Beautiful Senoritas Study Guide

Beautiful Senoritas by Dolores Prida

BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Dolores Prida saw and heard much to impress her in 1976 in Caracas, Venezuela, where she was reporting on an international theater festival for *Visión*, a Latin American newsmagazine. However, she was surprised to note that not a single one of the plays she viewed took up issues then being aired by the feminist movement. At the time, Prida was actively involved with feminism on her home turf of the United States, and she knew that the same issues preoccupying women there were also preoccupying women in Latin America and elsewhere around the world. When Prida discovered that plays addressing women's issues within Latin American contexts were scarce, she was determined to write a play that would help remedy that scarcity. *Beautiful Señoritas* is that play. It was staged in New York City in 1977 at the DUO Theatre.

In the essay □The Show Does Go On,□ published in *Breaking the Boundaries*, Prida's description of *Beautiful Señoritas* reveals its particular feminist focus. That focus is on female gender roles and stereotypes, particularly as they pertain to Latin women. *Beautiful Señoritas*, she says, is □a modest one-act musical play that poke[s] fun at long-standing Latin women stereotypes□from Carmen Miranda to Cuchi Cuchi Charo to suffering black-shrouded women crying and praying over their tortillas to modern-day young Latinas trying to re-define their images.□ Although it was published in 1991 in two acts, Prida would nevertheless call the work a one-act play owing to its brevity.

Like most of Prida's subsequent plays, *Beautiful Señoritas* is both comic and serious and has been staged many times. Prida is, indeed, a well-established American dramatist, and most large libraries hold volumes of at least some of her plays. *Beautiful Señoritas* can be found in the volume titled *Beautiful Señoritas & Other Plays*, published by Arte Publico Press (1991).

Author Biography

Nationality 1: Cuban

Birthdate: 1943

Dolores Prida was born on September 5, 1943, in Caibarién, Cuba. In 1959, following Fidel Castro's takeover of Cuba, Prida's father fled the country for the United States, and his family soon followed. Established with her family in New York City in 1961, Prida made Manhattan her base. In New York City, Prida began working in a bakery and attending night classes at Hunter College. Soon, she was writing for various Spanish-language publications, such as *El tiempo* and *Nuestro*. She was also writing and publishing poetry at this time.

Eventually, Prida developed an interest in the theater, forming a connection with the Latino collective group Teatro Popular on Manhattan's Lower East Side. Her first play, *Beautiful Señoritas*, was performed at DUO, an experimental theater where Prida would go on to stage more of her plays. Although Prida is best known as a playwright and has devoted most of her creative energies to writing drama, as opposed to other forms of fiction, she has written nonfiction as well. For example, in 2005 she was a senior editor at *Latina Magazine*.

A number of concerns characterize Prida's plays. Women's issues are the focus of *Beautiful Señoritas*. Prida also explores the themes of biculturalism, in *Coser y cantar* (1981), and the plight of the poor, in *The Beggars Soap Opera* (1979). Prida is very much a modern playwright, whose plays evidence the instincts of an avid experimentalist and dedicated entertainer. Prida experiments in the sense that she does not hesitate to mix and match dramatic forms and moods in a single play. Thus, *Beautiful Señoritas* is both comic and tragic and borrows from Broadway musicals. Besides borrowing from Broadway, Prida also draws on popular cultural forms, such as soap operas (as in the 1986 play *Pantallas*), in her effort to entertain her audience. While Prida might parody elements of the popular forms from which she borrows, she understands what is powerful about them and utilizes those strengths to her own purposes.

A vital figure in American drama and letters, Prida is a highly respected member of the many communities and organizations in which she is so active. She was honored with the Cintas Fellowship for literature in 1976 and the Creative Artistic Public Service Award for Playwriting in 1976, and she received an honorary doctorate from Mount Holyoke College in 1989.

Plot Summary

Act 1

Beautiful Señoritas opens with the character Don José pacing nervously and smoking a cigar. From what he says, the audience learns that he is awaiting the birth of a child, whom he expects to be a boy. On receiving the news that the child is a girl, he expresses disappointment and disgust. The man's masculine self-regard and disdain for things female set the tone for Prida's play about women's second-class status in traditional Latino and Latin American cultures.

Four Beautiful Señoritas take the place of Don José on stage. They speak nonsensically, sprinkling their speech with Spanish words. While dancing, they sing a song that, despite its nonsensical portions, still conveys coherent ideas: namely, that in the eyes of non-Latinos, Latino culture in the United States is a clichéd group of notions, among which is the female stereotype that Latin women are □always ready for Amor [Love].□

The four Señoritas exit the stage, and two different female characters, María la O and the Beauty Queen, appear. They are in a dressing room at a venue hosting a beauty pageant. They converse about their chances of making money by banking on their good looks. They exit, and the Midwife and Girl enter. As the Midwife speaks of the worries of women who rely on their beauty, the Girl sits at the dressing table at which María la O was seated earlier. She applies makeup, her back to the audience. Once the Midwife stops speaking, the Girl turns to face the audience. Her face is painted like a clown's.

A Master of Ceremonies (MC) takes the stage. He is presiding over a beauty pageant somewhere in the United States. The contestants are Miss Little Havana, Miss Chili Tamale, Miss Conchita Banana, and Miss Commonwealth. All of them, save Miss Commonwealth, sing a short song when they are introduced. They play up to the MC, who asks them ridiculous questions. They also all take the roles of different Women characters immediately after they appear as contestants. As Women characters, they express their inner thoughts and dreams.

A Man enters with a chair, places it in the center of the stage, and sits on it. The Girl enters and sits at the edge of the stage with her back to the audience. She is followed onstage by four Catch Women, who sit around the Man. As they speak, it is as if they are instructing the girl. They talk of how to tantalize and confuse men. When they have finished, the Man sings a song about how the women □do it all□ for him: □They do it all for me / What they learn in a magazine / They do it all for me.□

Then the Nun enters, grasps the Girl, and commands the Girl to pray. The Priest and four Señoritas enter. The Señoritas begin confessing to the priest their transgressions involving boyfriends and men. The scene ends with all except the Girl overcome by sexual hysteria.

Act 2

As the act opens, the MC is making a □welcome back□ speech. A Woman sits on a swing, swinging and singing. She sings about men who promise love and say sweet things but really have only seduction and betrayal on their minds. The stage, which has been dimly lit, now is lit fully. A group of Señoritas sits together and speaks at a dance. The Girl is also present with a Chaperone. A man, a seducer, dances with various of the Señoritas. He leaves with one of the Señoritas as the others relate tales of seduction, betrayal, and reputations ruined.

The action changes as the female characters sing a wedding song. The song explains that when women marry, they give up all their dreams and devote their energies to their husbands and children and their houses. The Martyr female figures are on stage, wearing wigs with rollers. They mime typical household duties, such as ironing and sweeping. They speak of the drudgery and boredom they endure and of being physically abused by their husbands, as if this were inevitable and part of what it is to be a wife.

The Guerrillera (meaning □female guerrilla fighter□) arrives in the midst of the Martyrs. She rouses them with stirring words about how women must liberate themselves and create richer and freer lives for themselves. She says that there will be a fund-raiser for the cause of women's advancement, and everybody sings a song about the fund-raising event, which will only mean more work for the women, while the guerrilla men talk about change. Afterward, the female characters remember that there are chores awaiting them, chores they are neglecting. The Martyr characters leave the stage, and a Man enters dressed as a campesino, a farm laborer. A Social Researcher questions him, and a picture of his and his wife's life emerges. The point of the scene is to show that the campesino's wife endures far more hardship than he. She has had sixteen children and works so long all day that she is still doing chores once her husband has gone to bed.

The setting shifts to a family scene. The family depicted is a traditional, poor one. The Daughter wants to go out to play but is not allowed because of her gender. The Son, on the other hand, is indulged. The Wife is submissive to her Husband, and the Mother and Father train the children in traditional gender roles. The Daughter announces that she is pregnant. The Son, as Brother to Sister/Daughter, announces that he will exact revenge for her shame. The Son says that he has made his own girlfriend pregnant, that she has nowhere to go, and that he cannot support her. The Mother tells her son not to worry, to bring the girl into their home. The play ends with Women characters speaking of what women endure: beating, rape, disrespect, lack of equal opportunity. They tell of their dream of a better future. The Girl joins in, talking about the better future that awaits women as they develop a sense of what they want from life and from the societies in which they live.

Act I

Act I Summary

Don Jose is a proud, excited, expectant father. His wife is about to give birth to his first child. He desperately wants a son. When his son is born, he will teach him to ride horses, shoot, drink, and take him to a whorehouse. The midwife rushes in to congratulate him on the birth of a brand new baby girl. Don Jose is disgusted. He throws his cigar on the ground and stomps on it. He walks off to get drunk, disappointed that another woman has been born into this world, another woman who other men's sons will covet and pursue and try to rape. He will protect her virginity with his gun.

A chorus of four Beautiful Senoritas enters, singing a song: they are the beautiful senoritas with maracas in their souls. They are always ready for amor. They are Latin bombshells who dance the tango all night long.

Maria La O, one of the Beautiful Senoritas, retires to her dressing room. Her feet hurt. She looks older and tired as she removes her makeup and false eyelashes; all of the glamour is gone out of her. She makes only forty extra dollars a week for her singing and dancing, but she must, because she needs the money.

The Beauty Queen enters the dressing room and asks Maria La O why she is still there. Maria La O is too tired to move. The Beauty Queen is off to yet another beauty contest. She has amassed numerous small titles such as Queen of Platano Chips and Queen of the Hispanic Hairdressers Association. She is sure that one day she will be discovered during a beauty contest and become a movie star. Maria La O decides to join her.

The Girl enters Maria La O's dressing room and plays with the makeup. She slowly applies lipstick, mascara, and eye shadow in a very serious manner.

The Midwife appears and reminds Maria La O not to forget to smile, that she cannot win if she does not smile. A girl with a serious face has no future. She warns that butterflies in the stomach can prevent a smile. She offers to trade the butterfly for a simple, lasting smile for day and night, for all occasions, for a smile that will survive. The Girl, who has made herself up to look like a clown, looks at the Midwife, but does not smile.

The scene flashes to an emcee with a microphone, welcoming the audience to a Latin beauty contest. Latin women, he says, are the most beautiful, most passionate, and most virtuous. They make the best housewives and cooks. They know how to dance to salsa, do the hustle, the mambo, and the guaguanco. They are always ready for amor.

The first contestant introduced is Miss Little Havana. Her name is Fina de la Garza del Vedado y Miramar. She comes from the best families of old Cuba. In old Cuba, her assets were a house with ten rooms, fifty maids, two cars, a plane, and a sugar mill. In the U.S.A., her only assets are 36-28-42. She sings a song about her old home in Cuba and all that she lost.

The second contestant is Miss Chili Tamale, from Mexico. Her name is Lupe Lupita Guadalupe Viva Zapata y Enchilada. She sings about her home in Mexico. Her dream is to marry a rich American so she can get her green card. Next up is Miss Conchita Banana. She, of course, sings about bananas.

The fourth contestant is Miss Commonwealth. Her name is Lucy Wisteria Rivera. She sings about food stamps and being a legal immigrant welfare mother. Her goal in life is to find a boyfriend, get married, and have children. She will make a great housewife, cook, and mother. When the emcee remarks that finding a boyfriend should not be hard for her, she replies that it is not as easy as he thinks. One must know the rules of the game, the technique, the tricks, and the know-how. As Miss Commonwealth walks off, she runs into the Girl. Miss Commonwealth's crown falls off. Miss Commonwealth is reminded of something far away by the Girl. Miss Commonwealth recalls a girl who visits the ocean one day after never seeing it before. With one single footprint on the sand, the sea came running in. A thousand waves crash. Two diving birds thrust into her eyes. Today she walks blindly through the smog and dust of cities and villages. She walks with a smile, though, because she has the ocean in her eyes.

A man brings a chair on stage and sits down. The Girl sits on the floor with her back to the audience. Four "Catch Women" enter and surround the man. The Catch Women offer the Girl tips on how to get a man. Catch Woman 1 suggests hypnotizing a man, being a good listener, and laughing at his jokes. She suggests that a little hip shaking never hurt the hypnotizing.

Catch Woman 2 suggests not being too intellectual. Men want to relax and have fun when they date. Conversation about serious subjects will turn them away. She teases the Man with her boa as she walks away. He tries to chase her, but Catch Woman 3 stops him with a hypnotic look.

Catch Woman 3 tells the Girl that looks are a very powerful weapon. She suggests using her eyes to look him up and down and sideways. Look through the eyelashes, from the corner of the eyes, and over sunglasses. Never look with too much insistence and never look at his crotch, she cautions. As she walks away, she drops a handkerchief. The Man stops to pick it up, but Catch Woman 4 places her foot on it. Catch Woman 3 further suggests making men jealous and making them suffer. She theorizes that men enjoy it, it gives them a reason to drink. Keep him in suspense, she says, tell him you love him, then tell him you don't, then tell him you do.

The Catch Women come forward in unison and say: "we do it all for him." The Man stands and sings a song, "They Do it All for Me," as the Catch Women dance around him. "Ah momma, don't walk like that, don't move like that, don't look like that, 'cause you're gonna give me a heart attack." "They do it all for me, what they learn in a magazine, they do it all for me, cause you know what they want... give me a piece of this and a piece of that, cause I know you do it all for me."

Catch Woman 2 throws her boa around the Man and leads him off stage. The other Catch Women cannot believe it. The Girl picks up the handkerchief from the floor and imitates the moves of the Catch Women.

The Nun, carrying a bouquet of roses, enters and chastises the Girl for her sinful actions. She tells the Girl to banish thoughts of the flesh from her head and heart. Love of the Lord is the only love for her. The Nun hits the Girl with the bouquet of roses and commands her to kneel on them and pray. The blood from her knees will erase her sinful thoughts.

The Priest enters and the Nun kneels before him, asking for forgiveness, because she has sinned. The four Senoritas enter, telling the Priest that they, too, have sinned. Senorita 1 confesses that it has been two weeks since her last confession. Senorita 2 says she let her boyfriend kiss her and it's all over now. Senorita 3 confesses to masturbating. Senorita 4 has sinned by having three wet dreams. Senorita 1 confesses "he said fellatio, I said cunnilingus." Senorita 2 takes it one step further. She admits that she did it, she went all the way. The other Senoritas and the Nun join in making the sign of the cross. Admitting her fornication, she asks the Priest for forgiveness and tangos off stage. The Nun faints in the Priest's arms and the other Senoritas tango off stage.

Act I Analysis

This play represents the journey of woman from birth to self-realization. In a short, compacted form, it presents the many societal problems women face. The beginning of the play shows how women are subjugated from birth. Don Jose, so hopeful that he will have a son to raise, is disgusted to learn that his wife has given birth to a daughter. From birth, the girl will feel the resentment of her father.

The Beautiful Senoritas appear and sing. They are Latin bombshells. They dance all night long-they have maracas in their souls. They wear the colors of the rainbow and they are always ready for amor-for love. These lusty ladies represent the male's sexual ideal. These are the women men drool over.

Maria La O represents the reality of the lusty ladies who were just singing. She strips for $40 a week because she needs the money. She is tired. She looks older when she removes her makeup and false eyelashes. She longs to be an artistic dancer, but that is not possible. The Beauty Queen is nothing but a slightly younger version of Maria La O. She, too, makes a living on her looks. The contests she wins are not prestigious. She hopes to be discovered and really make it. Fancy makeup and beautiful looks are the Girl's first exposure to becoming a woman. She applies makeup, but does not know how and makes herself up to look like a clown.

The Midwife reminds Maria La O to smile. She warns that butterflies in the stomach can prevent a smile. Nervousness can prevent a smile. The idea of the butterfly then changes. No longer is the butterfly simply a symbol of nervousness to be avoided. The butterfly becomes a wonderful thing. What she means here is that it is better to have a

little nervousness and to experience life than to wear a phony smile day and night. Embracing the full range of emotions is better in the long run. The Girl is not smiling. She has not given in yet.

We are now spectators to the beauty contest. The emcee represents the typical male who sees the Women not as individuals, but as stereotypes. These beautiful, passionate, virtuous Latin women make the best housewives and cooks. They know how to dance and they are always ready for love.

Miss Little Havana sings about times past and fortunes lost in Cuba. Her only asset now is her figure. Miss Chili Tamale's home is Mexico, but she dreams of marrying a rich American to get a green card. Miss Conchita Banana is happy with her fruit. Miss Commonwealth sings about food stamps and being a welfare mother. She wants a boyfriend so that she can have children. The contestants play into the stereotypes of the emcee. They think of nothing besides their figures, marrying successfully, food, and having children.

When Miss Commonwealth bumps into the Girl and loses her crown, she is reminded of her youth. This was a time when she had aspirations and dreams. Her girlish dreams are represented by the ocean. This is a metaphor that will be used throughout the play. She has forgotten her childhood dreams and now walks through life blindly.

The Catch Women, as their name suggest, teach the Girl how to "catch" a man. All of their suggestions involve being subservient to the man: listen to him and laugh at his jokes; don't be too intellectual; tease him; flirt with him and make him jealous. None of them suggest finding a man by being oneself. As they readily admit, they do it all for him.

Having received a thorough education in the whore half of the Madonna/whore purported male ideal, it is time for religion to enter the picture and temper the brash female behavior. The Nun forces the Girl to kneel on a bouquet of roses, causing her legs to bleed, and pray for forgiveness for her sinful thoughts.

At the sight of the Priest, the Senoritas confess their sins of the flesh and beg forgiveness. This is the life a woman is forced to lead: pressured by boyfriends to sin, yet responsible to their beliefs to confess and bear the guilt that their boyfriends likely do not.

Act II

Act II Summary

The emcee announces that the contestants will sing. Woman 3 swings and sings: "take me in your arms, let's dance away the night, whisper in my ears the sweetest words of love, I'm the woman in your life, say you die every time you are away from me, and whisper in my ear the sweetest words of love, promise me the sky, get me the moon, the stars, if it is a lie, whisper in my ear the sweetest words of love, we are playing all the greatest games, lie to me with romance again, betray me, betray me more."

The women sit, waiting to be asked to dance. The Girl is there, too. The Chaperone keeps a close eye on the Girl and also watches over the other women. The Man enters in a white tuxedo and Zorro mask. He dances with each woman and gives her a flower. He approaches the Girl and asks for a dance, but the Chaperone will not allow it. He asks another woman to dance and they dance cheek to cheek until the Chaperone butts in and stops the dance. The Man goes to Woman 3 in the swing and pushes her back and forth. She gets up and they leave.

Senorita 2 tries to explain herself. She says she only did it for love: he sang in her ear, he sat alone at the bar drinking beer, playing the same song on the jukebox over and over and professing his love for her. He sent her flowers and candies. Her father and brother swore to kill him if they ever saw him near her, but he persisted. He serenaded her every weekend.

Senorita 3 recalls that he said the same things to her. Then he said those things to her sister and to her best friend. Her sister was heartbroken to give him her virginity and then find out he wouldn't marry her. Three days before Christmas, her sister poured gas on herself, lit a match and then ran through the streets screaming. She ran into the sea near the place where they played as children. A cloud of smoke rose from the water.

The Women sing the Wedding Song. The song asks why Juana, Rosa, and Carmen have gone with a whimper, not with a bang; they have left their dreams behind. At the end of the song, the Women form a line behind the Chaperone. She gives each one a wig with hair curlers. Each woman puts on her wig and mimes housecleaning chores. The Mother sews, the Girl watches.

Martyr 1 tells the Girl to cry; there's nothing to do but cry. Women are born awake and crying, and that is the way God intends it.

Martyr 2 tells the Girl that she doesn't live for herself; rather, she lives for her husband and her children. A woman's work is never done. She holds her side in pain. She is having female problems again. It's not menstruation, it's that her husband has beat her up again. The Girl covers her ears and then covers her eyes with a cloth. She plays pin the tail on the donkey by herself. Martyr 3 says she understands, that she suffers as

well because her children are ungrateful and will not appreciate the things she does for them until after she is dead. The Mother tells them they should not worry about these things and hums and sews. She tells them it is better not to have many thoughts, just to go about the ironing and cooking and hair fixing.

Martyr 2 says that while keeping busy running from the bed, to the stove, to work, and back to bed, it is better that no one notices the light in her eyes. She lives for her family, but they don't notice the flash in her eyes, the flickering death wish, the "sparkle of a threat." The Girl tears off the cloth covering her eyes, expecting to see the Women doing something, but is disappointed when they are not.

The Guerrillera walks in and immediately grabs the attention of the Girl. The Guerrillera tells them to stop their whining, to change the world and improve their lives. As third-world women, they are three times as oppressed and have to fight three times as hard. The Guerrillera convinces them to go with her. Before the Guerrillera and the Women can join in the meetings, they must cook the rice, make the menudo, and sweep the hall. They sing a song about cleaning, making a banana surprise, typing, and being pregnant as the brothers speak about change. The Women get bored of singing and stop. The Man asks if dinner is ready. The women have neglected dinner. The rice, beans, and enchiladas are burning. The Women run off to the kitchen, leaving the Guerrillera to yell, "Wait! What about the Revolution?"

The Man enters the scene with the Researcher following behind. The Researcher is a woman from the Peace Corps conducting a study. She asks the Man if he has many children; he has nine. She asks if his wife works; he says she stays at home. The Man's wife gets up at 4 a.m. to fetch fire wood and cook breakfast, then she washes clothes in the river, then she goes to market, then she cooks his lunch and brings it to him at work. In the afternoon she looks after the hens, pigs, and children and makes dinner. After supper, household chores keep her busy until bedtime. The Researcher suggests that what she does is work. The Man says, no, she stays at home. Before the Researcher leaves, the Man tells her his wife goes to bed at 10 p.m. and that she can come around afterwards and ask him more questions.

The Girl and Daughter 1 enter and dance to a song called "Dolphins by the Beach." The dance portrays the fantasies of a young woman. It is a dance of freedom and self-realization.

The emcee takes the audience back to the contest. He comments that the tension mounts as the audience waits to see which of the lovely women will be crowned queen for a day.

Daughter 1 asks her mother if she can go out and play. She wants to pick fresh mangos and climb to the top of the hill where she can see the ocean in the distance. Mother refuses Daughter's request. She will have to wait to ask Father's permission. Father tells her to stay at home; girls belong at home with their mothers where they can learn to cook and sew. Girls should not be tomboys. Mother asks Father if she can buy a vase

for flowers. Father refuses, saying he would rather that she concentrate on getting pregnant and bearing him a son.

A different Mother talks to her son and daughter. She tells Son that she hopes he will be better than his father, who was killed in war and left her a widow. Son announces that he is going off to fight as well. Daughter 2 announces that she is pregnant. Neither she nor the father want to get married. She doesn't know if she wants to have the child. Mother is concerned, and reminds Daughter that she was not raised to believe this way, and expresses concern for what the neighbors may think. Brother/Son will kill the man who fathered the child. He thought they were friends, but he will pay dearly for her virginity. Son tells Mother and Daughter 2 that he impregnated his girlfriend and wants to bring her home, because her parents have kicked her out. Mother hopes she bears him many children.

The Women dance to loud Latin music until it stops abruptly. Woman 1 says that when she dances she hears the roar of water cascading down the mountain and thrown against the cliffs by an enraged ocean. Woman 2 says she hears the sound of water in the shower, splattering on the tiles where a woman died. Woman 3 says that behind the beat of the drums she hears the thud of a young woman's body thrown from a roof, and the cries of a young girl lying in the street. Woman 4 sometimes, over the sound of the brass section, hears the desperate cries for help from elevators, parking lots and apartment buildings saying please... no.... don't. Woman 1 thinks she hears her sister cry when they dance. Woman 2 hears the screams of a young girl running naked down the highway. Woman 3 says the string section murmurs names. Woman 4 completes her sentence, "...to remind her of the woman or girl who at that very moment is being raped or murdered." The four Women combine to say that the woman being raped or murdered is their sister, daughter, or mother.

The emcee announces the winner of the contest. The winner is Miss Senorita Manana. The Girl walks in, followed by her Mother. She wears miscellaneous items picked up from previous scenes and still wears her clown-like makeup. She is upset and restless. The Women are distressed by what they see. They goofed, they made a mess. They blame the emcee-it's all his fault.

The Women gather to discuss what to do. They slowly remove all of the items from the Girl and clean the makeup from her face. They tell her that being a woman is not about the hair, the lipstick, or the cooking. Woman 4 says she was locked in a bathroom at age 13 when she started menstruating and told the facts of life by her mother. Her mother then declared her a woman. Woman 1 was 18 when she lost her virginity and her lover told her she was now a woman. Woman 2 says that when she had her first child, someone told her that she was then a "real real woman." Woman 3 says she has looked to songs and movies to figure out what a woman is: they tell her a woman can be a mermaid, a palm tree, a whore, a nymphomaniac, a dumb servant, or a third-rate dancer.

Mama offers her advice: it is dangerous and deadly to be a woman. She sees too many parts to play. She sees many wild, free women who cry out to be tamed.

The Women are tired of being told what to do, what to buy and to lose weight. The Women combine their voices for some messages: tell my daughter I love her; tell my daughter I wish I had really taught her the facts of life; tell my daughter that her life doesn't have to be like mine.

The Girl realizes that women can choose their own way. They can go crazy at night. They can die alone and frustrated. The Women help her to her conclusions: a woman is a fountain of fire, a river of love, and an ocean of strength.

The Women look at each other as images on a mirror. They discover themselves in each other. The Girl is now one of them. She steps forward to sing: "woman is a fountain of fire, woman is a river of love, a Latin woman is just a woman with the music inside; don't deny us the music, don't imagine my face... I am just a woman breaking the links of a chain... free the butterfly, let the oceans roll in... I am only a woman with the music inside."

Act II Analysis

Woman 3 sits in a swing and sings of a realistic love. She wants her man to whisper that he loves her, to promise her everything, to lie to her with romance and then to betray her and betray her more. She knows that her man will not be able to deliver on the promises he makes; she knows she will be betrayed. She accepts him by lying to herself. Perhaps that is why, after dancing with the other women, the Man leaves with her. She is the woman who allows herself to believe the lies he tells her, even though she knows, in the end, that they are lies.

The concept of women selling themselves out is further developed with the tales of Senorita 2 and 3 who have given in to men who proclaimed an insincere love for them and defiled them. Senorita 2 "only did it for love" because her man serenaded her and professed his love. This Lothario has gotten around. Senorita 3 fell victim to him as well. So too did her best friend and her sister. So despondent was her sister for falling victim to his ploy that she set herself ablaze, ran through the town, and threw herself in the ocean. A ruined woman, she decides to kill herself in the place of her childhood dreams and aspirations, the ocean.

As the Women join to sing the "Wedding Song," it is clear that marriage is where they are truly subjugated and where their dreams go to die. At the end of the song, they each are fitted with a wig and curlers to symbolize this fact. No longer goddesses, they are now domestic goddesses-housewives. Any doubt about this symbolization is cast aside by the fact that the Women are now referred to as "Martyrs."

Martyr 1 tells the Girl to go ahead and cry, there's nothing to do but cry about leaving dreams behind. Society expects women to marry and be subservient mothers and wives. That's the "way God intended it," she says. The subservient mother/wife not only has to work tirelessly, but she also may suffer beatings at the hands of her husband and

ungratefulness from her children. By keeping busy, no one notices the hurt and anger they harbor: the sparkle of a threat in their eyes.

The Guerrillera enters the scene and promises the Women the hope of the revolution. They are eager to join and fight for their freedom. They are disheartened, though, to learn that before they can become part of the revolution they must do the cooking and cleaning. They still join in. When the revolution gets in the way of their cooking, when they realize the food is burning, they scurry back to the kitchen. Not even revolution can free women of the societal chains that bind them.

The Researcher tries to get the Man to acknowledge that being a housewife is a job and that his wife works very hard. Not only does the man refuse to admit this fact, but, by asking her to stop by after his wife goes to sleep, he shows what a lech he is.

The Girl and Daughter 1 enjoy their youth. They dance to a song called "Dolphins by the Beach." This song again employs the metaphor of the ocean as the place for freedom and dreams of young women. Daughter 1 wants the freedom to go play. She asks her mother if she can go pick mangos and climb the hill that gives her a vision of the ocean. Mother, subservient to her husband, defers the decision to him. He refuses to allow her to play and chase her dreams. He thinks this is tomboy behavior. She should stay at home and learn to cook and sew. The male squashes the dreams of the young woman. Father is so self-centered, he does not allow his wife the luxury of a vase for some flowers until she fulfills her motherly duty and bears him a son.

As if women did not have enough to worry about, they must also be concerned with their husbands and sons running off to war and dying. The truly devoted mother will take in her son's impregnated lover after her family has kicked her out. In the absence of the deceased father, the Brother takes his position and will defend his sister's honor, whether she likes it or not.

The loud music the Women dance to masks a disturbing reality that they all acknowledge. Underneath the music, they can just barely make out the screams and cries of women who are being assaulted, beaten, raped, and murdered. The victims are their sisters, their mothers, and their daughters.

Miss Senorita Manana, the woman of tomorrow, the Girl, is the winner of the beauty contest. The Girl has been listening to the advice that the Women have given throughout the play. She has picked up items from every scene. She wears so much makeup that she looks like a clown. The women are despondent. They have made a mistake. They didn't teach the Girl anything. She is a caricature of them; she has learned to put on makeup, to dance, to catch a man, to seduce a man. She has no sense of herself. The Women blame the problem on the emcee-on men-as they take the items the Girl has gathered and wipe the makeup from her face. Surely, though, they must blame themselves as well. Women are equally responsible for passing along and encouraging female stereotypes.

The Women try to teach the Girl what it really takes to be a woman. They recall how they were told they had attained womanhood: by reaching child bearing age, by having sex, or by having a child. They know now that there is more to being a woman than having a child.

Mama cautions against being a woman who lives her own life. She thinks it dangerous and deadly. She has seen "wild, free" women who are desperate to have husbands and children.

Finally, the Girl gets their message. She realizes that a woman can do as she chooses. If she dies alone and frustrated, at least she did it her way. The Women can now define for the Girl what a woman can be: a fountain of fire, a river of love, or an ocean of strength. The Women then have a moment of self-realization. They all finally get it. The Girl becomes one of the Women. A woman breaks free by being herself, not what society thinks she should be.

Characters

Miss Conchita Banana

The MC introduces the beauty pageant contestant Miss Conchita Banana as an invention of Madison Avenue for the United Fruit Company. In other words, this character represents a figure created by advertisers to sell bananas. Like Carmen Miranda, this figure is a tropical stereotype. As Woman 3, this character expresses her wish to one day become a real person, as if to suggest that stereotypes deny the humanity of those who are stereotyped.

Beautiful Señorita 1

No character in Prida's *Beautiful Señoritas* has a proper name, the Beautiful Señoritas of the title not excluded. Rather, four actors portray four different Beautiful Señoritas, who, as their generic naming suggests, cannot be distinguished from each other in any appreciable way other than through their costuming, which points to Latin female stereotypes propagated by Latinos themselves. These four characters appear very briefly in the play, as a group, at the play's beginning. According to the stage directions, they are to appear on stage dancing, accompanied by rumba music, and they sing a song. Quite nonsensical, the song nevertheless conveys two major ideas. One is that most people have come to think of South American Latin culture largely in terms of clichés. One typical line of the song, for example, is □Guacamole Latin Lover.□ The second major idea is that Latin women are □always ready for amor,□ □amor□ meaning □love.□ In other words, a stereotype of Latin women is that they are sexually precocious□□hot-blooded,□ □hot Latin,□ and so forth. Of course, since the Beautiful Señoritas resemble famous Latina women in popular culture, Prida points out that Latinos themselves reinforce these stereotypes. Eager to cash in, Latinos caricature their own culture.

One señorita□perhaps Beautiful Señorita 1□is to be dressed as Carmen Miranda. Miranda is most well known in the United States as a singer and movie star who made her fortune portraying the stereotype of the heavily accented, happy-singing-and-dancing tropical woman. Her most notorious items of costuming are a dress that leaves her midriff bare and an immense headdress made of tropical fruits.

Beautiful Señorita 2

Judging from Prida's stage directions, Beautiful Señorita 2 is to act and be costumed so as to bring to mind the Latina entertainer Charo. Charo's famous suggestive trademark line □cuchi, cuchi□ underscores her image as a sex symbol projecting the hot Latin stereotype.

Beautiful Señorita 3

Beautiful Señorita 3 appears as Iris Chacón, a Puerto Rican entertainer of the same stamp as Charo. Chacón hosted a widely popular television variety and talk show for many years.

Beautiful Señorita 4

According to Prida's stage directions, Beautiful Señorita 4 is to call to mind María la O, a stereotypical Latin female character in the style of Beautiful Señoritas 1, 2, and 3. María la O appears in a zarzuela (light opera) of the same name written by a Latin composer. A bit later in the play, this character is referred to quite simply as □María la O.□ In this second appearance, she is in conversation with the Beauty Queen. The women compare notes on how they can parlay their good looks into money.

Beauty Queen

Despite the large number of characters appearing in Prida's play, only a small number of actors are required. Actors simply exit as one character, make a quick costume adjustment, and then return to the stage as a different character. Thus, one of the Beautiful Señoritas next appears as the Beauty Queen.

The Beauty Queen converses with a character named María la O, explaining how she is tired of her life of competition and smiles. Hoping eventually to be discovered by a movie producer, in the meantime she appreciates whatever money she makes when she places in a beauty pageant.

Brother

This character appears in a scene designed to display gender roles within less educated Latino and Latin American families. In response to the news that his sister is pregnant by a friend, the Brother declares he will make his friend pay in blood (□con sangre□). Appearing as the Son, this character enjoys pride of place in relation to his sister (the Daughter figure).

Catch Women

There are three Catch Women in Prida's play, Catch Woman 1, 2, and 3. There is little difference between them. The only reason there are three and not just one is that they carry on a conversation. Their conversation is about how to please men so as to keep (□catch□) them. They are manipulative and cynical characters; partnership with men brings them no joy.

Miss Commonwealth

Miss Commonwealth is the last contestant, a figure apparently representing a Caribbean hybrid culture, as her name is Lucy Wisteria Rivera. This suggests that she comes from an island that was once a part of the Spanish Empire (Rivera) before becoming part of the British Empire and Commonwealth (Lucy Wisteria). As Woman 4, she thinks of how an idyllic seaside childhood has given way to her present life in a large, unpleasant city.

Daughter

The Daughter is a somewhat tragic and pathetic figure in the play. In her guise as a tragic character, she dreams of freedoms her Mother and Father do not allow because she is a girl and not a boy. In her guise as a pathetic figure, she appears as a young woman who has been fooled by the promises of a faithless young man and who has failed to protect herself sexually. Thus she finds herself pregnant and without the means to support herself and her baby.

Father

The Father character appears as a man who enforces traditional gender roles in his children. For example, he speaks as follows to the Daughter, who has just asked permission to go out and play: □No. Stay at home with your mother. Girls belong at home. . . . Why don't you learn to cook, to sew, to mend my socks. . . .□ As the Husband character, he exerts control over his deferential Wife.

Girl

The Girl is the most important character in Prida's play. Unlike most of the other characters, she appears throughout. Most often, she is in a scene observing the actions of one or a group of the women characters. Then, she mimics their actions. For example, she watches María la O and the Beauty Queen converse in a scene that takes place in a dressing room where the two women are busy with cosmetics and the like. At the end of this scene, the little girl begins to apply makeup herself. By the time she has finished, she has made herself up like a clown. In this way, Prida conveys the ideas that girls learn by example and that women's obsession with beauty amounts to a disfigurement of their humanity. The Girl's presence in Prida's play communicates in no uncertain terms that each successive generation of women will continue to struggle with the same limitations and inequalities until notions of what is gender appropriate change and these new ideas are taught to little boys and girls.

Guerrillera

The Spanish word *guerrillera* means □female guerrilla fighter.□ (The Spanish term for nontraditional, small-scale warfare, guerrilla warfare, has been adopted in English; *guerra* means □war,□ and *guerrilla* means □small war.□) Male and female guerrilla fighters are recognizable figures within Central and South American cultures, as so many small-scale insurgencies have been fought in so many of these nations. Quite often, guerrilla fighters represent an indigenous peasantry or a lower class that is fighting to wrest power from a corrupt or European ex-imperial elite. The Guerrillera in Prida's play is thus a revolutionary figure, a figure wishing to liberate others from an injustice or servitude. She tells a group of female characters named Martyr 1, 2, and 3 the following: □We can change the world and then our [women's] lot will improve!□ In a humorous, if sad, denouement to this scene, the roused Martyrs and the energetic Guerrillera find they must put their plans to change the world on hold, as their husbands will be home any minute wanting their dinners.

Don José

Don José is the first character to speak in Prida's play. He is pacing, waiting to hear news of his wife, who is delivering a baby. He is dreaming of what he will do together with his son, as he is certain his wife is having a boy. When he learns that she has given birth to a girl, he is disgusted.

Don José's actions and words make clear that he is a Latin macho male. He is so certain of his godlike power and superiority over women that he believes he has controlled biology to guarantee himself a male heir. That he is the first character to speak in the play is telling. This conveys the masculine character of traditional Latin culture, the way that men always come first. The birthing scene also communicates the idea that young Latins are groomed in their gender roles from the day they are born.

Miss Little Havana

Miss Little Havana is one of the play's beauty contestants. The song she sings tells the story of one class of Cuban (now Cuban American) women, those upper-class women who fled Cuba with their families and with as much of their wealth as they could gather in the aftermath of Fidel Castro's takeover of Cuba in the name of the country's impoverished masses. Castro confiscated the land and monies of the wealthy, redistributing the land and reapportioning the monies. As Woman 1, this contestant's inner thoughts are divulged. She thinks of how invisible she is in the United States, how her accent renders her a nonentity, how her social status has thus changed dramatically.

Man

The Man speaks to the Social Researcher character, who is an educated outsider in his village, studying the village's ways. Answering questions about his wife, he declares that she does not work because she stays at home. Then, quite ironically, he tells the Social Researcher what his wife does all day at home: cooking, cleaning, tending the animals, and so forth. His inability to see the contradiction reinforces Prida's point that men are deluded in their belief in their superiority.

Martyr

Three martyr figures named Martyr 1, 2, and 3 appear in Prida's play. They are presented as typical Latina women of the less-educated or less-privileged classes who are bound to the house and housework. Their lives amount to endless drudgery, and they accept as natural and inevitable the physical abuse their husbands dole out.

MC

MC stands for □Master of Ceremonies.□ The MC appears throughout the play, as he is orchestrating the beauty pageant that, in fits and starts, unfolds as the play does. He is a stock comedic MC, always upbeat and treating the most trivial of matters with perfect seriousness, by turns smarmy and vulgar.

Midwife

The Midwife appears periodically in the play. She is an ambiguous figure, sometimes directing pernicious gender clichés in the direction of the Girl, sometimes commenting poignantly on the action. The following words illustrate this doubleness:

Yes. You have to smile to win. A girl with a serious face has no future. But what can you do when a butterfly is trapped in your insides and you cannot smile? How can you smile with a butterfly condemned to beat its ever-changing wings in the pit of your stomach?

Mother

In her brief appearance, this character exemplifies a typical, traditional Latin mother. She grooms the play's Daughter to be meek and indulges the Son as the more important child. As the Wife, this character defers to the Husband of the play in all things, training the Daughter to follow in her footsteps.

Nun

A stock figure, the Nun interacts with the Girl, encouraging the Girl to forget the profane concerns of beauty and to embrace the piety of Catholicism.

Priest

The Priest hears a confession in Prida's play in a scene that suggests that the Christian/Catholic policing of sex amounts to an unhealthy repression that breeds sexual hysteria.

Señoritas

The Señoritas (1, 2, 3, and 4) appear in the confession scene as confessors, admitting to a priest to having kissed their boyfriends. The combination of sexual matters and the confessional proves to be a heady mixture, eliciting sexual hysteria in the Señoritas, the Priest, and the Nun.

Social Researcher

A Social Researcher appears briefly, interviewing a peasant in a Latin American village. The opposition of Researcher and Man emphasizes the outdated nature of the Man's views.

Miss Chili Tamale

The beauty contestant Miss Chili Tamale hails from Mexico. She seems meek, and she tells the MC that her dream is to marry an American man so as to become a U.S. citizen. As Woman 2, she expresses the resentment some Mexicans and Mexican Americans who live in the American Southwest feel: they remember how the land was once part of Mexico until it was lost in land war with the United States.

Women

Four Women□Woman 1, 2, 3, and 4□have a prominent part in the ending of Prida's play. They voice the concerns, longings, and dreams of all of the women of *Beautiful Señoritas*. They mourn how women the world over are treated as second-class citizens. They lament that women are raped, abused, and beaten and often have little or no recourse to justice. They long for a new day when women will be given all the opportunities and respect that men enjoy.

Objects/Places

The Ocean/The Beach

The ocean and the beach are recurrent themes throughout the play that symbolize a place of freedom, escape, and inspiration. This metaphor is introduced by Miss Commonwealth, who tells the story of a girl who dared set foot on the beach only to have her eyes plucked out by two diving birds. Before she was blinded, she saw the ocean with its thousands of waves and infinite horizon. Though blind, she is happy because she experienced the ocean.

Senorita 3 tells the story of her sister who, deflowered by the town Lothario, sets herself on fire, runs through the town screaming, and throws herself into the sea. The sea was a place where Senorita 3 and her sister played as young children.

Daughter 1 asks her mother if she can go out and play. She wants to climb a tree to peer off into the distance and catch a glimpse of the ocean. Her mother calls her idea nonsense and tells her to wait for her father to get home. Her father tells her to stay home and not be a tomboy.

Finally, at the end of the play, Woman 3 says a woman is "an ocean of strength" and the Girl sings "free the butterfly, let the oceans roll in." The Women have taught the young Girl to be independent and strong. The ocean symbolizes her strength.

The Butterfly

As Maria La O prepares to leave for the beauty contest, the Midwife reminds her to smile. She says that the girl with a serious face has no future. Sometimes, however, a woman cannot smile if there is a butterfly beating in the pit of her stomach. The Midwife is full of undelivered smiles and wants to trade her butterfly for a permanent smile. She says that the butterfly keeps one alive and running, awake and speeding with a herd of wild horses. The butterfly is magic. The Midwife turns to the Girl to find her made up like a clown, but not smiling. A permanent smile may be attractive to men and to beauty contest judges, but it hides natural emotions and is not normal. The permanent smile the Midwife wishes for obscures reality. The magic butterfly, on the other hand, represents life and vitality. The butterfly symbolizes an independent life where a woman need not try to please everyone with her smile.

The Flash in the Eyes

Martyr 2, when discussing the burdens of being a wife and mother, mentions that her family does not see the little light shining in her eyes. She also calls it a little flash in her eyes, a sparkle of a threat and a flickering death wish. Martyr 2 is so consumed with working for her family that she has forgotten about herself. Whatever sense of self she

had is reduced to the little light in her eyes. She sacrifices everything to please her family, but they do not appreciate her. She resents that she no longer has a sense of self. This resentment causes a death wish: either to kill herself or, possibly, to kill them.

The Revolution

The Guerrillera happens upon the lamenting Martyrs and urges them to rise up, fight oppression, and join the revolution. The Martyrs eagerly agree. The Martyrs are disappointed to learn, however, that the first thing Guerrillera wants them to do is to cook—one of the very reasons for their unhappiness in the first place. The Martyrs and the Guerrillera join in a song about revolution and neglect their cooking. As soon as a man asks if dinner is ready, the Martyrs drop everything and run to the kitchen. The Martyrs are so conditioned to be subservient to men, to cook and clean for them, that despite joining the revolution, they cannot break free. Even as revolutionaries, they fall right back into their traditional role of housewife.

The Research Study

The Researcher from the Peace Corps is taking a survey and talks to the Man about his family. She asks him if his wife works. He says that she stays at home with their nine children. His wife's day begins at 4 a.m. as she prepares to make breakfast. After breakfast, she washes clothes in the river. Then she goes to the market. Then it is time to cook lunch and take it to her husband at work. After lunch she takes care of the hens and pigs and looks after the children. Then it is time to cook dinner. She has things to do around the house until bedtime at 10 p.m. After hearing about the wife's long and arduous workday, the Researcher is surprised that the Man said she didn't work. Despite being given a chance to correct himself, the Man again says that his wife doesn't work, she stays at home. The Man demonstrates ingrained and traditional ideas about a woman's role in society and in the home.

Themes

Stereotypes

A stereotype of a particular group of people, a nation, or a culture might be entirely without foundation, a caricature of an existing characteristic, or a complex combination of the two. For example, an old stereotype of women was that they were not intellectual. As more and more women attend university at advanced levels, this stereotype has lost ground. Women have entered various professions and are now successful doctors, stockbrokers, academics, and lawyers. Still, since women were excluded from education for so long, it appeared as if they lacked the ability to perform in the professions that men did. Thus, although it was without empirical foundation, this stereotype seemed true, owing to the way in which society had been organized. Prida's play attempts to expose stereotypes of Latin women. In her depiction of the group of Martyr characters, for example, she is not saying that such women do not exist. She is saying, rather, that such women do not need to exist, that this is not a natural state of affairs. If Latin society were organized differently, then Latin women would not behave like long-suffering martyrs.

Nature versus Nurture

Prida's play emphasizes the crucial role that education plays in constructions of gender. In showing how the Girl character mimics the behavior of the Women characters, Prida argues that gender-appropriate behavior is, in large part, a matter of that which is taught (nurture) as opposed to that which is biologically determined (nature). This opposition of nurture to nature is a basic feminist argument. For example, if women are nurtured to believe that they are delicate by nature or that to be delicate is to be truly feminine, they will hesitate to take up those sports that would seem to belie delicacy. For centuries, only men took part in vigorous sports. Education for Prida is not simply a matter of the formal curriculum one learns at school; it is also a matter of everyday informal training within the family, within one's community, and through pop culture via television and film. The importance of popular culture in forming people's behavior and values, particularly in the realm of gender, is seen when Prida's various female characters appear as famous celebrities and fictional characters□as the entertainer Charo, for example. Prida's point in parading Charo's image is that if women who act like so-called bimbos (attractive but stupid) succeed financially and receive a great deal of attention, then little girls will emulate them.

Masculinism

In a society where women are considered less than men, masculinism reigns. Masculinism assumes that men are the more valuable gender in the world: more intelligent, better problem solvers, harder workers, and so on. It also assumes that

women, owing to their lesser capabilities, are best led by men: men should call the shots politically, culturally, and in the family; women should be followers and obey their husbands. While the feminist movement has loosened, and even shattered, many of the cornerstone beliefs of masculinism, there is evidence that a degree of masculinism persists in even the most feminist of societies. In *Beautiful Señoritas*, masculinism remains strong. No matter that Prida's play was written in 1977, the fact remains that in certain parts of the Latin world there are still men invested in macho views, those extremes of male superiority that are seen in the characters of Don José and the campesino.

Complicity

The mid-twentieth-century singer and actor Carmen Miranda was a Brazilian who spent her lucrative days in Hollywood exploiting a Latin stereotype. She appeared in films wearing outrageous costumes that conveyed the idea that Brazilians lived in a tropical paradise where everyone was happy, lusty, and wily (but just a little bit simple, too). Of course, Miranda managed to poke fun at herself while she performed in this way; she was silly and excessive enough to convey the idea that what she was doing was indeed caricaturing a culture. Nonetheless, her career in the United States reinforced this Latin stereotype.

That Prida's play features Latins who reinforce Latin stereotypes points to Prida's conviction that Latins are complicit in their own plight. It is a plight in which they lack true visibility, since many Americans evince little interest in learning about the complexities and subtleties of Latin cultures and, instead, are content to hold on to stereotypical notions. The reality, however, is that there is not a single Latin culture; there are many. There are differences between Salvadorans, Chileans, and Mexicans, and their nations have unique histories. These peoples emigrated to the United States for a variety of reasons. As long as Latins propagate stereotypes in conjunction with non-Latins, the true nature of their cultures, and of themselves as individuals, will remain invisible to outsiders.

Music

The Beautiful Senoritas open the play singing a song about their sexuality. They sing that they are Beautiful Senoritas with maracas in their souls who are always ready for amor. Music is linked to their passion. In contrast, towards the end of the play, the Women are dancing to loud Latin music when they suddenly stop. They discuss the disturbing sounds they hear behind the music. One hears the sound of a shower splattering water where a woman lies dead. Another hears the thud of a woman's body being thrown from a roof. Still another hears the muffled cries of women being raped from elevators, parking lots, and apartment buildings. Perhaps it is the unbridled sexuality of the first song that has produced the bad dreams these women link to music. By the end of the play, the Girl sings about the music inside women. She sings "don't deny us the music" and "I am only a woman with the music inside." The Girl is just a

woman with the music inside. She isn't like the Beautiful Senoritas who let the music bring their sexuality to the surface. She is not always ready for amor. She is just a woman.

Male responsibility for suppression of women

After the Girl is announced the contest winner, the Women immediately blame the emcee. Quickly, however, they realize their own fault in her upbringing. Men are equally to blame for female stereotypes. Don Jose, the character who opens the play, is very upset that his wife has given birth to a girl when he hoped so much for a boy. The emcee asks the beauty contestants whether they have boyfriends and what they are doing to find husbands. The Man takes his wife for granted. When the Researcher asks if she works, the Man replies, no, that she does not. He proceeds to list her daily family activities that keep her busy from sunrise until she goes to bed. When Daughter 1 wants to go out and climb a tree to see the ocean, her father tells her not to be a tomboy. Men are as much to blame as women for perpetuating the female stereotypes that keep many women home, barefoot and pregnant.

Religion and Marriage

A contrast is made between the Catch Women, who teach the Girl how to flirt with and attract a man, and the Senoritas, who confess their sins to the Priest. The Catch Women are much like the Beautiful Senoritas who sang and danced and made a point to show off their sexuality. They are also like the beauty contestants who likewise display their good looks to find a boyfriend or husband. The presence of the Priest, and the religion he symbolizes, forces the Senoritas to confess their sins of love making. Throughout the play, the women characters have enjoyed and flaunted their sexuality, but in the face of religion they must stifle it and accept it as a sin. This must be a very confusing lesson for the Girl to learn. This is an example of the Madonna/whore dichotomy. The stereotypical Latino man wants a virgin on his wedding day, but is not shy about sleeping with every girl he can before he is married.

Once the Senoritas are married, they become the Martyrs. Their transformation is symbolized by each one receiving a wig with hair rollers attached after completing the Wedding Song. The Martyrs serve their husbands and children without any appreciation for what they do. They suffer by working long and hard. Some are beaten by their husbands. The sense of vitality that the women characters had earlier in the play is completely drained of them after marriage.

Style

New Directions in Characterization

There is not a single character in Prida's play who is given a proper name. All the characters have generic names, such as Girl, Brother, and Daughter. On the one hand, this serves the very specific purpose of *Beautiful Señoritas*, which is to point out to the audience that standard, set gender roles are doled out to men and women alike: in some senses, all girls are the same girl, all wives are the same wife. On the other hand, Prida's use of character points to new directions in characterization in contemporary drama. Playwrights no longer feel compelled to present characters who act like people in real life. This is not to say that Prida's characters act unusually all of the time. Still, the fact that the audience is not introduced to a character with a proper name who is a part of a story with other such characters suggests the degree to which Prida feels free to experiment widely.

Beyond Narrative

In reading a novel or in seeing a play, most people expect a chronological narrative (story). In this kind of narrative, a number of characters are introduced and proceed to interact in ways that produce or reveal various problems or complexities. At the end of the story, the narrative resolves□whether for good or for ill. There is no narrative in *Beautiful Señoritas*, not even in the way that the play (very loosely) takes place in the form of a beauty pageant. Indeed, this pageant is only barely felt as an ongoing, unfolding event, so that on the whole the play takes place as a series of completely unconnected events. At any given moment in *Beautiful Señoritas*, two characters will converse; at the next moment, two or three entirely different characters will interact□new characters, to whom the audience has not been introduced and whom they will never see again. Prida, in short, feels no need to present a story to her audience. Like many contemporary playwrights, Prida believes that narrative belongs to the realm of the novel and short story on the printed page and that drama, in its aural and visual□that is, live□dimensions, can and should be something entirely different.

Point of View

Beautiful Senoritas is a two act play. There is no particular point of view. There is some stage direction, though not too much.

Setting

The play's setting shifts often, from a dressing room to a beauty contest to various informative situations involving a young girl's journey to womanhood.

Language and Meaning

The language of the play is a mixture of English and Spanish. This is appropriate to the Hispanic characters who populate the play. Many of the songs of the play are in Spanish. Often the lines in Spanish are repeated in English. The language is informal and conversational. Few of the characters have names. Instead, they are identified by titles, such as the emcee, Woman 1, Woman 2, Daughter 2, Mother, Man, and Catch Woman 1.

Structure

Beautiful Senoritas is divided into two acts. The basic storyline is a beauty contest. The sub-story is that the contestants and other women teach a young girl about womanhood.

Historical Context

The Cuban Revolution

Prida and her family are members of a particular group of Spanish-speaking immigrants and their descendants in the United States—Cuban Americans. Many of these Cubans came to the United States when Prida's family did, in the late 1950s and early 1960s. They came in the wake of Fidel Castro's takeover of Cuba in 1959. In 2005, Castro was still Cuba's leader, but he was ailing and not expected to rule for very much longer.

The situation that led to Castro's success in Cuba in the late 1950s was one that plagued not only many Central and South American nations, but also parts of the United States as well as other countries around the world. A small group of people controlled most of the nation's wealth, with a vast impoverished underclass wondering when its turn to earn would arrive. When would leaders create the conditions for the sort of industry that would improve the nation's economy and so enhance people's lives? When would the impoverished gain access to education? In the mid-twentieth century, with the existence of a Communist Soviet Union that believed in spreading its message and influence, conditions such as these were ripe for Communist revolution. Soviet Communist belief centered on the idea that workers should own the businesses in which they worked, so that profits could be equally distributed among all. Soviet Communism entailed the further belief that no one, no matter the nature of his or her job, should earn appreciably less or more than anybody else. All the wealth generated in a nation must be equally distributed.

Alarmed at Castro's success in taking over the government, many wealthy Cubans fled Cuba with whatever wealth they could take with them. Of course, not all who left were rich. Some left simply because they understood that Castro was unlikely to achieve his goals without establishing a political dictatorship. These Cubans understood that such a major restructuring of society would lead to massive governmental control and intervention in all aspects of life.

The Feminist Movement

The twentieth century was one that saw major gains for women's rights in the Western world. In the early decades of the century, feminist activists won the right for women to vote in national elections. In the later part of the century—most particularly in the 1970s, when Prida was writing *Beautiful Señoritas*—feminists were engaged in making society understand that attitudes about men and women had to change before laws that allowed the vote and other rights could be meaningful. For example, it was not considered feminine to have opinions or to be widely informed in matters outside the home. Women who challenged this status quo were labeled masculine—unnatural—and shunned. It was often the case that although women could vote, many left that job to their husbands, since not voting confirmed their femininity in the eyes of the world.

Thus, societal disapproval frightened some women into conforming, because humans, above all, are social creatures, craving acceptance. Still, feminists worked hard so that in the United States in the twenty-first century, most women feel confident that they can pursue whatever career interests them without being accused of being unnatural. Indeed, as the cost of living rises, forcing people to spend more on such basic necessities as housing, food, medical care, gasoline, and heating fuel, a household with two good earners is a must.

Critical Overview

A playwright's first staged effort, such as *Beautiful Señoritas* in the case of Prida, is lucky to receive any attention at all from critics. Yet as Prida herself has said in □The Show Does Go On,□ in *Breaking Boundaries*, □the play was exceptionally well received□it went on to have many productions throughout the country, including a special performance at the National Organization for Women's national convention in San Antonio, Texas, in 1980.□ Prida's unusual good fortune is largely owing to her skill and originality as a dramatist and partly owing to the content of *Beautiful Señoritas*. Its feminist and Latino themes were perfectly attuned to a time when women and minorities were asserting themselves as voices needing to be acknowledged and heard in American culture and politics. That Prida's play was staged at the National Organization for Women's convention in San Antonio attests to this. What could make more sense as a learning tool and as entertainment than a production of the play at a meeting of a major feminist organization held in the Latino Southwest?

Among Prida's plays, *Beautiful Señoritas*, in particular, will always be remembered not only in feminist but also in Cuban American circles. The play's place in Cuban American letters is defined by Eliana Rivero in her essay □From Immigrants to Ethnics: Cuban Women Writers in the U.S.,□ also from the volume *Breaking Boundaries*. As Rivero says, Prida's *Beautiful Señoritas* is important as one of the first U.S. bilingual plays, a bilingualism making concrete a very particular fact of many Latinos' lives, namely, their double identity. They are both Latin and American: □this phenomenon was first registered for Cuban women authors with the presentation in 1977 of the play *Beautiful Señoritas* by Dolores Prida, a writer/journalist who has distinguished herself as a playwright (*Coser y cantar*) and as a poet.□

As Rivero's comments indicate, Prida has written plays, *Coser y cantar* among them, that are more highly regarded than *Beautiful Señoritas*. As is the case with most authors, Prida's writing and concerns have gained subtlety over time. Prida has composed works entirely in Spanish, such as *Coser y cantar*, even while she continues to write bilingual works like Beautiful Señoritas.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1

Critical Essay #1

Dell'Amico is lecturer in the English Department of California State University, Bakersfield. In this essay, she discusses the feminism of Prida's play.

In 1976, Prida was in Caracas, Venezuela, to report on a theater festival for a magazine. She was struck by the fact that none of the plays she saw addressed a current major area of concern, women's issues, and she decided to write such a play herself on her return to New York City. This play is *Beautiful Señoritas*.

Beautiful Señoritas explores gender roles and stereotypes as they manifest themselves in Latin American and U.S. Latino cultures. Like so many feminists of the time, Prida is driven to question notions of what women are and how they should behave. In this play, she also looks at ideas about men, masculinity, and the stereotypical concepts of Latins held by non-Latins.

Although *Beautiful Señoritas* is humorous, the play conveys serious ideas and insights. The most obvious of these insights is communicated through Prida's clever decision to present the play in the form of a beauty pageant. In this way, Prida explores the idea that women are supposed to be beautiful, that they are even encouraged to compete with other women in this regard. Feminists find this use of beauty, and its implications, disturbing, and question the beauty standard for women. For example, if a woman is concerned with being beautiful to ensnare a man, it means that she does not work directly toward her own security by pursuing an education and creating a career. Rather, such a woman ensnares a man and then expects him to take care of her. One problem with this is that people divorce. What does the divorced woman do without an education or marketable skills? As feminists point out, before alimony laws were instituted, many women remained in unhappy, even abusive marriages because they realized that if they divorced, their standard of living would be dramatically reduced.

Another disturbing implication of the beauty standard is that brainwork is left largely to men: women are important for their bodies, men for their minds. This view not only encourages women to forgo a career but also underwrites the idea that women are not as intelligent as men. This pernicious notion has kept many a worthy (working) woman from receiving the promotion she deserves, as many companies buy into this belief about lesser intelligence and simply cannot see how a woman worker could be as competent as a male worker.

Of course, the idea that women are not as capable at work as men is a fallacy, a misleading belief with complex foundations and one of the most profound contradictions of traditional gender ideology. Prida addresses this contradiction with great skill in her play. At one point, she presents a researcher who is studying the culture of a traditional Latin American community. The researcher asks a man, a fieldworker, about his wife. The man says that his wife does not work, that she stays at home. He is the worker of the family, the man asserts, the one who earns money by working in the fields. When asked what his wife does all day at home, the man replies:

Well, she gets up at four in the morning, fetches water and wood, makes the fire and cooks breakfast. Then she goes to the river and washes the clothes. After that she goes to town to get the corn ground and buy what we need in the market. Then she cooks the midday meal.

When the researcher asks what she does after that, the husband says that she walks the few miles to the fields to bring him his lunch and then returns home to take □care of the hens and pigs,□ along with many other things. In short, the wife is still performing laborious household chores when her husband, following a good dinner cooked by her, of course, is tucked up snugly in bed.

This interlude seeks to dramatize the feminist argument that being a homemaker does not mean that a woman does not work. Rather, women who choose to stay home perform duties crucial to the upkeep of the family and hence vital to the well-being of the nation. Women, in other words, must be respected and acknowledged for whatever work they choose to do, no matter that this work does not take place in public. To put it another way, since women's work traditionally has taken place in the private sphere as opposed to the public one, it has not always been recognized as work. Thanks to this insight about women's work, alimony laws have been instituted in the realm of divorce legislation. Lawyers can finally argue that homemakers perform unpaid work. They can present figures for what it would cost a family to employ full-time nannies, cooks, chauffeurs, and household accountants and managers. Alimony payments are a way for society to acknowledge that women's traditional work is valuable and real. These payments also give divorced women time to train for professions that could support them when the payments might stop. (Now, of course, divorced men can and do also receive alimony payments if they took on the role of the homemaker or lesser earner in the partnership.)

Contradictions more pronounced in Latin cultures, in particular, are also addressed in Prida's play. For example, at the same time that women are encouraged to be seductive and attractive to men in these cultures, they are also supposed to emulate the Christian Virgin Mary and display innocence of mind and meek manners. Thus, Prida's preening Beautiful Señorita characters morph into the seductively teasing Catch Women, who, in turn, morph into the modest Señoritas who pray devotedly at church. Another, related contradiction is dramatized in the way in which Prida's Latin male characters expect their wives to be faithful while they themselves feel free to visit prostitutes, prostitutes whom they feel they can also despise. While such extreme and contradictory notions of gender are not limited to Latin cultures, they are more pronounced in them owing to the influence of the Catholic form of Christianity, as it is practiced by the people, which tends to encourage a dichotomous virgin/whore mentality: the Virgin Mary versus Mary Magdalene, as it were. Prida dramatizes these contradictions vividly in the confusions, costumes, and makeup of the Girl in *Beautiful Señoritas*:

The GIRL enters followed by Mamá. The GIRL is wearing all the items she has picked from previous scenes: the tinsel crown, the flowers, a mantilla, etc. Her face is still made up as a clown. . . . The GIRL looks upset, restless with all the manipulation she has endured.

In the range from the □tinsel,□ which points to how women must put their beauty on display, to the □mantilla,□ which is the veil Latin women used to be required to wear in church, Prida's audience sees in the Girl the contradictions of gender role ideology, especially as they pertain to Latin women. Further, the clownlike face of the girl suggests that women who spend a great deal of time manipulating their looks turn themselves into caricatures of humans□clowns. The clownlike face also points to the way that women who are overly concerned with men's opinion of their looks are always self-conscious, always on display, always feeling as if they are objects being looked at by an audience.

Another important component of Prida's play is its treatment of stereotypes. This is seen in the way that the Beautiful Señorita characters at the beginning of the play resemble famous female Latin icons, Charo and Carmen Miranda among them. Where the Brazilian Miranda made her money performing a tropical stereotype, Charo made hers taking advantage of the myth that Latin women are always ready for sex□the □hot Latin□ myth, as it were. It is significant that Prida features Latins conforming to stereotypes. Her point is that some Latinos in American culture are quite willing to exploit stereotypes if it means making money. In other words, these stereotypes are not promulgated only by unthinking non-Latins. Likewise, she shows how women are complicit in their own objectification in the figures of the calculating Catch Women. These women pass on advice about how to keep men in sexual thrall to females. By doing so, they knowingly further the women's body-sex equation.

The world has changed radically for women in those countries that experienced the feminist agitations of the 1960s and 1970s. Before those decades, the majority of middle-class women believed that serious careers were for men only. In the twenty-first century, more women than men are graduating from medical schools in the United States. Nonetheless, at the same time, many of the social structures that feminists find contradictory persist. One has only to peruse the supermarket magazine racks packed full of fashion magazines aimed at a female audience to see that the beauty industry is booming. Indeed, its profits are in the billions of dollars worldwide, with surgeries for breast enhancements and liposuction in demand as never before. Of course, it is also true that makeup for men is now a fast-growing industry.

Has women's success in the public arena changed the meaning and effect of women's being better groomed than most men? Does the fact that men are becoming more conscious of their bodies suggest that beauty is now a way to advertise one's health and fitness? Are people who are interested in fitness expecting to have partners of like mind? Perhaps the surest test of women's definitive equality to men in U.S. society is the presidential one. When will political parties determine that running a woman for president is not a risk? When will it be true that the average American will be just as likely to vote for a woman as a man?

Source: Carol Dell'Amico, Critical Essay on *Beautiful Señoritas*, in *Drama for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2006.

Quotes

"The first child that will bear my name and it is a ... girl!" Act I, p. 20.

"You have to smile to win." Act I, p. 24.

"...this butterfly will keep you alive and running, awake and on your toes, speeding along the herd of wild horses stampeding through the heart!" Act I, p. 24.

"My most fervent desire is to marry a big, handsome, very rich Americano." Act I, p. 26.

"No one knows me. They see me passing by, but they don't know me. They don't see me. They hear my accent but not my words. If anyone wants to find me, I'll be sitting by the beach." Act I, p. 27.

"I have been invented for a photograph. Sometimes I wish to be a person, to exist for my own sake, to stop dancing, to stop smiling. One day I think I will want to cry." Act I, p. 27.

"What are you doing, creature? That is sinful! A woman must be recatada, saintly. Thoughts of the flesh must be banished from your head and heart." Act I, p. 31.

"I don't live for myself. I live for my husband and my children." Act II, p. 35.

"Then, from my insides a child burst forth ... crying, bathed in blood and other personal substances. And then someone whispered in my ear: 'Now you are a real real woman.'" Act II, p. 43.

"I look for myself and I can't find me. I only find someone else's idea of me." Act II, p. 43.

"Free the butterfly, let the oceans roll in, I am only a woman, with the music inside." Act II, p. 45.

Topics for Further Study

Research and write a report on the Cuban Revolution, which resulted in Fidel Castro's takeover of the country in 1959. What motivated Castro and those who supported him? What were their grievances against the government? How did they succeed militarily in their takeover? What was the role of guerrilla fighting in the conflict?

The cold war, which is now over, was the battle of beliefs between Western-style capitalism on the one side and Russian-style Communism on the other. Since Fidel Castro's revolution in Cuba was Communist in nature, Cuba became the enemy of the United States in 1959. The two most serious moments in this long-standing enmity were the events known as the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban missile crisis. Research these events and prepare a Microsoft PowerPoint presentation describing them and explaining how and why they were moments of crisis for the U.S. government.

Form a group and watch, each person on his or her own, a few episodes of any U.S. primetime television show with a Latino character in the cast or depicting a Latin American family. Take notes on the show, with the goal of being able to argue whether the show reinforces stereotypical views of Latinos or some particular Latin group. Next, meet with your group and discuss your impressions. Present your findings to the class in the form of an oral report.

Gloria Steinem is a major figure of 1970s American feminism. Research her career as an activist and writer. What did she try to accomplish for women in the United States? What were her and other feminists' core beliefs? Present your findings in a report.

Many contemporary feminists say that feminists are poorly portrayed in the media. They say that instead of being presented as persons committed to the democratic ideal of ensuring equal opportunity for all, including women, feminists are portrayed as man haters. What is your opinion? Are feminists in the media portrayed as persons working toward equal opportunity for women or as persons who dislike men? State where you have encountered depictions of feminists, describe how they are portrayed, and explain why you think they are represented the way they are. Work with a group or on your own, presenting your findings to the class.

Compare and Contrast

1970s: The women's movement and ethnic minority Civil Rights movements that emerged during the 1960s refine their goals and strategies for change, with women of color participating in academic feminist efforts to correct a white, middle-class bias.

Today: Feminism is a complex set of competing and overlapping theories and practices that take race, class, gender, and sexuality into consideration.

1970s: Feminists begin campaigning for social welfare bills that will allow women equal success in the workforce. For example, they advocate for preschool programs for children and parental leave from work for the first few months after childbirth.

Today: A law requiring employers of fifty or more workers to allow twelve weeks of unpaid leave to employees with a newborn child or an ill family member is in effect.

1970s: César Chávez, a Latino activist for farmworkers' rights, is at the height of his influence, organizing strikes and boycotts. The grape boycott of the 1970s initiated by Chávez is hugely successful.

Today: Thanks to the efforts of unionists like Chávez, American farmworkers have the right to strike and demonstrate without fear of losing their jobs.

1970s: The landmark Supreme Court decision of *Roe v. Wade* in 1973 establishes women's right to an abortion, without restrictions, during the first three months of pregnancy.

Today: Numerous Supreme Court decisions have revised the terms of *Roe v. Wade*, limiting women's access to abortion. For example, individual states may now disallow abortions in public hospitals.

1970s: The Title IX amendment to the Higher Education Act of 1972 had a major impact on girls' and women's participation in sports. Because the act prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex by schools and colleges receiving federal funds, schools had to begin spending as much money on girls' and women's sports programs as they did on boys' and men's.

Today: The development of women in sports is seen, for example, in the international success of the American women's soccer team, and companies begin to recognize the profits to be made by advertising at events such as women's professional golf tournaments.

1970s: Affirmative action programs□designed to ensure equal opportunity for ethnic minorities in education and the workplace, initiated in the 1960s following the Civil Rights movement□begin to encounter opposition.

Today: Legislation limiting the scope of affirmative action programs is in effect, with states such as California voting for the end of university admission policies that take race into account.

What Do I Read Next?

Prida's *Beggars Soap Opera* (1979) is a musical comedy like *Beautiful Señoritas* that draws on the popular form of soap operas.

Prida's 1986 play *Pantallas* contemplates the end of the world, borrowing from soap operas much as *Beautiful Señoritas* borrows from Broadway musicals.

Before Night Falls, translated from the Spanish by Dolores M. Koch in 1993, is a highly acclaimed autobiographical work by Reinaldo Arenas, a Cuban writer who immigrated to the United States, as Prida did. The book was made into a film of the same name in 2000, directed by the American artist Julian Schnabel. Both book and film address Arenas's flight from Cuba and the nature of Cuban life under the reign of Fidel Castro.

How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents (1991) is but one work of fiction by Julia Alvarez, who came to the United States from the Dominican Republic. Like many of Prida's plays, this novel deals with the difficulties of belonging to two cultures simultaneously.

Further Study

Aston, Elaine, *An Introduction to Feminism and Theatre*, Routledge, 1995.

As the title of this work suggests, Aston's book introduces readers to the works and theories of feminist dramatists.

Kevane, Bridget, and Juanita Heredia, eds., *Latina Self-Portraits: Interviews with Contemporary Women Writers*, University of New Mexico Press, 2000.

This collection of interviews provides insights into the goals and concerns of Latina women currently writing in the United States.

Pérez-Stable, Marifeli, *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course, and Legacy*, Oxford University Press, 1999.

This is an accessible and thorough look at Fidel Castro's Cuba from its inception to 1999.

Sandoval-Sánchez, Alberto, and Nancy Saporta Sternbach, eds., *Puro Teatro: A Latina Anthology*, University of Arizona Press, 2000.

This anthology is a wonderful collection of plays by American Latina playwrights, Prida included.

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Prida, Dolores, *Beautiful Señoritas*, in *Beautiful Señoritas & Other Plays*, Arte Publico Press, 1991, pp. 21, 24, 30, 36, 39, 40, 41, 42.

□□□, □The Show Does Go On,□ in *Breaking Boundaries: Latina Writing and Critical Readings*, edited by Asunción Horno-Delgado et al., University of Massachusetts Press, 1989, p. 182.

Rivero, Eliana, □From Immigrants to Ethnics: Cuban Women Writers in the U.S.,□ in *Breaking Boundaries: Latina Writing and Critical Readings*, edited by Asunción Horno-Delgado et al., University of Massachusetts Press, 1989, p. 195.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale’s“For Students” Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on “classic” novels frequently

studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of "classic" novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members—educational professionals— helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed—for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man–the character is listed as "The Narrator" and alphabetized as "Narrator." If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. • Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name "Jean Louise Finch" would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname "Scout Finch."
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an “at-a-glance” comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author’s time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes “The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,” a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children’s Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

"Night." Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234–35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the "Criticism" subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on "Winesburg, Ohio." Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335–39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. "Margaret Atwood's "The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition," Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9–16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133–36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. "Richard Wright: "Wearing the Mask," in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69–83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59–61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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