

THE INFLUENCE OF MEXICAN MORALITY PLAYS
ON AMERICAN SPORTS ENTERTAINMENT

THESIS

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by

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DEDICATION

For my cousin Albert, who first introduced me to American sports entertainment. For Marlowe Downing, who introduced me to Mexican *lucha libre* by playing the Masked Gringo in my first formal high school sketch comedy scene. For Jeromy Sage, who has provided me the opportunity to supply my vocal talents to the world of sports entertainment and get paid for it.

And especially for my father, who took the time to transport me and several friends to San Antonio every so often to make his son happy watching professional wrestling.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Professional wrestling, known more recently as “sports entertainment,” is a unique entertainment outlet enjoyed by millions throughout the world. Though the term can be used to refer to other athletic competitions that emphasize spectacle over sport, the term is generally used to reference professional wrestling. For decades, sports entertainment has been firmly embedded in American culture, constantly evolving to adapt to the dominant popular culture of the particular time period. Through the rapid progression of globalization, American sports entertainment has been influenced by the nation just south of Texas, Mexico. Originally, the American style of sports entertainment contained distinctive elements that distinguished it from the Mexican style. Through globalization, the conventions and performative elements utilized to tell stories in Mexico have found their way to the United States. Today, American sports entertainment has evolved into a new form that has a distinctly Mexican inspiration. This Mexican influence was colored by centuries of morality plays, traditional dances, and seasonal religious devotions in Mexico. This paper will discuss the influence of Mexican morality plays on American sports entertainment.

American sports entertainment has been an influence in many lives across America. The men, the myths, and the history of sports entertainment have been passed on through a veritable oral tradition between fans and family. Fans in Texas had the opportunity to tune in Saturday afternoons for World Championship Wrestling (WCW)

from Atlanta, Georgia, or World Class Championship Wrestling (WCCW) from the Dallas Sportatorium on Saturday night. Through the magic of television, people were witness to many historic events in professional wrestling. The von Erich family would compete against their arch rivals, the Freebirds. Bruiser Brody and Abdullah the Butcher would compete in bloody fistfights for supremacy. Viewers watched as the elderly father of one of the good guys, or 'faces,' acting as the referee for a bout, was goaded into an altercation with the bad guy, or 'heel,' only to be viciously attacked by the villains. Viewers watched as the 'Boogie Woogie Man' Jimmy Valiant set an example of honor. Agreeing to a hair versus hair match, Valiant lost the bout and suffered utter humiliation by having his head shaved by his opponent. Even though Valiant's opponent used skullduggery to attain victory, Valiant respected the referee's decision and grimaced as his bleached blonde locks were cut off and fell to the canvas mat. Local wrestling shows in Texas included the savage Kamala, whose painted tribal visage and traditional African mask and spear cast an aura of fear over the youth in the arena. People who attended a live show could pat a sweaty Russian, who was fighting for redemption after the fall of the Berlin Wall, or touch the WWE Intercontinental Title as the champion passed them in the aisles. For many, these are memorable moments shared with hundreds to thousands of total strangers in a crowded arena, united against common enemies and supporting virtuous heroes.

Many young children have a problem understanding why people refer to professional wrestling as 'phony' since the spectacle is extremely physical. During bouts, wrestlers bleed from their heads from time to time and even sustain serious injuries. The stories being told are very physical and take a substantial toll on the

wrestlers. Like any profession, the wrestlers expect to be respected for their work and respond passionately, even violently, to claims that their profession is ‘fake.’ There is an old expression in the wrestling world that comments on the dubious nature of the sport. The expression states, “For those that ‘believe,’ no explanation is necessary. For those that do not, no explanation will do.” It can be hard to comprehend why people would participate in such an abusive spectacle for a fixed outcome. Once it is understood that it is, indeed, a spectacle and the outcome staged, the theatrical elements become even more pronounced. Depending on their moral alignment, wrestlers perform eloquent or pedestrian soliloquies, referred to as “promos” in the business, to incite the crowd to anger or joy. Music plays an important Pavlovian-style role in signaling a particular wrestler’s entrance by prompting the fans to respond with cheers or boos as the song begins. The choreography itself is not scripted, but “called” during the bout. The fighters enter in elaborate or simple costumes that provide insight into the wrestler’s disposition. Then the story is told through their physical actions and morally coded choices in (and out of) the ring before the predetermined outcome is eventually reached. The fans will either rejoice or renounce the winner before the next match begins and the process starts over again.

The spectacle took on a new meaning to fans in south Texas when stars from Mexico performed in border towns in the seventies and eighties. Later, the mystique of Mexican athletes would be unleashed on the U.S., when lucha libre was introduced to mainstream America in the late nineties. The performative elements lucha libre stars used to tell their stories were innovative, exciting, and new to American pro-wrestling fans. Today, lucha libre’s influence is seen in the performances of many American

wrestlers today. Blending the elements of Mexican morality plays and traditional cultural flair, lucha libre has certainly influenced American sports entertainment.

Many writers have explored the topic of professional wrestling. Mythologies by Roland Barthes is considered the base starting point for any research involving the spectacle of sports entertainment. Other sources that document American sports entertainment include Professional Wrestling as Ritual Drama in American Popular Culture by Michael R. Ball, Sharon Mazer's Professional Wrestling: Sport and Spectacle, The Death of WCW by R.D. Reynolds and Bryan Alvarez, and The Magnificent Scufflers; revealing the great days when America wrestled the World by Charles Morrow Wilson. Internet sources available to supplement the research of American sports entertainment include the Total Non-Stop Wrestling homepage and the World Wrestling Entertainment homepage.

Other sources that document lucha libre include Lourdes Grobet's photographic history called Lucha Libre: Masked Superstars of Mexican Wrestling, which chronicles some of the history and traditions of the sport, and Heather Levi's "Sports and Melodrama: The Case of Mexican Professional Wrestling." News articles about lucha libre that are cited in this thesis include a *People's Weekly World* article entitled "'Nacho Libre' provides glimpse of Mexican popular culture," Kathy Silberger's "La Lucha Continua" from the *Village Voice*, and "Mucha Lucha" by Sol Sussman from the Texas Observer.

There are abundant sources on the internet providing information about lucha libre including Bill Apter's interview, "Konnan the Creator – Charles Ashenoff discusses Mexican style of wrestling," originally published in the bi-monthly Wrestling Digest,

Lewis Beale's "Who's That Masked Man and Where Did He Learn to Wrestle Like That" from banderasnews.com, "Lucha Libre: The History of Mexican Pro-Wrestling" by Mark Boundurant, David Brashear's wrestlinginsidepulse.com article "Great-ing Gimmicks of the Past: The Latino World Order," Bill Donahue's "Mask and You Shall Receive," and a documentation of the production of 'Nacho Libre' and the experiences of the director Jared Hess entitled "The art of writing and making films: NACHO LIBRE." Other useful internet sources include Kathleen "Kitty" Williams's description of a mask exhibit at Arizona State University entitled "Lucha Libre! Popular Sport Figures Prominently at Arizona State Museum's Mexican Mask Exhibit," and the homepages of two prominent lucha libre promotions in Mexico, EMLL and AAA.

Several sources document the history of the native cultures of Mexico. Lost Civilizations: The Aztecs and The Aztecs: End of a Civilization, both written by Joan D. Barghusen, The Mayans by Stuart A. Kallen, Cultures of the World: Mexico by Mary Jo Reilly and Leslie Jermyn, Mexican Phoenix – Our Lady of Guadalupe: Image and Tradition Across Five Centuries by D.A. Brading, Masks of Mexico: Tigers, Devils, and the Dance of Life by Barbara Maudlin, and Ancient Mesoamerican Warfare by M. Katheryn Brown and Travis W. Stanton. Numerous internet sources supplement the scholarly works noted above.

Morality plays, Spanish autos by Calderon, Vicente, and Sor Juana, and other sources that document the plays and influences in the time period are utilized. The books include History of the Theatre by Oscar Brockett, Dorothy Brown's Christian Humanism in the Late English Morality Plays, Sor Juana Ines De La Cruz by Gerard Flynn, Pedro Calderon De La Barca by Heinz Gerstinger, Horace Parker's Gil Vicente. Other sources

include a document entitled Los Pastores composed anonymously by the San Antonio Conservation Society, Don Pedro Calderon De La Barca – Obras Completas, Tomo III: Autos Sacramentales by Angel Valbuena Prat, Fools and Jesters At The English Court by John Southworth, and Alan S. Trueblood's A Sor Juana Anthology.

Two scholars compare the allegorical characters in morality plays, luchadores, and sports entertainment performers to cultural archetypes. Jung: A Biography by Deirdre Bair provides insight into the archetypes and George C. Boeree's Carl Jung, which was made available on the internet, presents concise details on the archetypes.

The sources listed above document crucial links that connect the morality plays of the 16th century to current American sports entertainment. Morality plays originated in Europe, and the process that provided the migration of the plays from Spain into Mexico will be discussed in this thesis. The thesis also provides insight into the native cultures and their traditions, including how the two contrasting cultures and religious traditions melded. In addition, the section establishes how lucha libre rose to prominence in Mexico and how it was informed by the morality plays of the Catholic Church and the cultures of the indigenous people of Mexico. The origins of lucha libre are discussed as well as what separated it from its American counterpart. Also, the thesis discusses how lucha libre infiltrated American sports entertainment and forced the sport to evolve in America.

Chapter Two covers the origins of morality plays. It discusses the many possible allegorical characters and the themes of the plays. The chapter also covers the need for the morality play in medieval times and the subsequent development of the autos sacramentales in Spain. The autos of Don Pedro Calderon De La Barca and Gil Vicente

are considered at length. The chapter then moves to the conquest and colonization of Mexico. It documents the influence of two dominant tribes in Mexico, their traditions, and how Sor Juana melded the two cultures in an auto she composed. The chapter concludes by discussing the remnants of the old traditions, including the plays, pageants, and dances that remain to this day, which were another influence on lucha libre.

Chapter Three discusses at length the origins, rituals, and significance of lucha libre. The chapter starts by examining its founder, Salvador Lutteroth, and recounts the effect early lucha libre performances had on the people of Mexico. The chapter scrutinizes how lucha brings communities together through its fans. The importance of the fans will be discussed, why they enjoy a fixed contest, and how they arrange themselves within an arena. The moral codes of the luchadores are explained, as well as comparisons to morality plays and the characters that make up their casts. A discussion of the manner in which luchadores tell their stories physically and the themes prevalent in the show follows. Then, the importance of masks is considered, as well as comparisons between sacrifices and bloodletting ceremonies from the past that are also found in lucha. Near the end of the chapter is a discussion of dwarves in lucha, ancient traditions, as well as the infiltration of lucha libre by a true representative of the Catholic Church.

The fourth chapter reports the origins of American sports entertainment. It covers some of the cultural styles brought from around the world to America, the shortcomings of traditional wrestling, and the events that led to wrestling becoming staged. The chapter moves forward to the categories of American pro-wrestlers, the similar and contrasting themes, and how pro-wrestling began as regional fiefdoms that were ultimately absorbed by the WWE. The importation of luchadores into America by

ECW and their mainstream debut on WCW are covered. A portion of the chapter is devoted to a discussion about how WCW underappreciated the tradition of the masks and its importance in Mexican culture. An example of scientific wrestling will be documented, as well as how the Mexican and American styles contrast in their storytelling techniques. The chapter ends with an analysis of how the American sport evolved, even motivating heavyweights to utilize the storytelling techniques of the luchadores.

The final chapter reveals a strong reason why the allegorical characters of morality plays, lucha libre, and American sports entertainment resonate so strongly with the fans through the association of the characters with the archetypes of Carl Jung. The chapter investigates the influence of the fans in America and their changing ethnic makeup due to globalization. It also documents the tradition of promoters creating wrestling cards that appeal to the ethnic sensibilities of a community. The chapter concludes with an interesting suggestion about why lucha libre has been so insidious in its influence on American sports entertainment and an observation about the cultural makeup of America today. The conclusion of the thesis also suggests ideas for further research.

Ultimately, this thesis documents the connection between the morality plays of the 16th century and their influence on American sports entertainment. It connects the morality plays of Europe to modern sports entertainment by following the former's growth in Europe and evolution in Spain. The thesis then covers the migration of the morality play to Mexico and examines the subsequent creation of Mexican morality plays. Finally, the thesis documents how the American form of sports entertainment is

colored by its Mexican counterpart.

II. MORALITY PLAYS

Morality plays flourished in Europe between 1400 and 1550. Jack Horace Parker, author of the book Gil Vicente, defines a morality play as "...the allegorical representation of the conflict between good and evil" (Parker 54). Noted theatre historian Oscar Brockett traces the origins of morality plays to liturgical sources. Brockett asserts that morality plays first came from the Pater Noster prayers. These prayers were divided into seven petitions relating to both the seven cardinal virtues and the seven deadly sins. The cardinal virtues were the essential components a Christian needed to journey to heaven when they passed away. The seven virtues exemplified in these prayers were prudence, justice, temperance, fortitude, faith, hope, and charity. The seven sins were pride, covetousness, lust, anger, gluttony, envy, and sloth. These prayers "... established a framework of continual struggle between good and evil to possess a man's soul" (Brockett 108). Another influence came from preachers who held religious sermons outdoors. The preachers used the seven virtues and sins as an example of the struggles congregants had to endure to enter heaven. These seven virtues and sins were used "...as a scheme for depicting the choices required of humanity" (Brockett 109). The third influence was the rise in popularity of allegorical stories. These allegorical stories were found in both secular and religious texts. During this time period, for example, a popular love story called Romance of the Rose included characters named Slander, Danger, and Fair Welcome. Finally, Christianity used moralities as a means of promoting the concept

of the afterlife, promising that all people, regardless of rank, could live forever in Heaven if they followed Church teachings. Visual arts were incorporating images of death and frightening visages of skeletons and similar illustrations in an effort to display to the layman that death provided a horrible fate for the soul if it had not been saved. The only hope for the whole of humanity, from the perspective of the Church, was salvation through Christ (Brockett 108-9). Just as the visual arts promoted the need for deliverance, so did morality plays.

The morality play, promoted and sponsored by the Church, served the purpose of educating the general population in the teachings of the Bible. During the late Middle Ages (c.1300-1500), the peasants and serfs were uneducated and unable to read or write. Literacy was primarily the domain of monks, priests, and other religious stewards of the Catholic Church. Peasants were encouraged to go to the Church as a means to discover how they could reach the glory of the afterlife. Indeed, going to church was an experience in itself, as the elaborately crafted churches with gilded statues and religious icons were a stark contrast to the vermin infested village streets and poor living conditions of their own homes.

Since the Catholic Mass was delivered in Latin, most congregants could not understand the service and the message it was communicating. The morality plays gave the community a chance to see and hear biblical stories and teachings in the vernacular. Thereby, the plays educated the masses and revealed in the vernacular how they could get into Heaven. The seven virtues and sins of the Pater Noster prayers served as the foundation for the allegorical characters morality plays would use as their main convention, personifying on stage the sins and virtues, and serving as examples of moral

behavior. Inspired by the seven sins and seven virtues, characters were represented symbolically with names like Mankind, Well-Advised, Ill-Advised, Everyman, Kindred, Goods, and Fellowship (Brockett 110). The eternal struggle between good and evil became personified in these allegorical characters.

The tradition of the morality play was spread throughout Europe through the influence of the Catholic Church. In Spain, a contrasting existence of faiths was formed between the Moors and the Catholics. The Moors were from north Africa and professed their faith to the Muslim religion, which came into conflict with Catholicism in Spain. Morality plays were primarily performed in northeastern Spain, which was predominantly Catholic. After the Moors were forced out of Spain around 1550, the morality plays of Spain utilized new conventions in their productions that included staging, dialogue, and character choices that would make the plays distinctively Spanish (Brockett 186).

Religious drama continued to thrive in Spain despite a Church sanctioned suppression of the plays in other European countries for becoming “too secular” (E. Wilson, Goldfarb 44). Oscar Brockett attests to the fact that in the latter part of the sixteenth century

...plays came to be closely associated with Corpus Christi, a festival which emphasizes the power of the church’s sacraments. Probably for this reason, the plays were labeled autos sacramentales...The autos sacramentales combined characteristics of the morality and cycle plays. Human...characters were mingled with such allegorical figures as Sin, Grace, Pleasure, Grief, and Beauty. Stories could be drawn from any source, even completely secular ones, as long as they demonstrated the efficacy of the sacraments and the validity of church dogma. (Brockett 186)

Spain produced many writers who contributed to the tradition of the autos in

Spain during the height of the genre's popularity. Some of the most important dramatists were Juan de la Encina, Juan Perez de Montalvan, and Lope de Vega. One of the notable Spanish writers of autos was Pedro Calderon de la Barca. Born in Madrid on 17 January 1600, Calderon was influenced by the works of Lope de Vega. Of Calderon's voluminous works of poetry and plays, seventy-three of them are autos (Hesse 2). Calderon received a broad education, studying law, rhetoric, logic, history, and philosophy with Jesuit priests at The University of Alcala de Henares and also at the University of Salamanca. Calderon was appointed the court dramatist to Philip IV after the death of Lope de Vega (Hesse 1). He would go on to write two autos a year from 1647 to 1681 for the city of Madrid after joining the court (Hesse 2). Calderon is considered a master writer of autos sacramentales.

El Gran Teatro del Mundo is an example of one of his auto sacramentales that premiered in Seville in 1675. Calderon wrote it when he was seventy-five (Gerstinger 132). The play is a humorous, yet insightful, look at the people who populate the world and the roles that they play in life. The cast includes El Autor (the Author, who represents God), El Mundo (The World), El Rey (The King), La Discrecion (A Nun), El Ley de Gratia (Grace), La Hermosa (The Beauty of the World), El Rico (The Rich Man), El Labrador (The Laborer), El Pobre (The Poor), Un Nino (A Child), and La Voz de la Muerte (The Voice of Death) (Prat 203).

The play opens with El Autor wanting to write a play about the great comedy of life on earth. El Autor summons El Mundo, who then calls forth the people to be represented in the play El Autor intends to write. The cast enters, draped as shadows, and they announce that they are ready to play their parts. El Autor passes out the roles they

are to play on slips of paper, which prompts grumbling from El Pobre, who asks why he has to play the poor person. El Autor instructs the actors to live out their roles and then makes clear that he will tell the players when they have “finished their paper,” signifying their time to die. The play El Autor is prepared to write is Obrar bien, que Dios es Dios, which translates loosely as “Do Good, because God is God,” or according to author Heinz Gerstinger translation, Do What Is Right – God Reigns Over You (135). The auto becomes a play within a play.

As the stage is set, the characters are revealed from the shadows. El Rey receives his crown, La Hermosa delivers a brief speech about the beauty and colors of the world, and El Rico immediately demands his riches. El Mundo complains about the demand, as El Rico must metaphorically remove the gold and silver from the natural possession of El Mundo. La Discrecion assumes her role, but El Nino remains in the shadows, not to be revealed. El Labrador complains that he does not want to have to work, while El Pobre grumbles that he will not get anything and will “end his paper” with nothing. La Ley de Gratia sings her song, reminding the actors to do unto others as they do unto you, prompting them to do good because God is God.

As the play progresses, La Hermosa tries to convince La Discrecion to come out from her cloisters and see the beauty of the world. However, La Discrecion states that she has committed her life to seclusion and vowed to God that she would continue to worship Him. El Labrador complains that he has to work for others, demanding another role. El Pobre is comforted by the soothing song of La Ley, while El Rico finds it tiresome. El Pobre begs for money from El Rey, but is given nothing. When El Pobre begs to El Labrador, El Labrador says everything he possesses he has earned through

hard work and sweat.

Eventually, La Voz de la Muerte calls the people forth, regardless of their status in the world. They turn in their costumes and properties to El Mundo, with the result being that "...no one seems any longer to be that person whom his stage role signified; these characters are once again human beings and as such they are all equal" (Gerstinger 135). La Discrecion and El Pobre are the first to go to Heaven since La Discrecion has led a life devoted to God, and El Pobre has meekly accepted his lot in life. Initially, El Rey is not selected to go to heaven, but is spared by La Discrecion, who informed El Autor that she was once saved from disaster by El Rey. La Hermosa and El Labrador must go through Purgatory, while El Rico is denied entry into Heaven (Gerstinger 136). El Nino's fate is unclear. He has yet to truly be a part of the world, knowing that "pain and joy" are all around him, yet he can experience neither, due to his youth.

The play is representative of Spanish moralities from the time period, as Spain had yet to embrace the religious skepticism of the Renaissance or even the controversy of the Reformation. The play is not about finding meaning in life, but about fulfilling the destiny provided by God. We are a part of the world, not existing to find God, but for Him to find us. We are required to see the opportunities God provides to us in order to earn a place in Heaven (Gerstinger 133).

Another playwright of the early 1500s in neighboring Portugal was Gil Vicente. Though he wrote in his native Portuguese language, Gil wrote plays in Spanish, as well. Because he wrote plays that crossed languages, Gil Vicente has the unique distinction of being a part of two great literary traditions: those of Portugal and Spain (Parker 8). Scholars have been unable to uncover evidence of Gil Vicente's youth, because there is

“... a total lack of documentation concerning the childhood and youth of this important literary figure” who would become another prolific writer in his time (Parker 8).

Gil Vicente is best known for a trilogy called Autos da Barca. The three plays, starting with Auto da Barca do Inferno and ending with Auto da Barca da Gloria, were written in 1516, 1518, and 1519, respectively. The plays revolve around three ships with three different destinations.

The first play, Auto da Barca do Inferno, or The Ship of Hell, is about a ship that delivers people to hell, specifically all the people that are rejected from the ship that sails to heaven. The ship’s passengers include a pompous and proud gentleman, a usurer with a heavy purse, a tricky cobbler, a friar with earthly vices, a procuress, a Jew, a judge who took bribes, a public prosecutor who misappropriated state funds, and a hanged man who was killed because of his sins against society (Parker 55). Other characters are spared from the journey to hell. The Angel, who is the ferryman of the ship to Heaven, rescues a fool who sinned without malice, four noblemen, and Knights of the Order of Christ who died in north Africa promoting Christianity (Parker 56).

The Ship of Purgatory deals with peasants. The people assigned to ride to purgatory “... must purge their guilt along the stream until God deems it fitting for them to be transported to Heaven” (Parker 56). The passengers who are designated to ride the ship include a Farmer who moved property stones that marked land divisions, a Market Woman who watered down the milk she sold, a Shepherd who tried to seduce a shepherdess, and a Shepherdess who committed minor sins. A Gambler and a Blasphemer wait on the docks. The Gambler does not get on the boat, betting that the Redeemer will come for him. Neither the Gambler nor the Blasphemer are saved and are

actually taken quickly by devils onto their boat to Hell. In the end, a child is put on board the boat destined for Heaven, instead of Purgatory (Parker 57).

Ship of Heaven deals with people who hold respected positions in court and church. The characters are led in, one by one, by Death. The Devil and an Angel discuss the sins of a Count, a Duke, a King, an Emperor, a Bishop, an Archbishop, a Cardinal, and a Pope. The Angel ends up telling them that because of their sins, they will not go on the ship. The Angel sails away, and the men begin to pray for forgiveness. In the end, the Redeemer takes them to Heaven (Parker 57).

Calderon, Vicente, and others contributed to the rich tradition of the autos in Spain. Decades earlier, Christopher Columbus had sailed his ships to the New World in the late 1400s. Columbus initiated a trend of exploration, colonization, and conquest that would continue for years. The Spanish began exploration and colonization of the New World in the early 1500s, and Cortes conquered the native populations of Mexico in 1519 (Barghusan, Aztecs 12). After the conquest, the Catholic Church subsequently made its way to the New World to help convert the ‘savages’ that inhabited the newly discovered lands.

When the Spanish arrived, Mexico had a large resident population. The natives held territories across the land. These tribal territories not only spanned Central America, but even penetrated North America, as well as South America. Some of the most notable clans populating the landscape included the Toltecs, Olmecs, Tlaxcaltecs, and Totonacs. The Aztecs and Mayas were the most influential tribes in Central America. By the 1500s, The Aztecs had subjugated the surrounding tribal territories from their base at Tenochtitlan. The conquered tribes paid tribute to the Aztecs, but held deep-seated

animosity towards them. The Aztecs not only took goods from the subjugated lands, but also humans to sacrifice in their bloodletting rituals.

The traditional rituals and celebrations of the pre-Columbian people of Mexico included gods, animals, and natural forces and were "...intended to honor and entertain the pre-historic deities who, in turn, would bless the people" (Maudlin 1). Though there were many native people throughout Mexico in pre-Columbian times, the focus of this discussion will be on the Aztecs and the Mayas.

The Aztecs created an empire in the central portion of Mexico that held sway over the land from around 1325 A.D. to 1521 A.D. (Reilly, Jermyn 19). The religion and traditions of the Aztecs revolved around the ritual sacrifice of prisoners of war to appease their gods and provide for their society. The dates and times that ceremonies were to be performed were dictated by their solar calendar, an important forecasting device used by their priests (Barghusen, Lost 41). Deities featured in ritual ceremonies included war, rain, and sun gods (Barghusen, Lost 67). There was even a hummingbird god named Huitzilopochtli, who also shared war and solar god status (Barghusen, Lost 64). Another god was literally beaten back to earth with a stick by the feathered snake god Quetzalcoatl. The beaten mythological god became the jaguar that would kill and eat the first men. The jaguar would become an important symbol in Aztec warfare (Elick, Merchant par. 1).

The Maya were a culture highly respected by the Aztecs, and like the Aztecs, were eventually subdued by the Spanish before they disappeared altogether (Kallen 95). Mayans sacrificed their enemies, and even went so far as to engage in bloodletting to nourish their gods (Kallen 47). In the Mayan faith, portals for dead ancestors could be

opened through a wound in the human body, allowing them temporary re-entry into the physical world (Kallen 47). Bloodletting was also a way to christen new buildings or celebrate crop planting, political events, and other common ceremonies (Kallen 49).

Like their Aztec neighbors, Mayans had gods who represented various animal and natural elements. Jaguars, for example, were important to the Mayans. In their faith, the Jaguar was a protector of royalty and a creature that could go between the worlds of the living and the dead (Kallen 39).

The Spanish began their subjugation of the native populations of Mexico in the early part of the 16th century. The suppression of neighboring tribes by the Aztecs would benefit the Spanish, as the repressed natives were happy to join with the mysterious raiders in their conquest of the Aztecs (Aztecs 29). The Mayans began their demise after smallpox was brought by the Spanish conquistadores in 1515, before falling to their sword in 1527 (Kallen 95).

As part of the new Spanish leadership, Catholic priests were brought in to re-educate the natives of Mexico with the dogma of Christianity. So deeply rooted were the traditional religious rituals, deities, and ceremonies of the indigenous people that the Spanish had to assimilate the gods and goddesses into the Catholic faith. The Church went about co-opting the gods of the Aztecs to bring them into the Catholic Church. They even went so far as to create a legend about a small Aztec child named Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin who saw the Virgin of Guadalupe on the sacred Aztec hill of Tepeyac. The apparition of the Virgin spoke to him in his native Aztec tongue and told him to have an abbey built on the same site. To this day, La Virgen de Guadalupe stands as both a symbol of the Catholic Church in Mexican communities, and a final link to the Aztecs.

Appropriately enough, La Virgen was also used as the banner and battle flag of the indigenous remnants during the September 16th revolution against the Spanish aristocrats decades later (Brading 57).

One convention the church used during this assimilation phase was the morality play. Since the natives could not understand the Latin service, the morality play was introduced in Mexico as a tool to indoctrinate the indigenous population into the traditions and dogmas of the Catholic Church. With the arrival of the Church, morality plays arrived in Mexico.

As the influence of the Spanish and the Catholic Church slowly changed the face of Mexico, a native Mexican playwright emerged who created several morality plays, along with a large body of poetic and rhetorical works. Her name was Sor Juana Inez de La Cruz. Born in Mexico in 1651 and educated by her paternal grandfather Pedro Ramirez, Sor Juana was eventually sent to her aunt in Mexico City when Pedro died and her mother remarried (“Sor Juana” par. 1). At fifteen, she was considered a prodigy due to the educational opportunities offered her by her grandfather.

Juana became a nun in the Catholic Church. Taking advantage of her time in seclusion, she devoted her life to studies and abhorred anything that took time away from them. She became a prolific writer in her time, writing poems and rhetorical works that would make her an influential figure in Mexico (“Sor Juana” par. 4). During this time period, she also wrote several allegorical religious dramas which were influenced by the works of Calderon (Flynn 108).

In one of Sor Juana’s most notable religious works written in 1689 and entitled El Divino Narciso, she blends the Aztec and Catholic religions, using classical icons to

tell the story. Gerald Flynn, author of Sor Juana Ines De La Cruz, provides a description of the play. The Divine Narcissus represents Jesus Christ. Human Nature is the female protagonist, and Grace, Paganism, and Synagogue are attendant characters. The antagonist is Echo, representative of the fallen angel, Lucifer. Echo is accompanied by Pride and Self-Love (Trueblood 146).

In the classical myth of Echo and Narcissus, the verbose Echo falls in love with Narcissus. A curse is put on Echo by Juno that only allows Echo to talk when people speak to her, and then only to repeat the exact words spoken. Narcissus shuns Echo, which makes her disappear forever. The goddess Nemesis avenges Echo by making Narcissus fall in love with his reflection in a pool of water, which disappears whenever he gets close to it. He realizes how he made Echo feel, and ends up disappearing. Only Echo's voice remains in the hills and mountains, and Narcissus remains as a flower named after him (Flynn 56).

In the world of Sor Juana's play, Human Nature joins with Synagogue and Paganism to write a sacramental play. Human Nature describes how she was made in God's image, but her image has been "...so muddied by the waters of sin that the beautiful Narcissus (Christ) would not recognize Himself" if he looked at her (Flynn 57). She therefore wants to find a fountain that will cleanse her to "...enable her to reflect once more the image she was created with" (Flynn 57).

Echo then appears with Pride and Self-Love. Echo knows Human Nature (mankind) is seeking Beauty itself (God) (Flynn 58). Once, Echo, representing Lucifer, was the most beautiful in God's Creation, "the most God-like" (Flynn 59). Lucifer wanted to be equal with God, but was cast out of Heaven, joined by the other angels that

wanted to follow him. Echo, as Lucifer, is afraid that Human Nature will gain the same status he once had in Heaven. The sins he provides in the earthly realm keeps Human Nature malformed. Grace describes a Fountain (Virgin Mary) to Human Nature that will cleanse her of her sin and return her to her beauty. After this scene, Echo reappears as a woman to tempt Narcissus, to no avail.

In one of the final scenes, Human Nature longs for Narcissus. This moment and subsequent speech represent the meaning of the sacramental plays, and reflect their foundation in morality plays. Human Nature is miserable in the physical world dominated by Echo. Though mankind must search for Narcissus (Christ), he can always be found to fight the enemies of man (Pride, Self-Love, Echo). Narcissus will always lay down His life for His friends (Flynn 64).

According to Gerard Flynn:

If there is one virtue the sacramental plays extol it is Hope, and if there is one feeling they can create it is confidence, the thrill of being redeemed. The sacramental play is the truth that human life was meant to be a comedy. (Flynn 64)

Eventually, Grace leads Human Nature to the Fountain, but Narcissus arrives and sees his own image. He falls so in love with it that he will die for it. Echo enters and realizes Narcissus has fallen in love with His image, which is also Human Nature's. As in the classical tradition, Narcissus disappears, reminding Human Nature to remember him or be dominated by Echo. At the end of Sor Juana's play, Narcissus remains as the Holy Eucharist (Flynn 68).

In El Divino Narciso, Sor Juana borrows conventions utilized by Calderon in his autos. Sor Juana uses the device of self-definition, which is having the character define himself to the audience. Sor Juana also retells biblical history in order for the audience to

understand the context of the play. These devices “clarify the allegory, present familiar events to the audience so they can identify with the play, create crescendos at the end, and give the play a direction” (Flynn 70). Sor Juana also directly borrowed lines from Calderon’s three act mythological play called Echo and Narcissus (Flynn 71).

The religious theatre of Sor Juana did not just consist of the plays, but of loas, which were preludes to the play. The loa from Narciso is of particular interest in this discussion of the melding of the Aztec faith with Catholic standards. The characters of the loa include Occident (an Indian Youth), America (an Indian Maid), Zeal (a Spanish Captain General), and Religion (a Spanish Lady). Also included are Music, Soldiers, and Musicians (Flynn 72).

The loa’s principal theme is “...communion, a comparison of the Aztec Communion with the Eucharist Sacrifice of the Christians” (Flynn 72). The two faiths had very similar meanings in their communions:

The Aztecs took corn flour and mixed it with their blood in order to make an image of their God of Fertility, which they consumed; the Christians, on the other hand, took the body and blood of Christ in the Host, which was a wafer of unleavened bread. (Flynn 72)

The loa performed before El Divino Narciso is a short play about the contrasting traditions of the two faiths. Occident and America are dancing, preparing to celebrate their great God of Fertility. Zeal and Religion enter and approach Occident and America. Zeal wants to smite the pagans, but Religion offers a peaceful resolution through dialogue. Occident and America refuse the offer and suggestions of faith, causing Zeal to attack. The pagans are defeated, but still refuse conversion. Zeal wants to punish their obstinacy, but Religion offers a reasonable solution by comparing their rites. The pagans are “impressed by the Christian rites and wish to know more” (Flynn 73). Religion offers

them a chance to watch El Divino Narciso, since he thinks that they will enjoy it, as it blends pagan and Christian stories (Flynn 74).

Sor Juana's El Divino Narciso is considered her best work. It is interesting to note the loa before the play begins when considering morality and pageant plays initiated by the Catholic Church. These morality and pageant plays were meant to instruct the natives about the Church and the consequences they faced if they refused to convert. In the Moor and Christian pageant, a story was presented that described the defeat of the Moors by the Catholic Church. The pageant, sometimes referred to as a "combat drama," was illustrated through dance and elaborately carved wooden masks. The message the Church wanted to communicate to the natives by performing this pageant was to show that the indigenous populations would ultimately fall to the Catholics by force, therefore conversion was the path of least resistance (Maudlin 2).

Two plays that the Spanish missionaries brought over were the Tres Potencias, or the 'Three Powers,' and the Siete Vicios, or the 'Seven Vices.' In the first play, the three powers of good, Christ, Mary, and the Soul, are in direct opposition to the Devil, Sin, and Death. The Seven Vices, or sins as they are more commonly known, were acted out for the natives to see and comprehend. Used in the same fashion as the morality plays in Europe, the Tres Potencias and Siete Vicios expressed to the natives, who could not speak Spanish, the importance of the virtues and dangers of the vices, as dictated by the Catholic Church (Maudlin 2).

These morality plays had to compete with the traditional faiths, festivals, and dances that were already a part of the Mexican culture. Most of the plays, dances, and dramas in Mexico at the time and after the Spanish invasion were performed for

traditional reasons. The older rituals were usually performed to honor pre-historic gods and encourage them to bring rain to nourish their crops for good harvests (Maudlin 1). Some of the plays and dances after the Spanish invasion were satirical in tone, while others honored the dead. These rituals brought the people of the community together through the ages, an important bond within the communities (Maudlin 1).

The traditional festivals of the Aztecs and Mayans which melded with the morality plays and Biblical stories of the Catholic Church influenced the traditional dances of Mexico. Today, there are many different dances and plays that are done throughout Mexico. All have a fundamental connection, according to Barbara Maudlin, author of Masks of Mexico: Tigers, Devils, and the Dance of Life, since every community and neighborhood is bound by common ancestors (2). When the Catholic priests arrived, they assigned Christian saints to the villages, and the natives incorporated these saints into their own belief systems (2). The merging of the two traditions began. In the state of Guerrero, the Dance of the Three Powers, or Tres Potencias, and the Seven Vices, or Siete Vicios, grew out of the morality plays introduced by the Spanish Missionaries (43). In the Mexican states of Michoacan, Guanajuato, Jalisco, and Colima, a masked Pastorella developed, with youthful and comic shepherds, dignified male hermits, and fancy devils (43). The Pastorella, sometimes referred to as Los Pastores, is a play about the shepherds that is performed during Christmas.

Elements of the old Aztec and Mayan faiths also withstood not only the test of time, but the Spanish invasion. In the northern and eastern part of the state of Guerrero, a jaguar, or tigre, drama is still performed to this day. The Baile de los Tecuanes, or Dance of the Beasts, takes place. In the story, when a tiger kills farm animals, a rastrero, or

tracker, hunts down the animal and kills him (Maudlin 43). A similar ritual on the Feast of the Holy Cross (May 3-5) finds the masked jaguars actually fighting each other, pelting each other with a knotted rope. Though the fight is very rough, it is essential in “petitioning the deities for rain during the spring planting season” (“Mexican” par. 2). The jaguars are painted different colors, signifying the particular village they are from in the state of Guerrero (“Mexican” par. 2).

There is also the Danza del Venado, or Dance of the Deer, in which the symbolic deer tries to escape coyotes and hunters (“Yaqui” par. 1). Another dance that evokes the traditions and heritage of past times is the Dance of the Old Men. The dance is comical in tone (Maudlin 43). The dance itself “...has no real utility other than to mock a bevy of little old men, all dancing - or better to say hobbling - with feeble knees and canes while simultaneously making lecherous fools of themselves” (“Dance” par. 11).

As the popularity of autos faded away, the tradition of retelling Biblical stories remained. Several Biblical story plays are still standards within Mexico to this day. A cycle of plays remains called Los Pastores, or as they are more commonly known in Mexico, Coloquio de los pastores, the play of the shepherds. The play itself is three to five hours long, depending on which parts are performed. Typically, it is performed in five parts. The first part is La Posada (San Antonio 3). La Posada translates to “the Inn,” referencing the traditional Christian story of Joseph and Mary’s journey to find a place to give birth to Jesus (Reilly, Jermyn 118). This part is the most popular and is usually performed without the other four parts. There is no formal title to parts two, four, or five, but part three is entitled “The Infernal Council” (San Antonio 3). These parts involve a

hermit, shepherds, and sometimes a rancher who travel to Bethlehem to see baby Jesus, but are confronted by devils who try to stop them (Maudlin 3).

When the ritual of the Posada is performed by itself, it is a community event. The actors themselves consider it a kind of devotional act for their faith (San Antonio 3). Families are encouraged to travel to designated houses in their neighborhood, carrying an icon of the baby Jesus, and to dress as Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, and the Wise Men. Like in the traditional story, several houses will turn them down and send them away before Mary and Joseph find the place where they will stay. Throughout the event, there is a script for the travelers and the “innkeepers,” as well as traditional songs and chants.

Another very popular ritual conducted annually is the Passion play. This is a part of traditional ceremonies put on by the Catholic Church during Holy Week processions. These include Palm Sunday, Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday. The Passion play is presented on Good Friday.

The Passion play retells the story of Christ’s condemnation and his subsequent journey to his crucifixion. The play follows the traditional stations of the cross and culminates in the death and resurrection of Christ. Similar to La Posada, people dress the parts, from Roman centurions to angels played by children. Within the Catholic community, the Passion play serves as a powerful visceral example of the sacrifice Jesus made for his followers.

All of the plays and dances have similar elements and patterns. Most of the actors are people who have participated in the ritual before, and were taught the ritual by community members before them. Like the people who taught them, they pass the traditions on to others, especially young members of their family, creating a strong bond

not only within their families, but within their communities.

Morality plays were a popular educational tool used by the Catholic Church to instruct their congregants about Church teachings. The morality plays were made necessary by the congregant's inability to understand Latin, the language in which the services were delivered. Calderon, Vicente and others created Spanish versions of morality plays, called autos, that were carried over into Mexico by the priests after the Spanish conquest. The old and new cultures and faiths in Mexico merged, informing their traditional dances and stories, creating a unique blending of the two cultures. The strong ties of the Mexican people to the reenactment of traditional stories and Biblical teachings would provide the spark to the popularity of lucha libre in the 1900s.

III. ORIGINS OF LUCHA LIBRE

Though there is some contention regarding the origin of lucha libre in Mexico, most historians accept the story of how a Mexican entrepreneur named Don Salvador Lutteroth Gonzalez sought to create a profitable business. He recalled watching a wrestling exhibition in Liberty Hall, Texas, while on assignment for General Obregon's army (Gobet 20). Lutteroth realized the profit potential of the spectacle and decided to import it to Mexico. After his return to Mexico, he put together a group of financiers who would bankroll the project and lucha libre took off. He formed the official commission for this new endeavor and named it Empresa Mundial de Lucha Libre (EMLL), or World Lucha Libre Council (Bondurant par. 5).

Lutteroth had many detractors who claimed the new business venture would not work. Despite the negative criticisms, Lutteroth set out to make it a success. The first few exhibitions drew small crowds, but a following began to grow. Lutteroth started his business using talent from America, eventually training talent from Mexico in an effort to "develop Mexican idols" (Gobet 20). By the 1940s, countless arenas had been built throughout Mexico, either directly sponsored by EMLL or by boxing arenas that were already established and wanted to sponsor a show in their town. In 1983, EMLL celebrated its fiftieth year in business (Gobet 20).

This Mexican version of wrestling was dubbed lucha libre, and its theatricality blended with athleticism connected with the people of Mexico. Lucha libre translates

loosely to “free fight” and refers to the sport of professional wrestling in Mexico. The people of Mexico made a quick connection to the sport, deriving most of their enjoyment of the spectacle from the tradition of masked warriors, morality plays, and the traditional rituals that formed a significant part of their cultural heritage.

Xavier Garza, author of Lucha Libre: The Man in the Silver Mask (A Bilingual Cuento), has called lucha libre the “Poor Man’s Theatre” (Sussman par. 2). Like morality plays of the middle ages, lucha libre also appealed to the common people in Mexico who helped perpetuate the performance rituals sponsored by the Church. Lucha libre was quickly forming its own following and separating itself from its American counterpart, becoming something that was a part of Mexico’s cultural dramatic tradition. Heather Levi, the author of “Sports and Melodrama: The Case for Mexican Lucha Libre,” writes, “The xenophobic themes that structure the American version were played down, and new elements of dramaturgy, movement vocabulary, and dress were added, transforming it into a characteristically Mexican entertainment” (62).

Levi notes French literary critic and philosopher Roland Barthes, who deduced that as the characters and storylines progressed over time, the shows become more mythic (58). As the performers continue working over time, overcoming fantastic odds and adversity, their status is elevated and respected. As suggested by Barthes, their feats, battles, and trials become the stuff of myth as it is shared in a kind of oral tradition with new fans. It is for this reason that successful luchadores become celebrities in Mexico. Today, lucha libre is second only to soccer in popularity in Mexico (Williams par. 8).

Lucha libre shares many common features with the morality plays and customary dances of Mexico. A traditional ritual in Mexico might include a procession,

dancing, and a choreographed and rehearsed theatrical performance. Large public feasts with games, dancing, and comical satirical dramas are also included with the main performance. These celebrations “served a social function in bringing the communities together for their own enjoyment” (Maudlin 1). The morality plays of the past also brought the community together, utilizing processional staging, and involving a large public effort that included feasts and games along with the performance. In lucha libre, the wrestlers enter in a procession to the ring to music, occasionally with pyrotechnics. They then begin their performances in the ring, which, depending on the storyline and characters, might be comical or satirical.

In Mexico, a lucha libre bout sometimes takes place in the central plazas of the city, bringing the community together “...in ways that pro-wrestling in the states doesn’t” (“art of writing” par. 22). It is a “cathartic ritual” combination of entertainment and athleticism that is a “...diversion and an avocation for its fans of all ages and incomes” (“art of writing” par. 23). Similarly, a *People’s World Weekly* article reviewing a motion picture about lucha libre says the entertainment form, “...is a community event that spans generations.” In lucha, the young, the old, and the strong unite (15). Morality plays brought people from every background together as well. The plays gave people of all ages and social backgrounds, especially those who could not read, a chance to watch the messages from the Bible performed.

The strong connection made by lucha fans has something to do with the migration of its people. In the late 20th century, Mexicans moved out of villages to the bigger cities like Mexico City. The participation of traditional mask dances declined. But in the city, “...lucha took on the role that traditional masked dramas played in rural

Mexico” (Williams par. 5).

It has a similar connection to the urban Mexicans as well. Nicholas Martin de Campo, the image director for Arena de Lucha Libre magazine has an interesting perspective on the fan base. De Campo says,

It’s your classic struggle of good against evil...It’s therapy for the lower classes. Whole families go. Most of these people are, like, maids. Everybody treats them like dirt. And now they have a chance to let out their frustrations. (Silsberger 134)

Similar to the old morality plays and traditions of Mexico, lucha libre brings communities together. The audience is a vital part of the lucha libre ritual. Some scholars, however, question why fans enjoy a fixed contest. The reason is that pro-wrestling represents sports in the mode of melodrama (Levi 57). Author Micheal Ball elaborates on the role of the audience in professional wrestling:

Fans are both actors and setting. During the course of the ritual, they play their part by interacting with the wrestlers through cheers, boos, or yelled comments. Additionally, their interaction with other audience members creates a “participatory ritual’ rather than merely one which is observed. (83)

Because lucha is a participatory event, “...one is free to contribute to the action” (80).

Ball also states that the audience does not really care if the outcome is fixed. They do not have to buy the reality of the situation, “...but rather how believably and sincerely the actors play their parts” (116). Ball goes on to clearly state, “if the audience do not believe the performances, the rituals fail” (116). Heather Levi elucidates that the maneuvers, holds, and strikes of lucha libre “dramatize suffering and abasement of the vanquished.” She also says that wrestling portrays an “ideal understanding of things” closer to Greek drama than sport (58).

Ball elaborates on the subject of the audience by adding “the actual

competition' is secondary in importance with reference to the drama which precedes and follows each event" (4). Roland Barthes echoes the same sentiment, stating the staging of the outcomes is irrelevant because "[the show] ...abandons itself to the primary virtue of the spectacle... what matters is not what it thinks, but what it sees" (15).

Morality plays were no different. The same question posed by some scholars about the dubious nature of attending a fixed lucha libre bout could be asked about the audiences that attend morality plays. Just like lucha, if the people do not believe the performance, the ritual will fail. Within the Catholic Church, that would be unacceptable, especially with the salvation of their community at stake. And like Barthes states, having people view the price of sin in a morality play is a powerful motivator.

Lucha libre has a very interesting makeup, comparable to a soccer match or American style football game. There are specific sections in Mexican arenas for the fans of the rudos (villains) and fans of the tecnicos (heroes). The members of the sections even arrive at the arenas with their own noisemakers (Levi 62). Tecnico fans blow horns and rudo fans use carnival-style noisemakers. In the ritual morality plays, lessons were taught. Just as morality plays attempted to teach lessons, in the ritual of lucha, "men express what moves them most, revealing the values of their group" (Ball 4). With its strong symbolic overtones, wrestling arenas become mainstays in Mexican culture (Silberger 134). Ball states that, "As ritual, all activity is a product of the culture in which it occurs" (Ball 116). Lucha libre is no exception, and certainly owes much of its influence to the morality plays of Mexico.

As mentioned, the luchadores are morally coded, so that "...normally each match features one good guy (or team of good guys) and one bad guy (or team of bad

guys) (Levi 57). The good guys in lucha libre are dubbed ‘tecnicos’ and the bad guys ‘rudos’. The rudo uses sadism, underhandedness, and cowardice to win, while the tecnico uses skill to win. In Mexico, the roles are made so explicit that the announcer actually introduces the luchadores as either ‘rudo’ or ‘tecnico’ (Levi 63). These figures have been described by author Xavier Garza as “ancient Aztec heroes come to life “to assume the roles of “saints and cultural icons” (“Xavier” par. 1).

Lucha libre is openly “good versus evil,” but it could also be described as a drama about corruption. The tecnicos, considered underdogs, have to not only deal with the rudos, but with two other people typically in the ring with them: the referees (Levi 57). Usually, the referees are paired and tend to be biased toward the rudos, exemplifying the statement that lucha could be considered a drama of corruption (Silberger 134). The referees are corrupt and sometimes incompetent, “...unwilling or unable to enforce rules against the bad guys” (Levi 57). These referees can be compared to the characters who accompanied Echo in El Divino Narciso. In morality plays, evil is never alone. There are always accomplices who tempt the protagonist to engage in evil. The referee character also references the judge in Auto do Barca da Inferno who was corrupt and was made to pay for his sins.

The rudos can be directly compared to the “coyote” in the “Dance of the Beasts,” or the “trickster” in ancient Aztec and Mayan tradition. The rudos cheat using roughness, cowardice, and trickery to win (Levi 57). Author M. Katheryn Brown and Travis W. Stanton say the “Trickster” in the old tradition is often, “incomplete, not in control of his actions or bodily functions, or malformed in some manner” (247). The trickster in the tradition of the morality plays is Vice. Vice encourages the protagonist to

engage in activities that might be enjoyable, but are in direct contrast to the virtues upheld by the church. The trickster is “analogous to a clown” (247). Brown and Stanton also say the trickster “... whether manifested as a clown or a misshapen fool, is a liminal character” (247). A liminal character has the ability to change. It is not uncommon for rudos to sometimes become tecnicos and tecnicos to become rudos, as when Villano III became a tecnico after losing his mask, or El Hijo del Santo becoming rudo for a time before transitioning back to a tecnico.

The Aztec and Mayan trickster had a very important role in ordering, interpreting, and resolving social contradictions and was a catalyst for change (247). This same trickster can incorporate features that “...juxtapose humor and joking to chaos or terror” (147). Heather Levi asserts that it is for this reason that the villain must be established in every lucha libre show as the central dramatic tension, the “pure essence” of villainy in morality plays, and why they are formally announced by the announcer in lucha libre (58).

Xavier Garza says lucha libre's connection to theatre is made most obvious by the costumes of the performers (Sussman par. 5). The actors are the luchadores. The wrestlers wear symbolic clothing, entering to music and wearing colors that signify their roles. For example, La Parka is a rudo. He is dressed as a skeleton in a black body suit that covers his entire body. The skeleton is illustrated in white on the front and back of the costume and along his arms. His mask is a white skeletal face with a black hood sewed into the mask. On the other hand, the tecnico Sagrado is dressed in white and silver pants with a cross stitched across the front of his mask. If a person had never seen these two men compete, the costumes alone would indicate which one was ‘good’ and

which one was 'bad' by the contrasting colors alone.

When the luchadores are wearing their masks and costumes, they become bigger than life (Sussman par. 5). When Lutteroth first introduced lucha to Mexico, the American wrestlers he brought over wanted to protect their identities. It was decided that the men should wear masks to the ring. At the time, Lutteroth "... did not realize the importance that masks play in Mexican culture" (Williams par. 2). A visceral and spiritual connection was made between the people of Mexico and lucha libre.

Just as community values and the struggle of good versus evil are taught and reinforced in traditional masked dances and processions, lucha libre serves a vital social function as the masked wrestlers entertain and educate their spectators. (Williams par. 5)

Sharon Mazer makes a more definitive connection between the luchadores and the ancient masked dances of Mexico:

...the masks of the luchadores have a striking effect. By supplanting the wrestler's face with a less human image – abstractions of animals and symbols of power – what becomes visible is the idea of the man and his body in motion. (Mazer 68)

The lucha sometimes literally goes outside of the ring. Community activists in Mexico took a chance on a promotional gimmick for their political agenda.

Understanding the strong connection lucha libre has with the people of Mexico, a luchador named Super Barrio came into prominence. Originally a gimmick to protest poor housing in Mexico, the effectiveness of the character encouraged its creators to perpetuate the persona. Super Barrio marched on, fighting not only symbolic matches against faux-officials, but by attending meetings in board rooms and speaking at rallies. Super Barrio engages these social conflicts for the whole of the Mexican culture (Silberger 132).

With the exception of ‘promos’ (moments where wrestlers speak about their upcoming matches), the main part of the story is told through their matches. For the most part, no words are ever exchanged in regards to forwarding the stories during a match. The stories are told through the holds and physical movements of the performers. Lucha is “an interplay of moves and counter-moves similar to self-defense.” The moves of lucha libre are very acrobatic, theatrical, and fast with amazing flips inside and outside of the ring, to death-defying leaps from ropes or top turnbuckles, also to the inside or outside of the ring (Silberger 152). Telling the story through gymnastic moves and daredevil stunts separates Mexican wrestling from its America counterpart and will be discussed further in the next chapter.

At a typical lucha ritual, the tecnicos and rudos battle for moral supremacy. The two opponents grapple in an arena. The arena, Ball says, “...suggests use of the space for ‘trials of strength between influential paradigm-bearers’” engaging in “social dramas” (70). Xavier Garza sees it as a concept about plays we learned in childhood, writing, “When you’re a child, it’s a play – the oldest play in the world – good versus evil. Evil is winning and then somehow good will triumph in the end” (Sussman par. 6). It is the classic story of poetic justice.

Though lucha libre is the standard “good versus evil” stories, there are major themes prevalent as well. These include protection of women and underlings, rape, work ethic, dignity in defeat, and justice (Ball 135). These themes give both the good and the evil the opportunity to establish their roles, thus providing the audience with the examples to follow.

“Protection of women and underlings” tends to involve the tecnico escorts or

partners. A rudo might try to kidnap a female valet or a charge of the tecnico. If the kidnapping occurs, the tecnico must fight for their safe return.

A rape is not overtly sexual, but does have sexual overtones. It could associate with the previous theme of “protection of women and underling.” However, the rape does not have to involve a male and a female, but involve humiliation or a degrading act of some kind. There are moments of humiliation done to tecnicos by rudos in which a rudo might rub his genitals near his opponent’s face or body. A common move in wrestling that symbolizes a rape occurs when an opponent is tossed into a corner and the rival mounts the second rope in the corner to punch the opponent in the face and head. The rival, mounted on the second rope, has positioned himself so that his genitals are on or near the opponent’s face. Another example of rape is when an opponent has been poll axed by his rival and is left temporarily disabled in the middle of the ring. The rival might place a snake on the fallen opponent or use another similar gimmick to humiliate the opponent (Ball 129-31). The lascivious use of holds that involve sexual humiliation by rudos hearkens to the sin of lust from morality plays. The rudo is open with his lustful sexual nature, but defiles sexuality by using it for the purpose of degradation.

The theme of work ethic is typically exemplified by the tecnico. The tecnico demonstrates that through tenacity and courage, one can overcome all odds. Typically, when rivalry (or ‘program’, which means an extended rivalry) begins, the tecnico will get the worst end of a confrontation. The tecnico, wanting to right the wrong done to him by the rudo, will work to get another shot at the rudo. The tecnico will sign matches, also perhaps work through matches with different stipulations, sign contracts, fight opponents set out against him by the rudo, and overcome other obstacles set in his path in order to

avenge his humiliation. The tension builds until the two finally meet in a main event match. At this point, the tecnico will typically get a win, demonstrating the value of hard work. This is also an example of justice, where the rudo finally gets what is due to him (Ball 131-35).

Dignity in defeat is another value that is demonstrated by both the rudos and the tecnicos in lucha libre. When a tecnico loses, he will tend to accept it with little anger. When a rudo loses, he might continue to attack the winner. This is even more notable during high stakes matches like hair or mask matches. When a luchador puts his hair or mask on the line, he must relinquish his mask or have his head shaved if he loses the match. Rudos have been known to walk away from the ring after a mask match, refusing to reveal their names and ages, sometimes even their masks, when they lose. The rudos throw tantrums when they have to get their heads shaved, thus giving the audience more reason to laugh and mock the rudo.

The mask versus mask match in lucha libre is very special. Michelle Martinez, a Department of Chicano Studies member at Arizona State University, says, “The lucha mask is a symbol of strength and empowerment in the Mexican and Chicano culture.” Martinez continues by saying, “The mask goes back to Aztec and Mayan times, and also brought the luchador to the superhero level. It gave them this larger than human appeal” (Beale 1). Masks have always been a part of Mexican festival life. Moreover,

Aztec, Mayan, and other cultures of prehistoric Mexico used masks to commemorate life cycles, marriage ceremonies and death rituals to ensure favor from nature and the gods, in battle, and for entertainment.
(Williams par. 3)

Barbara Maudlin, author of Masks of Mexico: Tigers, Devils, and the Dance of Life, elucidates on the topic of masks. She says in lucha libre, the masks are used in the same

way as the Aztecs. Whether the Aztec dancer was a priest, a warrior, or a ruler, the helmets and masks he wore took on the identity and power of such animals as eagles and jaguars to birds, insects, and reptiles (1).

The masks of the tecnicos can be colorful combinations of blue, green, silver, purple and other gentle colors. The masks of the tecnicos tend to have softer round curves in their designs. The rudos tend to have colors like black, red, orange, yellow and other 'active' colors. The designs and shapes on their masks are sharp, and sometimes include faux horns sewn into the side of their mask and wild hair coming out of an opening in the top of the mask.

The mask versus mask match (or any variation of mask and hair) could be compared to the desecratory termination ritual practiced by the ancient Mesoamericans. This involved burning, burial disturbances, destruction of material goods, and destruction of architecture (Brown, Stanton 76). These acts signified the destruction or humiliation of an enemy. The purpose of the termination ritual is comparable to the Christian and Moor Pageant. The pageant displays what happened to the Moors during the conflict in Spain that eliminated the strong influence of the Moors from southern Spain. Retelling the story to the natives of Mexico perpetuated the memory of the conquest over the Moors, while setting an example of the wrath of the Christian forces.

The high stakes match could also be compared to a rite of separation. As identified by Arnold van Gennep, the rite of separation involves a removal of something, signifying symbolic death (Ball 8). The removal of a mask is a sacred ritual in lucha libre, and without it being earned, the mask is never removed. For example, real life wrestlers tried out for the movie "Nacho Libre," but refused requests by the director to

remove their masks. The director Jarrod Hess realized that in lucha libre “iconography is everything” (Beale par. 3). This emphasis on iconography is also the foundation for morality plays. Creating the personifications of the sacred virtues and deplorable vices helps the audiences connect to what they need to know to achieve their salvation.

The removal of a mask is to “...despoil the most cared for and coveted virginity on earth” (Levi 65). When the mask is removed by force, the offended luchador hides his face in humiliation and engages in an “elaborate pantomime of shame and outrage” (Levi 65). To lose the mask fairly in competition is “...to be forever humbled before your foe, and to be exposed as being too human” (Bondurant par. 13). Bill Donahue states the same, saying of mask versus mask matches, “For the loser, the experience is excruciating – a matter, it seems, of being exposed as frail and human” (par. 1). Recounting the loss of his mask, El Bronco (now Silver King) states:

I got down on my knees in the ring...I offered my mask to the Black Warrior and, as required, I told the crowd my real name. It was the most humbling night of my professional life. (Donahue par. 2)

The mask and hair high stake matches could be considered a sacrifice. Though not with the loss of life associated with their Aztec and Mayan predecessors, it sometimes signals the end of a luchadores professional life. A luchador losing his mask makes a tremendous sacrifice not only to the luchador, but to the fans who supported that fighter as well. The supporters of the luchador are also symbolically sacrificed during the mask versus mask match. This can be compared to the Aztec tradition of sacrificing enemies to their gods. Major mask or hair bouts regularly sell out large arenas throughout Mexico (Reynolds 127). Losing the persona represented by the mask is similar to Calderon’s Teatro. When the players were called by El Autor, they had to relinquish their roles,

becoming equal to everyone else.

Within the frame of the exhibition, the luchadors are taking a huge “chance” when putting their masks on the line. This same high stakes gamble can be observed in morality plays. For example, in The Ship of Purgatory, The Gambler, who thought he could take a chance with the Redeemer coming for him without purging his sins on the boat to Purgatory, ends up losing everything and going to Hell.

Similar to the loss of pride is the chance that someone will kill another man in the ring. Though some might mention killing their opponent in their “promos” for the match, lives are never truly at stake (with deaths in lucha libre being extremely rare). However, bloodletting is a part of lucha libre. Sometimes called “blading,” “showing color,” or “juicing” in the business, fighters will sometimes cut their foreheads with blades tucked into their wristbands (Silberger 132). The blood adds another element to the fight, making the struggle a literal “fight for life.” The violence of some lucha bouts relates to the Catholic Passion play. The Passion violently displays the cruelty that was inflicted upon Jesus Christ in his final moments. In some countries, the actors playing Jesus in the Passion play are actually nailed to the cross, a devotional blood sacrifice to their faith.

Lucha libre is a powerful ritual that “bonds society through the presentation of models for behavior.” In lucha libre, when the status quo triumphs, the prevailing ideology is also reinforced (Ball 140). These rituals and their accompanying symbols “provide insight into the values, norms, and ideals of the people utilizing them” (Ball Intro1). Though lucha libre has been around for close to a century, it is a ritual drama that has repeated plots with familiar stereotypes (Ball 122). In these dramas,

“...conflicting paradigm bearers give performances designed to demonstrate the superiority of the social status quo” (Ball 83). This once again hearkens back to the Christian and Moor pageant and Sor Juana’s El Divino Narciso in regards to the new status quo the Christians wanted to demonstrate to the natives of Mexico.

Lucha libre, like American sports entertainment, relies on its fans attending to continue being able to tell them stories. The stories told are meant to engage the audience in the stories that will take time to play out to their ultimate conclusion. Another story will begin soon afterwards. Michael Ball makes an observation about long term stories and says:

Just as the ‘serial adventure’ provided cliff hanger endings assuring that movie fans...would return..., wrestling provides perpetually unresolved long-term feuds which assure regular attendance at arenas. (Ball 127)

Heather Levi says these long term narratives serve as mythic signs, a continuing story that will be told about that particular superstar for the coming years, depending on popularity (60). The social dramas of the characters, how they respond to adversity and how they comment on society, become part of the ritual, “...building and reinforcing myth with every symbolic action” (Ball 70).

One of the most striking examples of the blending of Catholic dogma and lucha libre is the most famous Mexican luchador ever, El Santo, El Enmascarada de Plata. His name means The Saint, the Man in the Silver Mask. A Saint is a person who has died and has been recognized by the Catholic Church as someone who should be venerated. Appropriately enough, El Santo became the biggest lucha legend in Mexico in the 1940s. During his career, he was the headliner in Mexican B-movies in the 1950s through the 1970s (Bondurant par. 9-10). His legacy became so mythic he was buried with his mask

on (Levi 65). Stars who have similar holy monikers in the CMLL include Sagrado, Mascara Sagrada, El Angel, and Mistico.

Warrior characters go back to the Aztecs. Warrior characters include Rey Bucanero (Buccaneer King), Ultimo Guerrero (Last Warrior), and Pirata Morgan. Some people even have the Spanish name for warrior in their name, including the Guerrero family (Chavo, Chavo, Jr. and the late Eddie Guerrero). The father and son team of Fuerza and Juventud Guerrero are another team with warrior in their name. In Texas, Kerry von Erich was known as “The Modern Day Warrior.” Wahoo McDaniel was a Native American warrior.

Several wrestling stars relate to the character from Sor Juana’s Narciso. Alan Stone walks to the ring gazing at his reflection in a mirror. “The Model” Rick Martel used to admire himself in a mirror as well. And when Lex Luger debut in the WWE, he was dubbed “The Narcissist” and would pose in front of a full length mirror.

Skeletons and death figures hold a special place in Mexican culture. Images of skulls and Death are a tradition found in old Aztec statues. They also figure prominently in the traditional Dia de los Muertes on November 1st. In Calderon’s morality play El Gran Teatro del Mundo, La Voz de la Muerte, translated as The Voice of Death, calls forth the players from their earthly roles, similar to the Death character in Everyman who seals the fate of Everyman. In lucha libre, the specter of Death tries to do the same. La Parka is a walking skeleton, with white bones from head to toe printed on an all black body suit. In American sports entertainment, the Undertaker has been a symbol of death for years, even having high stake casket matches several times in his career.

Devils in morality plays and Mexican dance festivals are as old as the Church

itself. It is only natural that luchadores would also take up variations on the character and its sinister themes. Luchadores with devilish names in AAA include Damian 666, Halloween, Mephisto, and Satanico. Charlie Manson, Chessman, Ozz, Cuervo (Crow), Scoria (Dreg), Espiritu (Spirit), and Muerte Cibernetica form a stable called Secta Cibernetica, a collection of dark warriors who represent the evil energy of the world.

Wild beasts also figure prominently in Mexican lucha libre. Through morality plays, wild beasts are associated with the Devil, since wild beasts are not governed by reason. Animals respond to their most primitive instincts, and thus are associated with the devil, who provides temptations to lure mankind to experience their more beastly nature (Christian Humanism 126). It is also interesting to note that Vices or devils in the older morality plays "...sometimes wore costumes made of animal skins or feathers, having at times the heads of various beasts fastened at many points on the costumes (Christian Humanism 126). Though many wild beast figures are considered rudos in lucha, many are also tecnicos. Animal themed names include Felino, Tigre Blanco, Black Tiger, and Blue Panther. Jaguars were a warrior class in the Aztec army and figured prominently in Mayan myths. Jaguar names include Black Jaguar I and II, Jaguar de Juarez, Jaguar de Oro III, and King Jaguar. Eagles were also a warrior class in the Aztec military. Mr. Aguila was the name of a luchador before he lost his mask. In America, animal names include Rhyno, Man-taur, Bison Smith, Ricky "The Dragon" Steamboat, and Puerto Rican El Leon Apolo (The Lion Apollo). Some Canadian wrestlers with animal themed names include Lionheart Chris Jericho and The Rabid Wolverine Chris Benoit.

Another interesting character that dates back to stories of the Aztecs and other

native groups is the dwarf. “Because of their liminal characteristics,” dwarves were often cast into the role of ritual tricksters and “...associated with transformation and war” (Brown, Stanton 247). Dwarves are also purported to have links to the “other world” (Southworth 22). In lucha libre, little people are seen regularly, not only as escorts or seconds, but as actual competitors. They are sometimes referred to as “minis.” Some mini stars in AAA include Mini Max, Mascarita Sagrada, Octagoncito, Mini Psicosis, Mini Abismo Negro, and Mini Chessman. In America, there was a long tradition of “midget” wrestling as a spectacle in the ‘70s and ‘80s. Today, actual “midget” wrestling matches are rare, at least in the mainstream. However, current little people participating in the American rituals include Irish wrestler Finlay’s second, Little Bastard, and, more recently, Little Boogeyman. Both these characters are purported to be from another world. Little Bastard, in the guise of the stereotypical leprechaun, appears from under the wrestling ring at critical moments in the match to assist Finley by attacking his foe. He is never seen entering the arena to hide and always appears when he assists Finley. Little Boogeyman appears from a cloud of smoke, riding on top of the Boogeyman who is crawling out from the mysterious mist. For the most part, though, American wrestling uses little people to parody other wrestlers, including Bret Hart and the Spirit Squad. In Puerto Rico, a mini Savio Vega was brought in to make fun of the fans who were hoping for Savio’s return.

A true blending of lucha libre and the Catholic Church appeared in the mid 1970s. Appropriately enough, a member of the clergy of the Catholic Church participated in lucha libre for close to twenty-three years. His name was Fray Tormenta, or Father Storm. He played the role of a luchador who was also a priest. In reality, Fray

Tormenta was a Catholic priest who fought to raise money for an orphanage his church sponsored. He was even known to give masses in his mask. A rival recognized his voice during a mass he delivered (Williams par. 15).

Lucha libre was created in Mexico by Salvador Lutteroth, who had little idea how the sport would connect with the people of Mexico. The shows served a social function of bringing communities together, and drew inspiration from the morality plays of the Catholic Church, as well as the sacred traditions from Mexico's past. The themes within lucha libre can be directly compared to the morality plays, as iconic allegorical characters fill both the lucha stage and the stages of the morality plays. Even an ordained minister from the Catholic Church could not resist the chance to make money for the orphans under his care by fighting in the lucha libre ring.

VI. AMERICAN WRESTLING AND ITS MEXICAN ANTECEDENTS

Professional wrestling, or sports entertainment, has its roots in the traditional styles of grappling brought over from the Irish, English, and various other ethnic groups that made their way to America during the infancy of the nation. Charles Morrow Wilson, author of The Magnificent Scufflers, claims that people liked to wrestle after town meetings in the late 1800s (1). United States presidents, including George Washington and Zachary Taylor, enjoyed the sporting activity. Calvin Coolidge and William Howard Taft were adept at collar and elbow style, and Abraham Lincoln was an expert at catch-as-catch-can style (6). The collar and elbow style is named for the starting position, which finds each competitor gripping the ‘collar’ and ‘elbow’ of the opponent before attempting maneuvers. The catch-as-catch-can style permits most every hold and tactic to pin or submit your opponent with the exception of all strikes and gouges.

When the Civil War broke out, soldiers spent some of their down time relieving stress by wrestling. The Civil War is credited with spreading the collar and elbow style throughout the U.S., and wrestling even became the official sport of the Union Army (Wilson 43). During the Indian Wars, Abraham Lincoln wrestled a fellow regiment leader to determine who would lead the regiment into battle (Unreal).

In the early 1900s, wrestling became even more popular. Grapplers matched skills on wood floors covered in sawdust, and boxing rings were utilized to test their

wrestling prowess. People appreciated the sport, selling out stadiums by the thousands. But there were shortcomings in the traditional style. The matches were long, and though the crowds appreciated the sport, waiting several hours for a winner became tedious and boring (Ball 43). Things got worse during the rematch between Frank Gotch and George Hackenschmidt in 1911. Gotch sent in a 'hooker' named Ad Santell to the Hackenschmidt camp. A 'hooker' in the world of professional wrestling is a wrestler who has mastered severe holds. Santell seriously injured Hackenschmidt's leg. With the gate being so tremendous, the promoters refused to cancel the show. The teams and promoters agreed to make the bout a 'work,' with Hackenschmidt winning one of the falls in what was supposed to be a best-of-three match. A 'work' is the term used to refer to a match with a fixed ending. Gotch double-crossed Hackenschmidt and pinned him in two straight falls (Albano 20).

When the press got wind of the set-up, legitimate wrestling in America was over. Several years later, a promoter named Toots Mondt took on wrestling in the mid 1920s and reworked the matches, adding time limits and encouraging more exciting moves like drop kicks (Albano 21). Though it signaled the end of legitimate wrestling, it was the beginning of sports entertainment.

Sports entertainment refers to modern professional wrestling. Two grapplers 'compete' in the confines of a ring in a predetermined bout of physical might. Though sports entertainment is usually referred to as "fake," the truth of the matter is that while the outcome is staged, the story is told through an improvised fight that is very physical and, in some cases, a very real threat to life and limb. Sports entertainers train for months learning how to fall, or "bump," and understand the art of "telling a story" in the ring.

Like lucha, there are character roles, though not as distinct as in Mexico. In America, there are 'heels' who play the bad guys, and the 'babyfaces' who are the good guys. The bout is usually called by the heel. Throughout the match, the heel will give short instructions to the 'face on the moves they are about to perform. The typical story between a heel and a baby involves the initial contact, the heel taking control of the match, and a build up in which the baby uses his skill to overcome the control of the heel, eventually moving into the predetermined ending of the bout. In professional wrestling terms, the previous description of a wrestling match is referred to as 'shine, heat, and a comeback.' The baby shines in the beginning before the heel takes control (heat), and then the baby makes a comeback and either wins or is foiled by the heel. This can be compared to the dramatic structure of beginning, middle, and end. The beginning introduces the characters, the middle reveals the conflict, and the end resolves the conflict.

Micheal R. Ball formally identifies several categories of wrestler in American sports entertainment. Those categories are the Fall Guys, the Heroes, and the Villains. The Fall Guys are sometimes referred to as "jobbers." The fall guys are wrestlers who lose, or "job," to either the heroes or the villains to demonstrate what the hero or villain can do in a match. The heroes tend to be white, though depending on the part of the country, they can exemplify the racial makeup of the community. The heroes also represent examples of different classes of society. The Villains tend to be common, arrogant, and in America, people from other countries in the global community, especially nations that America considers aggressors or unsupportive of the American status quo. Examples of professional wrestling bad guys who represent threats to

American foreign policy include Germans after World War II, Russians during and after the Cold War, Iranians during the Iran hostage crisis, and currently Arabs and the French (Ball 110-13).

These categories of American wrestlers also represent different ritual characters in sports entertainment. There is the Punk, who is a brawler and a loner who can sometimes be swayed to take a side, whether for the hero or the villain. The Sadist character enjoys hurting people. The mentally ill or retarded character is dim-witted, yet charming, and usually very strong. The Authority figure is another character, like a police officer or teacher, and is typically demonized. There are also managers and valets who help out their charges using sneaky or distracting tactics. And the referee who, in contrast to Mexican lucha libre, is not necessarily on the side of the villain, but is just as incompetent (Ball 100-9).

The ritual character list expands even more. There is the Foreign Menace, which is a wrestler representing any country that is outspoken against American policy. These foreign menaces shift through time periods, as mentioned previously. There is the Titled Snob, or Pointy Headed Intellectual, who is obnoxious about being smarter than others (88). They are typically given a title like “King Booker,” “Mr. Wonderful,” “Lord Stephen Regal” (and, subsequently, Goodwill Ambassador William Regal), or “Dr. Wagner.” They can even go as far as being officials for the company, like the Commissioner, or the General Manager. These characters could take advantage of their position within the company by placing people who have stood up against them in matches, sometimes with crippling stipulations and handicaps. For example, a ‘face’ commissioner might put a ‘heel’ wrestler in a lumberjack match. A lumberjack match is

a special stipulation that lines the exterior of the ring with a certain number of wrestlers on all sides. The wrestlers on the outside will thrash a wrestler thrown outside of the ring with their fists or belts before throwing him back into the ring. In the case of this match, the lumberjacks might be 'faces' who are enemies of the heel. The same can be done by a 'heel' general manager, who might make a 'face' fight in a two-on-one match against two vicious "heels." Heel officials who take advantage of their position to take power away from the good guy are automatically derided by fans.

There are characters that represent Hillbillies. The Hillbillies are not the most educated, but have common sense and charm. There are also masked villains, although these character types have faded dramatically since the '50s and '60s. There are cowboys who can be good or bad, and blacks and Hispanics, who usually play up their particular racial stereotype, such as the tag team combination of Cryme Tyme. Composed of two black men who play up the current 'gangster' stereotype, they viciously attack their opponents and steal property from their opponent and the corporation. The late Eddie Guerrero played up the tough Latino gimmick, coming to the ring in a dolled-up classic car with hydraulics. His entrance was accompanied by a song that was sometimes "Latino Heat" or the song "I lie, I cheat, I steal." Native Americans also play up their stereotypes, including Tatanka, Chief Jay Strongbow, and Wahoo McDaniel. And there are also Nature Boys, who could be considered 'metrosexual' in today's culture. Young wrestlers wear modern clothing with a youthful sexual sensibility, while classic nature boys like Ric Flair come to the ring in sparkling flowing robes or 'cut promos' in custom suits (Ball 91-9).

American sports entertainment shares some of the same themes found in

Mexico, but also has several different themes that separate itself from Mexican lucha libre. These dialectic themes include youth and age, America and the world, education and experience, and simplicity and complexity. Youth versus age themes show themselves when a young up-and-coming star takes on a cagy veteran. When a foreigner takes to the ring, the opponent tends to represent America by default. Education and experience shows its face during matches between scientific (or technical grapplers) and the brawler. The brawler uses basic strikes and holds, while the technical wrestler dazzles the audience and his opponent with science. The contrasting styles are also examples of simplicity and complexity (Ball 135-37).

For decades, wrestling in the United States was regional, with promoters holding sway over each section of the country. It was considered an affront to bring your promotion into another territory, with serious consequences, including financial and physical harm. When Vince McMahon, Jr., took over his father's promotion, the World Wrestling Federation (then World Wide Wrestling Federation), based out of Connecticut, he utilized a different tactic to promote his organization. Vince began to tape his wrestling shows and ship the tapes around the nation into the markets of other promoters. The territorial bosses were upset at the move, which eventually brought about the end of the regional promotions (Reynolds 25-7).

There was one exception, though. In Atlanta, Ted Turner's WTBS had aired a weekly weekend show called World Class Wrestling. The programs were a part of the NWA, the National Wrestling Alliance, a territory in the south. As the regional promotions fell by the wayside, Ted Turner decided he wanted to compete with Vince McMahon and the World Wrestling Federation (now World Wrestling Entertainment).

Turner created a program of WCW programming called Monday Nitro to go up against the WWE's Raw program on Monday nights (Reynolds 62). Though it was a lively time for several years, mismanagement and reorganization eventually closed WCW forever. All rights to the WCW name, images, and history were bought by Vince McMahon (Reynolds 334).

Though World Class Wrestling was gone, one of the innovative strategies it implemented while competing against World Wrestling Entertainment remained. In contrast to the typically muscle-bound and large athletes in the WWE, WCW chose to bring in lightweight talent. While WCW officially brought stars of lucha libre into the mainstream of American sports entertainment, they stole the idea from ECW (Extreme Championship Wrestling). ECW was an upstart independent federation based out of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, which chose to take a position contrary to the wrestling sensibilities mainstream American sports entertainment, booking violent gimmick matches with 'extreme' rules. Lucha libre was another piece to its promotional strategy that challenged the status quo in American sports entertainment. In 1995, Rey Mysterio, Jr., Eddie Guerrero, and Psicosis were some of the first stars to introduce lucha libre to Americans who were not living on or near border towns (Sacks 8).

Though the luchadores were typically known to fans along the Texas and California border, they were now projected into living rooms across the United States and, subsequently, the world. It was a smart move that paid dividends to WCW. Typically, luchadores were true athletes, renowned for their physical prowess, quick moves, and high flying acrobatics. In the U.S., more appreciation was shown to larger athletes who used their size and strength to win (Williams 9). WCW brought in the

luchadores, who brought their high flying, innovative and exciting storytelling style to America.

Charles Ashenoff, better known to professional wrestling fans in the U.S. and Latin America as Konnan, was a part of the transfer of Mexican talent to WCW. Konnan said about the fan reaction to the luchadores “They really grabbed the attention of the audience for about three years...” (Apter par. 3). In 1996, the popularity of the luchadores division resurrected the idea of a light heavyweight division. WCW had tried to create a division for smaller wrestlers several years earlier, calling the title the Light Heavyweight Championship. But the title was dropped after its champion was injured. The new light-heavyweight division was dubbed “cruiserweight.” The Cruiserweight belt represented the weight class, typically composed of Mexican luchadores, and featured some of the most exciting stars of WCW, including Rey Mysterio, Jr., Dean Malenko, Eddie Guerrero, Ultimo Dragon, and Shinjiro Otani.

One thing WCW did not understand was the tradition of the mask. Konnan says about the first unmaskings that things were “...great until WCW pulled the sacred and traditional masks off the performers...” (Apter par. 3). Despite the great popularity of the luchadores, “WCW buried top lucha stars despite the high Hispanic interest in their organization” (Reynolds 177). Mexican luchadores were being used as squash match fodder (Brasher par. 48). The late Eddie Guerrero felt WCW was treating the luchadores unfairly (Brasher par. 1). Despite their popularity in Mexico and their new fanbase in America, the Mexican luchadores were being used as ‘jobbers’ with few exceptions. They were even told not to take bookings in Mexico on their days off. Nevertheless, several luchadores were being booked in both America and Mexico and making good

money. Many ignored the decree, while others looked for ways to be fired by a WCW management they saw as ungrateful (Reynolds 128).

One of the first top WCW lucha stars to lose his mask was Juventud Guerrero. Juventud is the son of Mexican legend, Fuerza Guerrero. Believed to be in his late fifties, Fuerza continues to wrestle with his mask. His son followed his tradition, taking on a mask similar to his father's, only to lose it in an outstanding match against Chris Jericho for his mask and his title.

Rey Mysterio, Jr., got his mask from his uncle, the original Rey Mysterio (Apter par. 9). Extremely popular in ECW and, subsequently, WCW, Rey would also lose his mask. Fans in Mexico hated the unmasking of Rey because they felt Americans were not respecting Mexican culture. However, it was difficult for Juvi and Rey to say anything against it, since they were under contract to WCW (Apter par. 7). Konnan writes:

They were so well known for the masks. It was like taking the mask off the Lone Ranger. All the mystique died... [WCW Officials] shouldn't have done it. They didn't respect the tradition or they didn't understand some of it. It was just ignorance. (Apter par. 3-5)

Interestingly enough, when joining the WWE, Rey Mysterio donned his mask again, and it seems all has been forgiven. He is one of only two Mexicans of the lucha libre tradition who have gone on to win a major title in the WWE. The other is the late Eddie Guerrero.

Thanks to the influence of lucha libre on American sports entertainment, the sport in America has evolved significantly. American wrestling has traditionally been considered "scientific" and "technical," a tribute to its origins in legitimate wrestling competition. A "scientific" or "technical" wrestler uses legitimate amateur style moves, submission style grapples, and complicated pinning maneuvers to achieve victory.

“Stories” are told from this physical “scientific” foundation.

Ric Flair, for example, considered a scientific and technical wrestler who also implements cheating tactics, uses as his “finishing move” the figure four leglock. This move is a hallmark of a scientific wrestler. The move finds the attacker standing by the feet of his opponent and facing him. The victim lies on his back on the mat. The attacker picks up the victim’s right leg with his left hand. The attacker then steps around or simply twists the victim’s right leg around his left leg, places the twisted leg on the knee of the victim, making a number four with the leg. With the attacker’s leg in between both of the victim’s legs, the attacker picks up the victim’s left leg with his right hand and falls backwards, simultaneously placing his right leg across the ankle of his victim, which has been placed over the victim’s left knee. The pressure of the victim’s leg against the waist and stomach of the attacker and the pressure applied by the attacker’s right leg on the victim’s left ankle draped across the victim’s knee puts tremendous pressure on the victim’s knee, leading to hyperextension. This is an example of a technical, or scientific, move.

During a bout, Ric Flair executes moves and delivers strikes affecting the legs, knees, and hamstrings of his opponent, communicating to the fans that he is “wearing down” his opponent and “setting up” his vaunted figure four leglock. When he applies the hold after the repeated grapple and strike attacks on the leg, it is assumed that the opponent’s leg is worn down and that he is sure to submit. Whether he does or not depends on the match, but the story has been told through his scientific offensive.

Lucha libre, on the other hand, is high-flying and acrobatic, with elements of scientific wrestling. A typical lucha bout is a six man bout with three rudos and three

tecnicos. It is also typically a best-of-three bout. The first two men enter the ring and engage in an acrobatic display of moves. One ends up on the outside of the ring, only to have his opponent flip or jump on him from inside the ring to the outside. Since they are both outside, the rules allow for the next two competitors to come in while the two original wrestlers try to return to their respective corners. Again, one man will go to the outside to have the other opponent fly on him and the final pair will come in. In a common ending, a rudo will be outside the ring and a tecnico will fly onto him. Another rudo will follow suit, attacking the tecnico. Another tecnico will then follow, leaving four men on the outside. The remaining two left in the ring will engage in a final tussle which will determine the winner through a scientific pinning maneuver or submission hold or dirty tactic.

With the introduction of the “lucha” style, the traditional scientific foundation has changed, integrating and assimilating the lucha style of storytelling. Heavyweight wrestlers, typically known for tremendous throws and power moves, now attempt acrobatic maneuvers that include moonsaults and tope suicidos, or suicide dives. A moonsault is an acrobatic move in which a competitor mounts the top turnbuckle facing the audience before arching into a backflip to land stomach first on his opponent. A suicide dive is performed by a wrestler who runs and dives headfirst over the top rope to strike his opponent on the outside. Lance Hoyt is a 290 pound wrestler who not only has a fierce power attack, but a top rope moonsault in his arsenal. Brock Lesnar, 285 pounds, also performed a moonsault at Wrestlemania XIX versus Kurt Angle. The Undertaker, six foot ten inches and 305 pounds, has been known to attack his opponents with a suicide dive between the top and middle rope to the outside.

Traditionally, WWE did not have a roster of light heavyweights. There is now a title that represents their division. Shawn Michaels held the Heavyweight title and is currently one half of the tag team champions with Heavyweight John Cena. Val Venis competed in Mexico for several years under a mask as Steel. Chavo Guerrero, Eddie Guerrero's nephew, holds the Cruiserweight title. Brian Kendrick, 175 pounds, and Paul London, 205 pounds, hold the WWE Tag Team Championship. The doors to these light heavyweight stars were opened by the influence and sacrifices of lucha libre stars in America.

TNA, Total Non-Stop Action, has a tag team called LAX (Latin American Exchange) that is currently running an "angle," or storyline, in which they act as anti-Americans who attack the American status quo and all white Americans who they consider racist. The TNA roster itself is filled with light heavyweights in or above 200 pounds, including Chris Sabin, the masked Shark Boy, Sonjay Dut, The Fallen Angel, Jay Lethal, and Jerry Lynn.

American sports entertainment also shares a seasonal performance tradition similar to the seasonal morality plays like the Pastores, Corpus Christi plays, and the Tiger Dance. WWE calls the Survivor Series pay-per-view a "Thanksgiving Tradition." Summer Slam is produced every summer, and Halloween Havoc is a Halloween themed event that WCW used to produce every October.

American sports entertainment today is a stark contrast to its origins in the traditional wrestling styles of the various ethnic communities that brought their styles from their native lands. Abraham Lincoln and George Washington might not recognize the sport they practiced in sports entertainment. Hackenschmidt and Gotch were two of

the greatest wrestlers in the world, and their botched legitimate wrestling match gave birth to the staged conflict that would spread around the United States through shrewd promoters. The WWE would ultimately dominate the sports entertainment landscape, building upon the success of lucha libre nurtured in the defunct WCW. Lucha libre would prove to be such an influence that cruiserweights and even heavyweights would try to copy the moves popularized by the luchadores in America, melding the two distinct storytelling styles and provide another link to the Mexican morality plays of days gone by.

V. CONCLUSION

Mexican morality plays influenced American sports entertainment through lucha libre. The dances, festivals, and traditions of Mexico melded with the religious dogmas of the Catholic Church brought over from Spain during colonization in the early 1500s, and continued to evolve into the 1900s. When Lutteroth created what is now known as lucha libre around 1933, the people who had moved from their villages into the cities found another outlet to celebrate the struggle between good and evil, while the city people found an outlet for the frustrations of their daily working life. When Extreme Championship wrestling imported lucha libre in 1995 into America in an effort to set themselves apart from standard American sports entertainment, luchadores dazzled American audiences with their storytelling style. This style eventually melded with the American style, creating modern American sports entertainment, the morality plays of our time.

The perpetuation of the morality play and its subsequent influence on lucha libre and American sports entertainment could also be attributed to a concept forwarded by Carl Jung. The archetype is a symbolic, mythological, or primordial image that resonates with all humans when it is viewed. The image is immediately understood through its “universally human characteristics” (Bair 177).

The allegorical characters of the morality plays and the competitors in lucha libre and American sports entertainment are comparable to archetypes. The father of

modern psychoanalysis, Carl Jung, advanced the concept of the archetypes and the “collective unconscious,” or “psychic inheritance.” The collective unconscious is

... the reservoir of our experiences as a species, a kind of knowledge we are all born with. And yet we can never be directly conscious of it. It influences all of our experiences and behaviors, most especially the emotional ones, but we only know about it indirectly, by looking at those influences. (Boeree par. 20)

Jung says that many images or situations can be felt and recognized unconsciously by every human being, regardless of race, generation, or time period. The actions and choices made by the allegorical characters in a morality play or the foreign menace in a sports entertainment bout can all be interpreted unconsciously as good or evil. Some important archetypes to consider in relation to morality plays and sports entertainment are the Mother archetype and the shadow. Others include Father, family, the wise old man, and the trickster.

The Mother archetype is anyone or anything that nurtures. Dr. C. George Boeree writes that since every human being must have a mother to exist on earth, every generation understands what a mother is. Mothers, whether real or substituted, tend to nurture and can be associated with forests, church, or the ocean (par. 27-28). The Mother archetype is found within El Divino Narciso in which the healing waters of the Fountain, representing the Virgin Mary, cleanse Human Nature on its journey to find Narcissus. Mother characters in sports entertainment include Buff Bagwell’s mother who came to his defense during a WCW angle and Shelton Benjamin’s mother who for a short time supported him from her wheelchair at ringside.

The shadow is an amoral archetype, representing all the ideas and images a particular dogma considers “evil,” yet is a natural impulse of our humanity. The shadow

can be compared to an animal. The animal knows neither right or wrong and does what it needs to do to continue to exist, whether by taking tender care of its young or killing for its food. The shadow is that part of human existence that belief systems consider evil (Boree par. 31-3). In the WWE, Dave Batista is nicknamed “The Animal” and has a shirt that fans can purchase that reads, “Sometimes Good Guys do Bad Things.” The Vices of the morality plays, who were sometimes dressed in the skin of beasts, also compare to the animal archetype, as well as the mentally ill and retarded characters in professional wrestling.

The Father archetype represents authority, or a guide (Boree par. 41). El Autor represents the Father archetype in El Gran Teatro del Mundo. The tradition of a luchador passing his mask to his son represents the importance of the Father archetype in lucha libre. It elevates the son in importance, as he is continuing the tradition of his father. Such luchadores include El Hijo del Santo, Blue Panther, Jr., and Lizmark, Jr. The authority figure in the WWE is the cunning owner, Vince McMahon. Playing an exaggeration of his true role, McMahon bullies and derides any wrestler who stands up to his tyrannical methods.

The Family archetype can also be found in morality plays and sports entertainment. The Family archetype “...represents the idea of blood relationship and ties that run deeper than those based on conscious reasons” (Boree par. 41). El Nino in Calderon’s Teatro represents the product of a married union. The vices comprise a family working to provide sins for Everyman, while the virtues are united to provide salvation. In sports entertainment, formal families like the McMahons, the von Erichs, and the Guerreros display the power of family. Vince McMahon employs his own

children, Shane and Stephanie, to help run the organization. Informal families include stables like the Four Horsemen, Degeneration X, and the New World Order, who comprise teams that work together towards a common goal. A famous heel stable in the 80's headed by Bobby "The Brain" Heenan was simply called "The Heenan Family."

The Wise Old Man archetype can be viewed as Grace in El Divino Narciso by Sor Juana. The Wise Old Man helps lead the Hero archetype to make the right decisions. In Divino, Grace leads Human Nature to the cleansing waters of the Fountain. In professional wrestling, Ric Flair formed a stable named "Evolution" and acted as the wise old man who recruited three young up and coming stars and led them to stardom. The Trickster is another archetype that relates to the morality play and sports entertainment as previously discussed in detail (48).

Fans around the world are able to recognize the roles of the sports entertainers and choose to support whomever they see fit. The fan involvement and stake in the ritualized confrontation between good and evil are "... made more intense by the audience identifying with the characters" (Levi 59). This is an interesting observation, considering the growing Mexican population in America and the hands of globalization reaching into and out of Mexico. With the massive influx of immigrants into America, especially from Mexico, American sports entertainment will continue to grow as Mexicans spend money to participate in the ritual.

In the United States, the relationship between the wrestlers to the crowd is more important than the actual performance. The match is just a "motor" to the relationship constituted by the spectacle. Appropriately enough, Heather Levi writes that the meaning of the spectacle is produced through the crowd's identification with the wrestler coded

most closely to their ethnic self image (58).

In the 1960s and 1970s, capitalists like the McMahon family and regional promoters produced these pro-wrestling rituals as “reflection of elite ideology rather than naturally evolving popular values” (Ball 2). In the modern world of professional wrestling, it is not so important to be the “heel” or the “babyface,” but to be more or less ethnically American. Being ethnically American depends on the region of America a performance takes place in, thus identifying the audience. This is a curious observation considering the evolution of the sport, the changing ethnicity of America, and the popularity of the lucha style.

If the morals and values of being “American” are reflected in the characters within the sports entertainment realm, there is certainly a shift in the status quo of the ‘80s and even the ‘90s. American lightweights have used the door opened by luchadores to become stars, displaying and even innovating high flying moves and spectacular grappling holds and throws with each new televised episode. In previous decades, this would not have been the case in America, with its ground style and emphasis on science over spectacle.

Yet light heavyweights are now main event performers. The late Eddie Guerrero was the first luchador from this generation to hold the WWE Championship in 2004, an honor that has not been bestowed upon a man of Hispanic descent since Pedro Morales held the title in the ‘70s. Rey Mysterio, Jr. would go on to win the WWE Heavyweight Title in 2006, the second Hispanic to win a major title in the WWE in a decade. It is interesting to note, as during the ‘60s and ‘70s, the promoters would pander to the ethnic population of the territory. This makes an interesting suggestion about the

ethnic population of America today.

For example, the first recorded WWE championship was between Buddy Rogers and Antonino Rocca. Rocca was part Argentinean and part Italian and was a huge draw to the ethnic crowds in New York. In this time period, Pedro Morales also rose to fame. His Puerto Rican roots drew on the dense Latin community in New York. Bruno Sammartino, who was born in Italy, would go on to become the longest running champion in WWE history, holding the title for nearly twelve years. His ancestry drew the Italian population of New York to WWE shows.

The recent placing of the two biggest titles in the WWE around the waist of two Hispanic superstars seems to communicate not only the acceptance and respect lucha libre now has in America, but signals an interesting cultural evolution in America itself. No longer seen only in Mexico or restricted to border town performances, lucha libre is now a strong part of the tradition of American sports entertainment. It is a sign of not only the acceptance within the American sports entertainment community, but of the makeup of the general population of America.

It is no secret that immigration, whether checked or unchecked, is affecting the United States. George W. Bush, working hand in hand with Mexican president Vicente Fox on the Trans Texas corridor, as well as work permits and other regulatory legislation, reveals that immigration issues are on the minds of our politicians. The influence of globalization will be felt even more, not only in the border towns of Texas and California, but the entire United States.

Mexican immigration is obviously on the minds of businessmen as well. Pizza Patron, based out of Dallas, has agreed to accept pesos as acceptable currency in their

stores across the state of Texas. MTV has an entire channel devoted to the videos of Latin reggeaton style of music. When Vince McMahon placed the most coveted belts of his organization on Guerrero and Mysterio, this event signaled not only a respect for Mexican luchadores, but their style as well. By doing this, he brought in more Hispanic fans. More fans equal more money. Last year, the WWE traveled to Mexico and put on several shows in cities across the nation. Globalization works both ways, as some might suggest that Vince McMahon is looking to gain possession of territories south of the border, just as he did in America. He currently broadcasts his Monday night show in Spanish and provides it to Spanish speaking television audiences. The WWE has plans to travel back to Mexico to do more shows. This was unheard of several years ago. Typically, WWE had tours of Europe, with major emphasis on televised shows and pay-per-views in England. For four days in March, the WWE will be in Mexico City, D.F., Chihuahua, and Monterrey. During the last trip into Mexico, Latin stars such as Carlito and Rey Mysterio, Jr., figured prominently in the promotion of the show and the matches. Rey even wore a traditional feathered headdress and native warrior clothing in the ring that used the colors of the Mexican flag.

In a way, the Mexican morality play has come full circle. The Mexican morality play colored lucha libre, which then traveled north through globalization to influence American style professional wrestling. Today, the newly evolved form of sports entertainment has come back to the place where its evolution began: the heart of Mexico. When Rey wore the headdress and mantles of the traditional Mexican warrior, the tradition that melded with the religious dogma of the Spanish conquerors, he reminded us where the current form of American sports entertainment was cultivated and

nourished.

American sports entertainment is looked upon as pedestrian entertainment. However, the fact remains that it is the modern version of the morality plays of days gone by. It is a representation of the dangers and evil influences that are a part of our human existence. American sports entertainment and lucha libre, like the morality plays, are also beacons of hope, shining lights of salvation that demonstrate that though the struggle with evil is perpetual, there will always be good people fighting against the armies of darkness.

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