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SUNSETS AND Margaritas

By José Cruz González
Directed by
Nicholas C. Avila

Apr 3- May 16
The Ricketson Theatre

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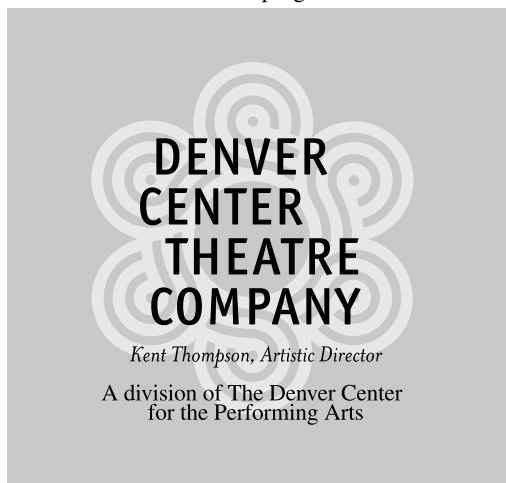
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Douglas Langworthy Editor
 Sally Gass Contributing Writer
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SYNOPSIS

“LUZ: We’ll get through this. You’ll see: we’ll have our sunsets and margaritas, too.”

S*unsets and Margaritas* Gregorio and Luz Serrano are aging baby boomers who are looking forward to retirement with the enjoyment of travel, grandchildren and paid-up mortgages. But they have a crisis in their lives: they are plagued with the predicament of an aging parent, problem children and spirit visitations. Candelario is Gregorio’s 78-year-old father who smashes his red convertible Cadillac through the wall of the family restaurant. In addition, he thinks he’s being pursued by Koreans, is forgetful and grieves for his dead wife, Olivia. All this prompts Gregorio and Luz to consider putting him in a retirement community where someone else will have the responsibility for his care. This angst causes Gregorio to have panic attacks that he tries to alleviate by breathing into a paper bag. Their children are wrapped up in their own concerns. Gabby Serrano is a 29-year-old unmarried Republican lesbian with a yet unnamed newborn. She is a drama queen with raging hormones which produce tears and lactation at inconvenient times. Jojo Serrano is a 22-year-old who rides a low-rider wheelchair while he dreams of being a gangster fashion designer. As the action starts to spin out of control, Gregorio starts being visited by spirits from the realm of Mexican folktales and religion.

In this comedy of machismo, myths and mirages, we view how *la familia* remains *la familia* in a time of generational and cultural changes.

THE PLAYWRIGHT — JOSE CRUZ GONZALEZ

Jose's plays include *Three Tuesdays*, *Earth Songs*, *Thaddeus and Tila*, *Old Jake's Skirts*, *Waking Up in Lost Hills (A Central California Rip Van Winkle)*, *Lily Plants a Garden*, *The Red Forest*, *September Shoes*, *Always Running*, *Two Donuts*, *Salt & Pepper*, *The Highest Heaven*, *La Posada*, *Harvest Moon* and *Mariachi Quixote*. He is a recipient of a 2004 Theatre Communications Group (TCG) Pew National Theatre Residency grant. Jose has written for the "PAZ," the Emmy Award nominated television series produced by

Discovery Kids for The Learning Channel. In 1997 he was awarded a grant from the NEA/TCG Theatre Residency Program for Playwrights, and in 1985 was a NEA Director Fellow. He teaches theatre at California State University in Los Angeles and is a member of The Dramatists Guild of America, ASSITEJ/USA and an Associate Artist with Cornerstone Theatre Company and Childsplay. His play, *September Shoes*, received a mainstage production at the Denver Center Theatre Company during the 2005/06 season.

MAGIC REALISM

Candelario talks to his deceased wife, Olivia. Gregorio is visited by La Llorona and la Virgen de Guadalupe who practices her stand-up comedy routine before him. This literary device, injecting the dream world into everyday life, is known as "magic realism." Characterized by a juxtaposition of apparently reliable realistic reportage and extravagant fantasy, magic realism appears in a large body of spectacular fiction produced in South America after World War II, but has expanded world wide.

In magic realism, truth is best viewed as a communal, collaborative construct, rather than in the integrity of individual perceptions. In the theatre magic realism is magic from the standpoint of the audience, but realistic from the standpoint of the characters in the play. The characters may perceive a situation as bizarre, but they must deal with it as a real state. The audience, from its perspective, is able to isolate elements and symbols; the characters are not. Magic realism allows symbolic reality to be brought to life. The invisible may be made visible, and it becomes possible to transform the world and see glimpses of new possibilities.

In her book *Magic(al) Realism*, Maggie Ann Bowers says the term originated with the German art critic Franz Roh in the 1920s. He used the

term to define a kind of painting that had a representation of mystical, non-material aspects to it. "For the new art, it is a question of representing before our eyes, in an intuitive way, the fact, the interior figure, of the exterior world."¹ The era in which he wrote followed the German defeat in World War I, a time of political fragility, political violence and extreme economic difficulty.

Actually the movement of magic realism can be traced back to the 16th century Spanish writer Miguel de Cervantes. His novel *Don Quixote* is a precursor of magic realism in the opposition of the mad, idealistic knight and his sane pragmatic squire, Sancho Panza. "Don Quixote's belief in what he perceives is absolute but can be seen by his companion—and the reader—differently."²

Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986) is often thought of as the father of modern Latin American writing and of magic realism. In his *A Universal History of Infamy* (1935), a collection of short fiction, he was influenced by the work of Franz Kafka, the Czechoslovakian writer whose story *Metamorphosis* is about a man awakening to find himself transformed into an insect.

The Columbian novelist Gabriel Garcia Marquez, a chief exponent of magic realism, sets the majority of his novels in a fictional town called Macondo on an isolated Caribbean coast. His *One Hundred*

Years of Solitude, written in Mexico in 1967, is a family history full of quaint, nostalgic and horrific moments. For example, the birth of a baby with a tail is considered an everyday reality. When he received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1982, Garcia Marquez explained how the tumultuous past and present of Latin America lends itself to magic realism “due to its ability to convey the unearthly tidings of Latin America.”³

Miguel Angel Asturias (1899-1974), a Guatemalan novelist, incorporates Mayan mythology and the history of oppression in his novel *Men of Maize* (1949). The plot reflects the Mayan story of the “rain woman” or “mother of maize” who is caught between the worlds of earth and sky. When the man finds his “rain woman” wife, he appears to be reunited with the earth (land taken away from him by the colonists).

Isabel Allende is the first woman writer from Latin America to win renown as a magical realist. Her novel, *The House of the Spirits* (1982), is narrated by the granddaughter Alba and follows the stories of three generations of women and their working class lovers. Clara, Alba’s great aunt, reappears in the family house as a ghost to influence the next generation. “Clara’s spiritualism simply represents happy times that are destroyed by natural and political cataclysms.”⁴ Isabel Allende, the goddaughter and cousin of ex-president Salvador Allende, experienced a time of dictatorship, civil unrest and police brutality under the government of Colonel Pinochet.

Laura Esquivel’s novel *Como Agua para Chocolate* (Like Water for Chocolate) (1989) is also written from a female perspective. Completed in Mexico, Esquivel begins each chapter with a food recipe taken from a monthly magazine. The novel proceeds from the recipe’s instructions and relates the tragic love affair of Tita, the cook and her sister’s husband. Tita’s food communicates her emotions to such a degree that the people who eat it enact her emotions for her. For example, after consuming the wedding cake which Tita baked while suffering from unrequited love, the wedding guests suffer from “a wave of longing: the weeping was just the first symptom of a strange intoxication—an acute attack of pain and

frustration that seized the guests and scattered them across the patio.”⁵ The narrative shows the domestic life of women who are rejected by their racist and socially ambitious families; the political world interrupts when the family is visited by soldiers who demand food and shelter in an interminable civil war. Another female novelist is Ana Castillo, a Chicana writer, whose book *So Far from God* (1993) includes aspects of Native American mythology such as the ability to change shape and take on the form of animals and characters who return from the dead.

The influence of magic realism has spread worldwide. Salman Rushdie, the Indian novelist, used the technique in *Midnight’s Children* (1981) and *The Satanic Verses* (1988). The African-American writer and Nobel Prize recipient, Toni Morrison, employs the device in her works *Song of Solomon* (1977), *Beloved* (1987) and *Jazz* (1992). Maxine Hong Kingston, a Chinese-American novelist, utilized magic realism in her book *The Woman Warrior: a Memoir of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*. In addition, the American playwright Tony Kushner uses magic realism in his plays *Angels in America* and *Caroline or Change*.

To summarize, magic realism seems to arise when political repression and instability exist; when individuals emerge from war and its aftermath; and when a national or personal crisis causes extreme suffering. It is non-judgmental and open to interpretation. Most importantly, it permits the past to merge with the present.

1. Roh, p. 24.
 2. Bowers, p. 17.
 3. Bowers, p. 39.
 4. Bowers, p. 45
 5. Esquivel, p. 39.
- Bowers, Maggie Ann. *Magic(al) Realism*. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Esquivel, Laura. *Like Water for Chocolate*. London: Black Swan, 1989.
- Roh, Franz. *German Art in the Twentieth Century*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1968.

LA FAMILIA

“LUZ: *La familia es la familia.*

And she is not family!” – *Sunsets and Margaritas*

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, *la familia* became “an all-encompassing term describing a variety of relatives and compadres, most of whom lived close by and rendered mutual aid.”¹ This definition reflected close bonds of affection and assistance among members of the family. It was not limited to just the household or even biologically related kin. It also included the godparents and their families.

Members of a familia were supposed to possess and pass on certain values and behaviors. Among these were the provision of emotional support and financial security for one another. Women were subordinate to men, while proper behavior, honor and maintaining self-control were taught in the home by family members.

But, as Richard Griswold del Castillo writes, “in the past 150 years there has been a conflict between the beliefs and values held by Mexican Americans regarding the proper and desirable way to live within families and the economic pressures of the American

capitalist system.”² This weakening of the family has been caused by urban growth and industrialization in which family members have had to separate from one another to find employment. Women working outside the home have blunted the patriarchal system. In addition, the degree of marital assimilation, Mexicans marrying Anglo Americans, has increased in the past fifty years.

The contemporary Latino *familia* has had to accommodate to some changes. There are now more broken homes and one-parent families. With more women working outside the home, there is one person making decisions or shared decision making instead of patriarchal authority. Work, location and responsibility have limited the number who can legitimately participate in a family.

1. del Castillo, p. 118.

2. www.sandiegohistory.org.

<http://www.sandiegohistory.org/journal/85fall/br-familia.htm>.

del Castillo, Richard Griswold. *La Familia: Chicano Families in the Urban Southwest*. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984.

PANIC ATTACKS

“LUZ: Your cholesterol is off the charts, you can’t sleep and your panic attacks are getting worse!” – *Sunsets and Margaritas*

A panic attack is a sudden episode of intense fear that develops for no apparent reason and that triggers severe physical reactions. Symptoms can include rapid heart rate, sweating, trembling, shortness of breath, chills or hot flashes, chest pain, headache, dizziness, faintness, tightness in the throat, trouble swallowing and a sense of impending death. These attacks begin suddenly without warning, usually peak within ten minutes and last about half an hour.

The causes of panic attacks are not specifically clear. Agents that may play a role include: genetics, stress and changes in the way parts of the brain function. Some research suggests the body’s natural fight-or-flight response to danger is involved, but when no

danger is present, this explanation is unclear.

If these attacks are persistent and long lasting, doctors may prescribe the benzodiazepine class of drugs for relaxation. However, there are self-management plans that can be helpful. Avoid caffeine, alcohol and illicit drugs which can trigger or worsen an attack. Practice stress management and relaxation techniques such as yoga or meditation. Get physically active since aerobic activity may have a calming effect on your mood. Be sure to get sufficient sleep so that drowsiness does not interfere with the day. Breathing into a paper bag is not a valid treatment since it has been found to be ineffective and hazardous to the patient. This practice may lower oxygen levels in the blood stream and increase carbon dioxide levels which may exacerbate a panic attack.

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/panic-attacks/DS0038/>

MACHISMO

“Machismo is complex and multifaceted” writes Omar S. Castaneda in his essay “Guatemalan Macho Oratory.”¹ In the play the four male characters demonstrate different aspects of macho behavior. Candelario is the representative of the self-aggrandizing male who flirts with danger. He smashes his car into the restaurant, wants his deceased wife back to serve him, insults his daughter-in-law and has seduced other women. Gregorio, his son, is afraid of his dad but wants to be his own man and not dictated to by his father. He is respectful to his wife, but he is filled with rage (a macho quality) over his childhood and the fact that he cannot come to terms with his father. Jojo is machismo on training wheels. He boasts of his “gang exploits” to Bianca while fantasizing about being a “gangsta” designer who used the capitalistic system to his advantage. By contrast, Sheriff Montoya exhibits none of the attributes necessary for being a macho male. Though a lawman, he is courteous and helpful to the Serrano family.

In his essay “I’m the King: the Macho Image,” Rudolfo Anaya believes that macho behavior is instilled in young boys because both parents want the child to be manly. But as more Latino-American families are headed by single parents, “the traditional role of the father and the extended-family males will not be as influential in shaping the behavior of boys.”² Instead, young males will be influenced by the Anglo culture around them—the world of MTV, rap music, movies, TV and gangs. Anaya believes young Mexican males can grow up to be “pachucos”—adolescents who use drugs, drive fast cars, drink liberally, dress provocatively and are liberated sexually. They live *la vida loca*, the crazy life. Or young men can grow up to be “*hombrotos*, men with a sense of honor.”³ The *hombrote* takes care of *la familia*, which is what being macho means according to Anaya.

Mothers play a role in raising a positive macho male. A mother who is active in shaping the maleness of her child will produce a more integrated man who will take responsibility for the family and assume a place in the community. If the mother’s love is stifled by the oppressive patriarchy system, “then a dysfunctional child will emerge.”⁴

Anaya asserts that the indigenous myths can help us understand machismo. For example, the myth of *La Llorona* (the weeping woman) has implications for men. The story concerns a young woman who is taken advantage of by a man. She has a child, but there is no male presence, so the young mother kills the child and throws the body into a river. In the legend the mother seeks the pieces of the child, but why? In Anaya’s view, *La Llorona* “is creating a new male, a child more closely aligned to the feminine sensibility without the status quo of the macho role.”⁵ He also cites the myth of *la Virgen de Guadalupe* who was the Aztec goddess Tonantzin, goddess of the earth and corn. In the Catholic Church she became the Virgin and “for the male she is the living presence of the anima, the female within.”⁶

Thus, a definition of machismo which might satisfy the male characters of the play is the one given by Luis J. Rodriguez. “The macho is the warrior, protector, defender and lover. He is artist, hero, father and elder.”⁷

1. Castaneda, p. 36

2. Anaya, p. 64.

3. Anaya, p. 66.

4. Anaya, p. 68.

5. Anaya, p. 71.

6. Anaya, p. 73.

7. Rodriguez, p. 201.

Gonzalez, R, ed. *Muy Macho: Latino Men Confront Their Manhood*. New York: Anchor Books, 1996.

Anaya, Rudolfo. “I’m the King: the Macho Image.”

Castaneda, Omar S. “Guatemalan Macho Oratory.”

Gonzalez, Ray. “Introduction”.

Rodriguez, Luis J. “On Macho.”

THE HISTORICAL AND MYTHICAL WOMEN IN SUNSETS AND MARGARITAS

L*as Soldaderas* were the soldier-women, the battlefield heroes of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920). Unfortunately, the names and personal information of most of these women have been lost or omitted from the history books, but the name of one lives on in legend: Adelita. Eventually, the word *Adelitas* became a synonym for the *soldaderas*.

La Llorona is the Weeping Woman in Mexican folklore. She is the ghost of a woman crying for her dead children that she herself drowned. Her appearances are sometimes held to presage death and frequently are claimed to occur near streams and rivers. There are many variations of the story, but she represents the woman who has failed at motherhood.

La Virgen de Guadalupe is believed to represent both the Virgin Mary and the indigenous Mexican

goddess Tonantzin by some historians. Others believe the Virgin was a simplified and sanitized version of Coatlicue, the Aztec mother goddess. This syncretism may have provided a way for the 16th century Spanish to gain converts to Christianity among the indigenous population of early Mexico. The origin of the name “Guadalupe” is a corruption of the Nahuatl name “Coatlaxopeuh” which translates as “who crushes the Serpent.” In this interpretation the serpent is Quetzalcoatl, one of the chief Aztec gods whom the Virgin Mary “crushed” by inspiring the conversion of native people to Catholicism.

<http://www.ic.arizona.edu/ic/mcbride/ws200/mex-jand.htm#Soldaderas>.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/La_Llorona

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Our_Lady_of_Guadalupe

ARTISTS AND OTHER REFERENCES

Patssi Valdez is a Latina artist out of Los Angeles who has participated in performance art, installations, photography as well as theatre and scenic design. Her paintings derive from ethnic symbols, myths and her private experiences which are feminist and painful.

Gronk is an artist whose paintings reflect Chicano traditions, wryly commenting on themes of ethnic identity, high and pop culture, romantic love and mortality.

International Workers’ Day, also known as May Day, is a celebration of the social and economic achievements of the international labor movement. It is characterized by street demonstrations and marches by millions of working people in most countries except the United States and Canada.

<http://artscenecal.com/ArticlesFile/Archives/PValdez/html>

<http://www.tandempres.wisc.edu/tandem/gallery/gronk.html>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Workers'_Day

ELDER CARE

“GREGORIO: Thou shalt not place *Su Padre* in an Old Folks’ home.”

– *Sunsets and Margaritas*

Luz thinks Candelario should be in a retirement community because he is a danger to himself and others, but Gregorio is afraid to confront his father on this issue. Candelario is 78. However, “concepts of ‘old’ come from a society that worships youth and attempts to stave off the most dreaded thing in life—aging.”¹ Even Luz and Gregorio have feelings about their own fading youth; Luz fears she’s getting fat and Gregorio is over-anxious.

Other cultures respect age; ours does not. “By 2050 more than one person out of five will be in the senior category (over 65).”² This increased lifespan is due to better medical care, life sustaining technology, healthy lifestyles and, sometimes, just good genes. Usually large, close families care for aging family members. The Serrano family is close but has other responsibilities such as running the restaurant, jobs, children and grandchildren. In addition, Candelario would not be an easy person to care for.

The best person to judge if an elderly person needs a care-giving facility is a physician. “Only five per cent of people over 65 are in long term care facilities.”³ At 78, Candelario is strong and outwardly, appears healthy. As people age, “the more dominant personality traits often become even more pronounced.”⁴ Thus, Candelario’s irascibility has now escalated to the point where he is argumentative, aggressive and demanding. Though Olivia has been dead ten years, he still misses her care. Candelario probably does not need an Old Folks’ home but better communication and cooperation with his family.

1. Williams, Kay, Williams, p. 1.

2. Ibid, p. xvii.

3. Ibid, p. 1.

4. Ibid, p. 5.

Williams, Gene B., Kay, Patie and Williams, David. *Baby Boomers’ Guide to Caring for Your Aging Parents*. New York: Taylor Trade Publishing Co., 2005.

SPANISH

Aquí estoy—Here I am.

¿Qué quieres? –What do you want?

No se me pasa nada—Nothing gets by me.

Ándale—Go ahead, go on.

Cariñoso y un gran amante –affectionate and a great lover.

Hombre fuerte y bien guapo – strong, good-looking man.

Chistes – funny stories.

Bruja – witch.

Con ganas – with desire.

Claro que sí. – Yes, of course.

Como bacalao y flan – like codfish and custard.

Viejitas – little old ladies.

¡Ahí voy! – I’m coming for you!

¡No me estorbes el paso! – Get out of my way!

¡Alto! – Stop!

¡Muévete! – Move!

¡Tu pinche padre no vale nada! – Your father is a good for nothing!

Se robo mi Nova y manejo a traves de mi Hermosa yarda. – He stole my Nova and drove across my beautiful yard.

¡Voy a llamar a la policía! – I’m calling the sheriff!
Tu padre me ha causado mucho sufrimiento y dolor. – Your father has caused me much suffering and pain.

Quiero una indemnización completa. –I want to be fully compensated.

Ahora mi contrato. – Here’s my contract.

Y un viaje de ida y vuelta a El Vaticano.—And I want a round trip ticket to the Vatican.

Que Dios te bendiga. – May God bless you.

¡Baboso! – Dummy!

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No llores. – Don't cry.

¡Qué bolo! –What's up!

Tu esposo – your husband.

¡Hábleme! – Talk to me!

No seas tan dramático! – Don't be so dramatic!

Tortuga – turtle.

¡Están todos locos! – You are all crazy!

De volada – in a rush.

Pobrecito – poor little guy.

Gusano – worm, meant as a put down towards

Cuban Americans.

Este chavo se sabe cuidar. – This guy knows how to
take care of himself.

Chillones – crybabies.

Maricones – queers.

Chavos – guys.

Los hombres no valen madre. – Men aren't worth
anything.

Manda – order, command.

Asuntos – having romantic affairs.

Mujeriego – womanizer.

Sinvergüenza – shameless, scoundrel.

Gallos – roosters.

Hijos – sons

Ropa vieja – Cuban dish of shredded beef.

Puras papas – literally means “potatoes” but is a
folk expression to mean “baloney, a bunch of lies.”

QUESTIONS & ACTIVITIES

Questions:

- 1) What purpose does magic realism serve in *Sunsets and Margaritas*?
- 2) List some television shows and movies that use a form of magic realism in their styles. Why would you classify them as using magic realism?
- 3) How would you describe the Serrano family? Explain why you would describe them in this way.
- 4) What is “machismo?” How does each male character show their macho behavior? Do the female characters foster a macho attitude among the men?
- 5) How are mythological, religious, and historical icons used by the playwright? What do the characters represent?
- 6) Why do you think the playwright chose to make the *La Virgen de Guadalupe* a stand-up comic? How did the playwright portray *La Soldadera*? *La Llorona*? How do these characters help tell the story?
- 7) Why is Gregorio upset with his father? How does he confront his father?
- 8) If you were in Gregorio and Luz’s position, would you put the grandfather, Candelario, in a retirement community? Explain why you would or would not.
- 9) What is Jojo’s business and marketing plan? Why does he identify with gang members?
- 10) Why does Bianca want to keep Sheriff Montoya from seeing the baby?
- 11) How does the May Day march tie in to the play?

Activities:

Magic Realistic Newspaper Writing

Materials: Newspapers, pen and paper

In theatre, magic realism is only perceived as magic by the audience. The characters in the play have to treat the situation as real. For this exercise, students are going to take a moment in time and bend it to make it magical.

- 1) Take a newspaper article. The article can be from any section including the sports page. Read the article and make some notes about the event that has happened and the characters that were involved. Condense the story into three parts; a beginning, middle and end and write them in three paragraphs.
- 2) Keep the beginning of the article as written by the journalist. Change the middle of the article by giving the characters some magical powers or a moment where something fantastical happens. Keep the integrity of the story.
- 3) Add the ending of the article as written by the journalist.
- 4) Read the new article with your magical moments included.

Discuss how the story may or may not have changed. Did the characters and the situation stay believable even with your changes?

Colorado Model Content Standards

Reading and Writing 4: Students apply thinking skills to their reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing.

Reading and Writing 6: Students read and recognize literature as a record of human experience.

FAMILY TREE

Create a family tree. Interview your parents and grandparents to find out information and who to place on the tree. How many generations can you go back? Use the web to help with a template and help gather information. Fill in the branches with pictures from magazines and create a collage of images and symbols that represent your family. If you would like, create a tree from people that have influenced your life to create who you are. Create a family tree from the play. Start with Candelario and work your way through the Serranos.

Colorado Model Content Standards

Visual Arts 1: Students recognize and use the visual arts as a form of communication.

History 1.1: Students know the general chronological order of events and people in history.