Target-Language Theatre as Lived Experience: Politics, Phenomenology, and the Toss of a Coin

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Abstract

During Spring 2011, a University of Wisconsin-Madison Spanish class studied Latin American theatre and performed a play. Sabina Berman’s ¿Aguila o sol?, whose political content informed and was informed by the students’ experience of the real-life political events affecting their campus and city: Gov. Walker’s conflict with senators, public employees and citizens. Interviews conducted participants revealed their insights on how their participation in the play intersected with events in their community and state. Students also reflected on how their participation influenced their understanding of world events connected to the Arab Spring.

Methods and Data Collection

I conducted phenomenological interviews with undergraduate participants of Spanish 555: Theory and Practice of Hispanic Theatre, a mixed-level course in which students read plays, theory and criticism in the target language and then selected, produced, and performed one of the texts for the public. Students discussed their learning experience in a course that included native speakers and graduate students, identifying both advantages and disadvantages. They also discussed the course’s relationship to political events of early 2011 having to do with the Wisconsin Protests and Spanish 555 reads and discusses ¿Aguila o sol?

Findings

Students commented on:
connections between the political situation and their future career prospects
the impact on family members, peers involved in the protests
their own greater awareness of events related to the Arab Spring as a result of the Wisconsin Protests
the role of social media in the protests; its connection to the figure of Malinche and Visión de los vencidos
parallels between the final scene of ¿Aguila o sol? and events that took place at the Wisconsin State Capitol

A Bakhtinian analysis of student comments reveals carnivalesque aspects of their experience of “a world turned upside down,” and dialogized heteroglossia is evident in the interplay of language and images from the play, the Wisconsin Protests and the events of the Arab Spring.

References