *La Prensa*, the country's newspaper, explains the following chart:

	<i>BEFORE 79</i>	<i>AFTER 79</i>
TEXT	text important	denied text
QUALITY	classics & new works	not many revolutionary plays have endured
EDUCATION	theater student, cultured	more people, less education

"There was a lot of stuff going on; a lot of things happening. That was great. But all the people who knew theater were gone to the United States."

They were putting people in charge of projects and they had no idea what to do. They denied everything that was foreign, that's why they denied foreign scripts and foreign ways of doing things."

(Isidro Rodriez, personal interview, February 2001)

Rodriguez believes fervently that the quality of texts decreased due to the rejection of the notion of a script. In addition, many of the "educated" individuals who participated in theater left immediately after the onset of the revolution, leaving the aspiring thespians, who had no formal training, to their good intentions and lack of knowledge.

According to Dona Gladys, quality was not the only thing that suffered during those years. *"During the Sandinista Government, artists had financial support, but had no liberty of action. They didn't dare express themselves."* In other words, an artist could express himself as long as it agreed with the present government.

"Let me tell you something, the play we are trying to put on right now is a political satire. We tried to produce it during Somoza, they said no. We tried again during the Sandinistas, after three days, they came and took all of the scripts...we'll see what happens this time."

(Espinoza #1)

Dona Gladys' greatest contribution was not her theater itself, although that in itself is a great contribution. Her advocacy and support of the theater when she had the power to make a difference is what stands out and makes her vital in the history of theater in Nicaragua.

When Violeta Chamorro became president of Nicaragua, Espinoza became the Minister of the Institute of Culture, enabling her to have direct access to the president.

Before the Sandinista Government, Padre Cardenal had the position. During the Sandinista Government, Rosio Murillo (the wife of then President Daniel Ortega) had the post. Both had no real interest in theater. Currently, the Institute of Culture is under the subdivision of Ministry of Education, Culture, and Sports, once again giving it a lesser degree of importance. Chamorro's presidency however, permitted Dona Gladys to make sure that those involved in the theater were being heard and respected. Bonilla recalls that, "*In her(Espinoza) labor as minister, she always supported the theater. With us as a group, she was also very kind.*"(Bonilla Interview #3) In this position, she was able to inspire greater freedom in theatrical expression. Restrictions were significantly less severe or some would argue non-existent.

Her second greatest contribution was her column in La Prensa, which she wrote for ten consecutive years in the late 70's and early 80's. In this column she had her greatest influence as she was able to educate and inspire the readers about theatrical activity in Nicaragua. If theater was at a point of dwindling, Dona Gladys words once again sparked interest and controversy in current and future productions. Also, as theater is a reflection of the political environment in a country, she indirectly had a very powerful political voice.

Of the three women interviewed, Gladys Ramirez de Espinoza was the most vocal about her political beliefs. As she is part of the National Unity Party, she believes in national unity. "*We are a small country where every one knows everyone. Only with forgiveness and real forgetting will we be able to get ahead. Dona Violeta (Chamorro) was a president who reduced an army of 90,000 to one of 20,000, that is an incredible accomplishment.*" (Espinoza, interview #1) In regards to theater, Dona Gladys believes

that “ *We never had real liberty in theater, not with Somoza not with Ortega, only with Violeta.*”

Dona Gladys Ramirez de Espinoza contributed so much to the theater because of a true passion for it. “*I never acted, well except in school. When I was in boarding school in France, there was a school production and they needed some one and I did it. Since then though I have always directed or been a critic or commentator. That was my affinity, not acting.*” (Espinoza, interview#1) Of her person and moral character, her competitor says this:

“I think she is very important in the theater and you need to talk with her. She is a morally healthy individual, with a wonderful education, great social grace, and an excellent position here in Nicaragua. She has gotten along well with every one. She is not an aggressive person, nor does she have professional jealousies with any one. She works for her group, like we all work for our groups.”

(Bonilla, Interview #3)

CHAPTER 4

SOCORRO BONILLA CASTELLON

Socorro Bonilla Castellon was born in Masatepe, Nicaragua, in the department of Masaya. It lies south of Managua, the capital of Nicaragua. During the first interview, Castellon spoke of the premature loss of her father while still a child. Her mother, wanting the very best for her daughter, sent her to Managua for her studies, where she finished her degree in education. There, her love for the theater began as she participated in several school productions. After graduation she returned to Masatepe where she directed the school of Commerce. Later she again traveled to Managua and worked as an administrative assistant while still deciding what to do with her life. Through all of this, she still had an unexplainable desire for the theater, so she began studying at the National School of the Arts in Managua. While she was working as an administrative assistant in Managua, she made contacts that led her to a scholarship to go to Spain and study performance. Upon her return from her studies in Spain she began *La Comedia Nacional*, (It will be referred to as *La Comedia*) The National Comedy. (although, to clarify, there is no official national company.)

La Comedia's official birthday is the 13th of May of the year 1965. Its first production was Los Arboles Mueren de Pie, (Trees Die on Their Feet) by Alejandro Casona. It was performed at the Theater of the Red Cross in Managua, and the production itself was a success. Los Arboles Mueren de Pie was just the beginning of a lengthy

repertoire of productions by *La Comedia* that has yet to have a closing chapter. Bonilla was always involved in some way, although not always in the same capacity, in all productions produced by her company. She served as director and actor. Other times she would systematize, as is her character, and would continually fundraise for the productions, which depending on who was governing, could be an enormous challenge. Most of their subsidy has been from private investors. In recent years, the Swiss Association of International Growth (ASDI) has been a proud benefactor of *La Comedia*. From 1972, the year of the great earthquake of Nicaragua, until now, the Swiss Government has been involved in Nicaraguan affairs. The Swiss have given aid to Nicaragua for many years and recently they have been present in some aspect in several theatrical companies including *La Comedia*, and the Justo Rufino Garay, Lucero Millan's company. In an article in *REVISTA*, a magazine published in Nicaragua, Bonilla explains:

"The idea behind the creation of La Comedia was the fact that comedy itself is a genre that allows interaction with all human emotions. It distracts and entertains always with a social message and constructive criticism."

Bonilla, now 64 years old, is candid about the sacrifice that she as a woman in Nicaragua had to endure in order to accomplish all that she did while simultaneously being grateful for her family.

"I was real lucky, Octavio (her husband) always understood. Zalmira, although a child, was always supportive and understanding of my long

hours. I had to work, be a wife, a mother, a teacher. Still, if I were to die today, they would both some how continue supporting theater."

(Bonilla Interview #3)

In fact, most of the members of *La Comedia* have to work other full time jobs in order to survive. They do not have the luxury to have theater as their only occupation. The fact is that they can not simply do theater in order to sustain themselves. Socorro Bonilla herself is the Director of the University of the Valley, a university in Managua. *"It would be nice to do theater and just theater, but then we can't live the way we want to live."* (Bonilla, interview #2)

In the beginning, *La Comedia* focused on all types of theater. Their repertoire included works from Shakespeare to Pablo Antonio Cuadra, the popular Nicaraguan playwright. They did however put special emphasis on children's theater. Bonilla's only regret is that *La Comedia* has yet to achieve its own space. This is due to the lack of funding. Every Sunday afternoon at 4:00pm the company produces a children's play at the *Ruben Dario* which is the National Theater of Nicaragua. The problem is that when the theater gets an engagement that offers them a larger profit than that of *La Comedia*'s production, *La Comedia* gets bumped. *"So we may have the space three weeks in a row and the next three weeks some one else is occupying it. We try for every week but it doesn't always come through."* (Bonilla, Interview #3) Bonilla feels compelled to reach children and expose them early on to the majesty and opportunities the theater offers. *"Theater does not only advance the conscience of the multitudes, but it has helped develop humanity."* (Bonilla, Interview #3)

From the year 1965, the birth of La Comedia, until the year 1979, the revolution, La Comedia took the natural course for a growing successful theater company, if there is a natural course. As the years passed they became more professional and evolved into a company that was respected and seen as a place where actors wanted to work. The gradual growth of the company is evident through the increased number of advertisers and the quality of the programs.

After the year 1979 there was a radical change in the theatrical climate from Bonilla's point of view, there was really less freedom:

"When the Sandinista government took over, many people said that during the Somoza government they didn't do any theater...But what I have lived, well I'm old enough...I lived during Somoza, the Somoza stage, the revolution, and all the other governments, Dona Violeta, now Aleman. But during Somoza... Somoza there was a lot of theater because Somoza didn't tell us what we could or couldn't do- If he didn't promote, he also didn't prohibit, and so a lot of groups were born."

(Bonilla, Interview #2)

She described the Sandinista Theater as a pamphlet style theater where there is collective creativity, so the quality was not sustained and it got lost in time.

Socorro Bonilla and Dona Gladys seem to agree that during the Sandinista government there was more theater but of less quality. A solid, quality script is one with a complete arc and well-developed characters. Subject matter is not the issue. The Sandinistas however, rejected all that was foreign, including the idea of the written script.

therefore not allowing themselves the opportunity to develop quality scripts and not allowing themselves the opportunity for quality theater that will transcend time.

"There was a phenomena during the revolution. All kinds of things sprang up but after the revolution they went away and the ones that were there before, like Dona Gladys and myself, remained."

(Bonilla, Interview #3)

It is Bonilla's conviction that because they never did get involved in the political arena they were able to subsist through three decades of theater and remain a powerful force theatrically and socially. *La Comedia* was focused on doing theater, not promoting their political agendas.

Like Dona Gladys, Bonilla recollects the Sandinistas' use of the theater,

"They wanted to do a play about health, about something or other...children...we never did it. We did not dominate the collective creative thought nor were we interested in learning it. What we did and still do are adaptations."

(Bonilla, Interview #2)

In order to make theater accessible to the Nicaraguan audience, *La Comedia* adapts a play to fit within a certain format and time frame. First, they make the play shorter. Second, they simplify sets and costumes, believing less is more. Finally, they rarely go to a blackout on stage as it indicates too often the end of something. If a work of Shakespeare is five acts they will cut it drastically to fit that format. They have also cut Lorca to the bare bones as well as Oscar Wilde. *La Comedia's* purpose is to make

theater simple and thus making it accessible. *"It is necessary as we have had to adapt to the demand of the audience."* (Bonilla, Interview #2)

La Comedia's audition process today seems to be unfair to outsiders. By committee, *La Comedia* picks a work, then does a table reading. *"We already have in mind who we want as actors so we have them read and see if they fit. We may trade roles or something but we basically have it set."* (Bonilla, Interview #2) If an actor has not worked with them previously the chances of being cast in a major role is almost none.

In addition to *La Comedia*, Bonilla also directed the *Teatro Ruben Dario*, which is the National Theater of Nicaragua. This position came with much deliberation as she and her theater company were charged with being Somosistas in the 80's. The implications of that accusation could have had catastrophic results as the Sandinistas had already taken over the country in 1979. Showing any alliance to the former dictator, Somoza, could not only have destroyed Bonilla's company and reputation at the time, but could possibly have forced her out of Nicaragua. There was a court trial where she was on the witness stand for an entire day responding to questions about the theater and her motives in producing certain shows. There was testimony for and against her, but in the end she was the victor. *"The truth is I have never taken any political position."* said Bonilla in our first interview. After much debate and fight, Bonilla did serve as director of the *Ruben Dario* during the Sandinista government, and renovated it, as it had not been refurbished since the earthquake of 1972. The main problem with the space was that more than half of the air conditioning units did not work. After much contest, she made it a place where an audience could sit comfortably to enjoy a work of theater or musical

event. Because of all she endured during those years in the position of director, she was able to facilitate a theater space Nicaraguans are very proud of.

Bonilla is first and foremost a teacher. She has run a successful theater company for over three decades, taught and directed at schools and universities (including the school of dramatic arts which she finds to be the most honorable of her positions), directed the one and only major theater in Nicaragua, and is a wife and mother. Castellon considers teaching other actors as her greatest gift to the theater. *“In 34 years every one has passed by our group and they have learned.”* (Bonilla, Interview #2) Socorro Bonilla’s training as a teacher has given her the gift of giving. Instead of professional jealousies, she insists on sharing all that she has learned in her 64 years of life. She doesn’t only know theater but she knows how to teach. She has the training to instruct, guide, and direct actors in the right artistic and professional choices.

Socorro Bonilla is a diplomat. During the research process for this thesis, Bonilla led the writer to all sorts of people for interviews, including people with whom she may not share the same artistic vision. During the interview sessions, she would never mention her opinions or thought on any particular person and would wait for a first encounter and this writer’s feedback to comment at all. *“I didn’t want to say anything about anyone, I figured you could form your own opinion.”* (Bonilla, Interview #4) Socorro Bonilla’s goal in sharing information and resources with the writer was to provide enough information to give UNLV and whoever else might read this thesis an accurate picture of what theater in Nicaragua was, is now, and can be. Though that is not the intent, Socorro Bonilla may sound glorified in this thesis. The fact remains that she and her company have contributed so much for the good of the theater in Nicaragua that

it is difficult to find negative points to emphasize. She is, as most actors are, embellished with a healthy amount of ego, yet her desires as a teacher and instructor surpass those issues. The fact is, that there is not much competition in Nicaragua in the arena of theater these days. Besides La Comedia and EL TEM, the only other company that holds any ground in this area of theater is Lucero Millan's company, the Justo Rufino Garay.

CHAPTER 5

LUCERO MILLAN AND THE JUSTO RUFINO GARAY

Lucero Millan is not a native Nicaraguan. In fact, in 1979 with the onset of the revolution, she and her husband came from Mexico to Nicaragua to aid in the revolution and to do theater. Millan is an individual whose morals and character are questioned by her peers yet her talent in the theatrical arena is above reproach.

Her company, Justo Rufino Garay, began in television. The group was headed by Millan and her partner/husband Enrique Pol and worked on the Sandinista television network in addition to focusing on workshops for actors in correlation with the network. After a while, still under Lucero Millan's leadership, they departed the network to focus on theater. Lucero Millan can still recollect with a smile their next step: "*We used to do theater right there in that park...right there. El Paque de Las Palmas.*" (Park of the Palms). They literally did workshops and collaborations in the middle of the park.

During those years, artists in general, including those involved in theater, were on salary by the government. This is where history gets controversial, as not enough time has elapsed to know what is fact. Both Veronica Castillo and Rene Medina, current members of the group, say that the money that was made by the company enabled them to purchase a space that was converted into a theater seating 20 people. Others state that the government gave the company the space. Octavio Robleto, a playwright, thinks

Millan an incredibly intelligent woman to take advantage of what the government gave the group:

“They offered us a space, the group that is, La Comedia, but we didn't want to do political theater and taking their space would have meant doing what they wanted and we wanted to do what we wanted. She took it though and that was good for her group. They wanted to do political theater...that's why she came here so it made sense for her.”

(Bonilla, Interview #1)

Socorro Bonilla added that when the government was giving away lands and properties there was always the fear that the owner would come back and contest it, and they would then be left with a lot of invested money and legal battles. Millan would not comment on how she got the space but she did say it took a lot of work. Regardless of how the group got the space, turning it into a theater required a lot of investment and hard labor.

“The space was so small. There was only space for the actual stage. You had no space for wings so the actors would have to go outside and around in the other door if they were required to enter on the opposite side. We hear this story all the time...they had a performance, I forget the show, it's irrelevant anyway, but the actor exited stage right and it was pouring that day, so when he exited stage right he was totally dry, he came in the next scene soaked because of the rain.”

(Rene Medina Interview)

The current space, Teatro Justo Rufino Garay (the space bears the same name as the company), was purchased in 1990 and is under renovation today. It is a space that

seats approximately 200 people and it is the only theater that is privately owned in Nicaragua. In addition to workshops for actors and seminars during the day, they have a theatrical production in the space almost every night. In the very front of the space, a small café serves beverages and snacks during the day and before theatrical performances. The space itself is in a very nice neighborhood where Dona Violeta lives, and it sits across the Park of Las Palmas, the company's former home. The company focuses not on European works, although Shakespeare has been done, but on international Latin American playwrights. It is evident by the choices Lucero Millan has made for her theater and company that she has a talent for business. That talent, however, has earned her a reputation for severity, which contributes to the fact that none of the Justo Rufino Garay's originating members, Millan excluded, are affiliated with the company today.

Mariano Nunez is the current leader of the *Grupo Fenix*, and ex member of Justo Rufino Garay. The *Grupo Fenix* is another small theater company that manages to stay afloat by giving acting classes and touring their shows. Mariano and his wife were both in Lucero Millan's group when it began. Mariano's story is that they did all work together to attain the space. They all contributed in different ways and that in the end Millan had put everything in her name and in fact betrayed them all. "*I'm grateful that she trained me as an actor; but we all worked together for that theater, together...and she betrayed us. There is no one in the troupe today that was in it when it started.*" (Mariano Nunez Interview) Now *Grupo Fenix* has had to pay to use that space for productions.

Lucero Millan's Justo Rufino Garay is the only company existing today that was conceived during the years of the revolution. Alfredo Valessi, a playwright author of

several novels and director, says that you have to leave Nicaragua in order to see theater. Maybe the fact that Lucero Millan came from Mexico has to do with the longevity of her artistic vision. She persevered even when the government stopped giving money to artists because of lack of funds. Today she holds a piece of history she is unwilling to share. Octavio Robleto believes that Millan tries to forget those years of revolution but smiles when he says, *“but the people never forget here.”*

If there was any quality in revolutionary theater, Lucero Millan was behind it. She herself says that even the collaborations were only a thought process. The group would throw out ideas, but she would put a script together. The theater that was being produced after 1979 was generally rushed and scripts were generally improvised. Too many people had input resulting in a lack of a single artistic vision to carry the dramatic action throughout the “script”. Alfredo Valessi could be right. If one does not know theater, they can be under the erroneous impression that a group of 12 people can sit down and write a play and it will make sense. With that much input, it is impossible that the play will have an obvious protagonist, powerful antagonist, and enough dramatic action to drive the play to a climatic and eventful conclusion. Lucero Millan was informed enough to make the choice to have collective input but to have one single playwright. Even so, she is not proud of the work she did at the time and does not discuss it very much except to say that her group was born of that era.

In the files of Don Salomon Alarcon, the man in charge of the National School of the Arts, this writer was lucky to find an article included in Alarcon’s personal files written by Juan Rulfo, a Nicaraguan reporter. The article included an interview with

Lucero Millan in which she states her philosophy of theater during those revolutionary years. In this article she states:

"the only thing I tried to do is systematize those points, the ones I find fundamental goals, that are, for example, the use of the theater like an ideological weapon. It is a point I believe the whole world agrees with because if we don't agree with that we are out of context. In this revolution we all have to be committed to using art like a machine gun."

(Alarcon Files, Date Unknown)

The theatrical phenomena that occurred during the years 1979 until approximately 1985 is controversial.

"The theater falls with the war. The Sandinistas rose and they were ignorant people, maybe they were brave but they were ignorant, especially in their artistic ideas. Then came a lot of international people with ideas from Moscow and socialist realism in their heads- and they came and brought socio-drama. They came with the idea from Cuba that we must start from Zero...There was no theater in Nicaragua before, we have to start from zero. 'There was nothing!' they said...crazy"

(Valesi Interview)

The thinking that Nicaragua's theater must start from zero negates anything good that occurred in the *Epoca de Oro* (1951-1978). To even insinuate that the theater after 1979 negates the earlier theater is erroneous considering that the later theater was merely an effort that is yet to be realized. The Sandinistas intentions to promote and make theater accessible to all people in the nation was honorable in the sense of making the arts

available to all people, but unfortunately, not enough people were trained enough to produce quality theatrical events.

Luis Valdez's Teatro Campesino in California began with similar roots but the balance between people of theatrical background and campesinos (farm workers) was the key to its success. Like Luis Valdez, Lucero Millan had some theater training and with that knowledge, she managed to stand out from the other companies of the revolutionary era. In fact, there is no other company in Nicaragua with similar origins worthy of being compared to Justo Rufino Garay. During the revolutionary era, all the companies funded by the government had the same basic purpose: to educate and inspire the Nicaraguan people in revolutionary thought. Of the several companies and groups that were established in those years, the Justo Rufino Garay is the only survivor. Gladys Ramirez de Espinoza, as well as Socorro Bonilla, were not involved in political theater, and so were in a completely different genre.

Lucero Millan is proud to say that her company has trained many actors in Nicaragua thus making the actors' pool for her and the other companies in Nicaragua larger. She, like the other two women, prides herself in sharing and being a teacher. Lucero Millan is incredibly busy. She not only directs her theater and company, she is the President of CELCIT (Center for the Latin American Theatrical creation and investigation), and she is the director of La Red (The Web) of cultural promoters in Latin America and the Caribbean. Her company is also the founder of a festival of monologues that is open to all of Latin America and has been around for years. Though these are past colleagues who question her character and loyalties, Millan is respected for her work.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Although the women studied in the previous chapters deserve special attention, they do not repudiate the other companies or groups that have contributed and persevered through the years in the theatrical arena of Nicaragua. As of the year 2001, there are 14 theater companies in existence in Nicaragua.

The group *TEUCA* is a university group. They have been in existence since before the revolution and have inspired individuals to become interested in professional theater.

The National School of Theater, part of the National School of the Arts, now headed by Salomon Alarcon, also has its own theater company. They occasionally have productions but they are not considered a professional company, although, its members often go out and work in the main companies of Nicaragua upon graduation. The school has changed its program, and will no longer have a defined theater program. Instead, they will have workshops and the students will get certificates for the workshops they complete. Anyone will be able to attend the separate workshops. This of course means that no theater degree will be available. This action brings into question what will happen to the company; but, as of now, it still exists.

UNICA, *El Toil*, and *El Eko* are all small theater groups that were conceived after

the revolution and that occasionally produce works. The members cannot sustain themselves solely in theater and they all have to rent out space in order to perform. *Thalia* is another group that began after the revolution, although the name may be familiar as it has been mentioned in chapter one. The previous group named *Thalia* was headed by Adan Castillo and existed in the *Epoca de Oro*. It is no longer a running company. *Estrella Nueva*, like the *Justo Rufino Garay*, began with the revolution, but the group has not been as consistent and successful. *Fenix* we have already been introduced to in Ch. 4 and *Tearo Estudio* is a nascent company that has yet to define itself.

Group Niquinomo, based in Niquinomo, and *El Quetzalkoal* are both companies whose origins date back to before the revolution. As a matter of fact, both these companies are full of history. They both focus on indigenous theater. Grupo Niquinomo is busy only once a year. They perform *El Gueguense* once a year and everyone from all over the country goes to see its performance. The entire town participates and it is a theatrical spectacle that is worth the travel. The last two we have discussed in depth; *El TEM*, and *Comedia Nacional*, both established before the revolution.

In Bonilla's opinion, the reason theater is minimally produced while poetic writing, stories, and novels are proportionally greater is because theater requires a higher level of evolution in the individual writing, and greater culture over all sustaining characters. In other words, theater requires a character not only to be born, but to breathe life. The character has to have problems, have and a history, in essence, a true life. Ironically, Nicaragua is a country where poetry is rampant. If one is not a poet, he is the son of a poet, or the nephew of a poet, at the very least. It is a country that has chosen to express itself and its tribulations by the poetic word. That mastery of language is vital

also to the playwright, and so it is tragic that a country full of such skill in the manipulation of language, has yet to grasp the proficiency that brings those words to life on stage.

The Sandinista government had honorable intentions in their artistic pursuits. Valessi says they were ignorant, but somehow they had a sense that “*theater does not only advance the conscience of the multitudes but it helps develop humanity.*” (Bonilla #3) The desire to put artists on salary to free them from responsibilities other than their creations was a step in the right direction. They put an emphasis on the arts that no other government before had acknowledged as important. Unfortunately, the quantity outweighed the quality of the work produced. The *Epoca de Oro* is still the era that produced the most quality work in Nicaragua’s theatrical history.

Government has much to do with the theater in Nicaragua. Although Bonilla insisted in saying she was void of political partition, her company still faced pressure from the Sandinista government. Gladys Ramirez de Espinoza, on the other hand, was very open about her political affiliations and is today still hoping that Dona Violeta Chamorro, the former president, will run for the presidency again. In her words, *That was the only time theater was truly free in Nicaragua.*” Lucero Millan is known to be dawning out of the Sandinista party and still sympathizes with the party, yet, she maintains that she is presently not directly involved.

The fact that these women, who have very different political agendas, or none at all, have persevered is partially the reason for the thesis. If these women were to have followed the example of what the rest of the country did directly after the revolution --- Dona Gladys gone to America not to return, Millan, gone back to Mexico when the funds

were cut, or Bonilla, gone about her daily job and not insisted in exposing the theater to Nicaraguans --- the theatrical reality in Nicaragua would be bleak. All Nicaragua would have is a few little companies that go about the country performing little skits, accompanied by the indigenous companies that only do productions when linked to religious celebrations. These three women are vital to the advancement of the theater. Regardless of politics or hidden agendas, these women have done theater --- pure marvelous theater.

Dona Gladys Ramirez de Espinoza not only established a theater company that has maintained a high production standard in a third world country, but for a decade, had a strong voice in Nicaragua with her theater column. She advocates for the advancement of theater. Regardless of the complications the country is facing, she has not allowed theater to be forgotten, and has always insisted, on its necessity for the well being of the country. She insists that the arts bring a sense of balance, that regardless of social status, one is entitled to be exposed to.

Socorro Bonilla Castellon, in all of her endeavors, has focused on the quality of the theater presented. She has not only produced the wonderful European playwrights we are familiar with, like Brecht and Shakespeare, but has also had the courage to present works by American playwrights like Tennessee Williams. (American playwrights are not usually presented in Nicaragua because of the complications with copyright laws.) Her teaching emphasis however has been where she truly advanced the theater in Nicaragua. She has presented to the acting students the ideas of Stanislavski and introduced Method acting in order to expose the actors to the different methods of acting being used in the world.

Lucero Millan, on the other hand, focuses not on European or American playwrights, but chooses to produce works by local playwrights, as well as other Central and South American playwrights. She chooses to advance Hispanic theater, possibly a residue of her Sandinista background, where all that is American or foreign is rejected. Nevertheless, the quality of her work, has not only advanced her career and reputation, but has progressed the reputation of Nicaraguan actors on an international level.

The three women have advanced the theater of Nicaragua through diverse means. Despite their different approaches, beliefs, and political views, they have pressed on with the same unified goal in mind: to advance the theater of Nicaragua. Theater is a necessary outlet in which the audience can gain knowledge, conviction, and inspiration. To allow such a powerful media to disappear is a tragic possibility in Nicaragua. These three women have made certain that the people of Nicaragua have the opportunity to be exposed to the art and power of theater.

APPENDIX I

PHOTOS



Fig. 1 – Dona Gladys Ramirez de Espinoza: Co-Founder of TEM



Fig. 2 – Socorro Bonilla Castellon: Founder of La Comedia



Fig. 3 - Lucero Millan: Co-Founder of Justo Rufino Garay



Fig. 4 - El Volador (the Flyer) - See ch. 2, pg. 4



Fig. 5 - Indigenous person of Nicaragua. See ch. 2, pg. 7

APPENDIX II

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AUTORIZACION

Por la presente, autorizo a la estudiante nicaragüense TANIA BAUNDES para reproducir en su disertación académica, las fotografías e ilustraciones que figuran en mi obra Inventario teatral de Nicaragua (Managua, Banco Central de Nicaragua, 1998).

Managua, 2 de julio de 2001.

Jorge Eduardo Obelleiro

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Fig. 10 - Official authorization to use magazine publication and/or photographs

AUTORIZACION PARA USO DE FOTOS Y TEXTOS SOBRE TEATRO

Yo, Socorro Bonilla Castellon, natural de Managua, Nicaragua, Directora General y Miembro Fundador de Comedia Nacional de Nicaragua, grupo de Teatro Autonomo, fundado en Nicaragua en 1965, autorizo a Tania Bandes de Becerra para hacer uso de programas, textos y fotos relacionados con la trayectoria de este grupo.

Tania Bandes de Becerra en varios viajes que ha hecho a Nicaragua ha recibido de nuestros archivos Revistas de Teatro = 1 - 2 - 3 - 4, para tomar notas y contenidos para su Tesis sobre Teatro que esta preparando en San Francisco de California

Firmo la presente a los veintinueve dias del mes de junio del año dos mil uno.


SOCORRO BONILLA CASTELLÓN
 Directora General y Miembro
 Fundador de Comedia Nacional de Nicaragua


c.c. archivo cronológico

Fig. 11 - Official authorization from Socorro Bonilla Castellon to use likeness and information from interviews.

AUTHORIZATION TRANSLATION

For the present, I authorize this Nicaraguan student, Tania Bandes, the reproduction, in her academic dissertation, the photographs and illustrations that are in my work, Nicaraguan Theatrical inventory (Managua, Central bank of Nicaragua 1998).

Managua. 2 of July of 2001

signed: Jorge Eduardo Arellano

Translation of Fig. 10

AUTHORIZATION FOR USE OF PHOTOS AND TEXTS ABOUT THEATER

I, Socorro Bonilla Castellon, natural of Managua, Nicaragua, General Manager and founding member of the National Comedy of Nicaragua, an independent theater group founded in Nicaragua in 1965, authorize Tania Bandes de Becerra to use programs, texts, and photos relating to this group.

Tania Bandes de Becerra, in several trips to Nicaragua, has received from our archives the magazines TEATRO 1-2-3-4, to take notes from its content for her thesis about theater that she is preparing in San Francisco, California.

signed on the 29 of June, 2001

Socorro Bonilla Castellon

Translation of Fig. 11

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