

THE PANZA MONOLOGUES. 2nd ed. Written, compiled, and collected by Virginia Grise and Irma Mayorga. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014. 191 pages. Hardcover 55.00, paperback \$24.95.

The Panza Monologues is a play that intertwines conversations and ruminations from the daily experiences of Tejanas. Written for a solo performer, it presents a collection of stories that explore themes such as domestic violence, sexuality, abortion, body image, public health, politics, poverty, music, and migration. The release of the DVD in 2009 has sparked an entire movement of people who are interested in performing and discussing its content. They gather in homes and public spaces all over the country for “panza parties,” in which they talk about the play and “panza positive cultural production” (225). Playwrights Virginia Grise and Irma Mayorga received so many requests for the published script, now out-of-print, that they decided the time was right for an expanded text.

The title of the play immediately evokes Eve Ensler’s well-known work, *The Vagina Monologues*, but as Grise (the solo performer) and Mayorga (the director, producer, and dramaturge) point out, the subject matter of their text is specifically focused on the experiences of women who reside within Mexican-majority Texas. Grounded in a salient sense of place, the play is an homage to the strength and perseverance of San Antonio’s Mexican American inhabitants through centuries of colonialism. A critical indictment of inequitable social conditions in the United States, it articulates a “panza politics” (xxiii), “something unmediated by dominant culture and something strongly, unapologetically Chicana feminist in its form” (11).

The second edition of *The Panza Monologues* offers not only a reprint of the original script but also a set of invaluable resources for artists, scholars, and activists. The Spanish word *panza*, whose literal translation is “belly,” is a nuanced, gender-neutral word that can be either playful or derogatory, depending on context. In this new edition Grise and Mayorga explore the dual valences of *panza* by interrogating the connections between the effects of colonialism and the high rates of poverty and obesity in Mexican American communities. The supplementary materials, which include essays, discussion guides, organizational tools, and suggestions for pedagogical

interventions, bridge the concerns of performance, feminism, pedagogy, and activism, encouraging a veritable “theory in the flesh” as described by Cherríe L. Moraga in the germinal text *This Bridge Called My Back* (Third Woman Press, 1981). Grise and Mayorga present Chicana theater as a “politics of visibility” (xxx) that has the potential to “ameliorate generations of silence” (xxix) and point the way toward social transformation.

The book is especially engaging in its description of the sometimes tumultuous, but potentially life-changing, process of collaboration. Part 1, “*The Panza Monologues: From Cuentos to DVD*,” relates the origin story of the play in a personal account written by Mayorga. In a moving reflection of the time that she and Grise spent as social justice advocates at San Antonio’s Esperanza Peace and Justice Center, she examines the power of feminist cooperation, the common neglect of self-care, the unhealthy life “choices” often associated with geography and socioeconomic location, and the intensity and comedy that arise when working women share *chisme* and *chistes*.

From the play’s 2004 premier in Austin to productions in Los Angeles, Phoenix, Dallas, and Boulder, *The Panza Monologues* has had an indelible impact. Requests to produce the play have come mostly from women-of-color initiatives and performances have occurred primarily at people-of-color and queer cultural spaces. “A Chronological Production History of *The Panza Monologues*,” in part 2, lists performance dates and locations and performers, director, and crewmembers. Information about where and why the performances were staged serves to situate the play within a radical and community-based context. A close look at the impact of *The Panza Monologues* within activist organizations is achieved primarily through a discussion of *Conciencia Feminil*, a group of *teatristas*—“cultural warriors”—who have fought to bring Chicana/o *teatro* to public spaces (176). The glossary that follows the script provides an English translation of the Spanish words and phrases used. Definitions include references to the writers’ hometown, including local celebrities like Chicano blues man Randy Garibay and popular eateries like Luby’s cafe, offering an often wildly humorous look at the history and traditions of Mexican American culture.

Part 3, “Tejana Topographies,” locates the play within the geographical borders of San Antonio, “a city of tensions and contradictions” (113) that “often tries to disguise the fullest dimensions of its story, especially events, people, and structures that have worked to subordinate its Mexican American people” (114). In an essay titled “San Antonio Paint(ed) by Numbers” the authors closely examine the historical conditions of racial segregation that

persist in modern-day San Antonio and inform the local “color” of the city and its residents. By breaking down the uneven distribution of wealth and economic growth in the city through brief examinations of commerce, real estate values, city planning, educational attainment, labor capital, and conditions for women, children, and the elderly, the authors show how “San Anto” has been divided along racial and economic lines. This provides crucial background for the play, revealing the linkages among public health, race, and socioeconomic location, especially for Mexican American women. *El Mapa de San Antonio*, an original map by visual artist Debora Kuetzpal Vasquez, shows San Antonio’s cultural-political topography and highlights the city sites that bring in the most revenue through tourism, like the Alamo and the River Walk, as well as locations of significance to the Tejana/o population, like Comanche Park and the haunted railroad crossing known as the “Ghost Tracks.” Individual “autogeographies” of the playwrights, in the tradition of Norma Cantú’s autobioethnography *Canícula: Snapshots of a Girlhood en la Frontera* (University of New Mexico Press, 1997), emphasize the importance of location and space to identity, body politics, and self-image.

The supplemental texts are most effective when they explore the connections between radical production and self-representation. Part 4, “A DIY Production Manual,” provides a guidebook for Chicanas and other women of color who aspire to be cultural producers, not only of *The Panza Monologues* but also of their own works. Grise and Mayorga voice a need for “more people of color theater artists” to articulate “all of our different and varied ethnic, racialized, and regional experiences—not a few representative playwrights burdened with the task of capturing the totality of, for example, the Latina/o experience in the United States through their work” (227). “Guidelines, Advice, and Good Wishes for Staging a Production of *The Panza Monologues*” includes examples of form letters for obtaining permission to stage the play and for negotiating royalties, examples of promotional materials for and from the play, notes for staging a production, a planning checklist, and event planning notes. These documents demystify the production process for those without conventional theater training. Concluding part 4 is “Tupperware Meets Telenovela: How to Organize a *Panza Party*,” in which the authors describe the contemporary cultural phenomenon as an opportunity to invite people to view the film and spur discussion about issues that are important to their community. This kind of outreach, which can involve people who are unlikely to attend a theatrical production because of time and/or financial constraints, is an essential component of cultural production whose aim is to address social justice issues.

Ultimately, however, it is part 5, “Pedagogy of the *Panza*: A Reading, Creative Writing, and Discussion Guide for *The Panza Monologues*” that makes this new edition of the book distinctive because it fosters the evolution of Chicana/Latina dramaturges, producers, directors, playwrights, and artists amid a growing cultural consciousness about issues of inequality in the United States. For example, in the essay “*Panza Pilón: A Manifesto for Panza Positive Chicana Cultural Production*,” Grise and Mayorga make incisive suggestions about the future direction of Chicana/o and women’s theater. They assess the mixed successes of social justice organizations and cultural spaces to foster productive relationships with women and people-of-color artists and to produce their creative endeavors. Especially important are the discussions of artistic labor and the value of women’s work, a conversation that must continue to grow as more women’s theater is recognized and performed in public spaces.

The Panza Monologues exemplifies the kind of decolonizing “perform-antics” theorized by Arturo J. Aldama, Chela Sandoval, and Peter J. García in *Performing the US Latina and Latino Borderlands* (Bloomington University Press, 2012), and the second edition adds to an ever-expanding body of writing on Chicana/o *teatro* and the emerging field of borderlands performance studies, a project that looks to the performance of culture as a means to effect collective liberation. Chicana scholar and creative artist Tiffany Ana López, writing in the foreword, frames the work within the larger trajectory of feminist performance pieces that are “pivotal for the ways they have shifted consciousness about the female body as a personal storehouse of knowledge and a source of cultural memory” (xi) and situates it alongside Latina feminist theater studies by scholars like Diana Taylor, Roselyn Constantino, Alicia Arrizón, Alberto Sandoval-Sánchez, and Nancy Saporita Sternbach. Dedicated to the women whose stories it immortalizes, the play is what Alicia Gaspar de Alba would call an alter-*Native* intervention in that it honors the voices of a silenced majority whose histories have been excluded, erased, and contorted and points to a potential to remake the world in more egalitarian terms through cultural production. The book is a powerful testament to the fact that Chicana/o and queer Chicana performance is not only art but also a pathway to healing the spiritual damage inflicted by centuries of colonialism and subjugation. This second edition of *The Panza Monologues* speaks to artists and activists both within and outside the academy and contributes to social change by challenging convention and engaging with community in the accessible language of theater.

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