Sometimes good fortune comes disguised as its opposite. Years ago I lost the opportunity to work on a newly-discovered Nahuatl play, but luckily for me it fell into the hands of Louise Burkhart, who later published it as Holy Wednesday: A Nahuatl Drama from Early Colonial Mexico, thereby deepening her interest in early Nahuatl dramas. Around the same time I was working with John Frederick “Fritz” Schwaller on a critical edition of a Nahuatl-Spanish confessional manual of 1634 written by don Bartolomé de Alva. Alva had also translated some Spanish Golden-Age dramas into Nahuatl. I examined his translations and became fascinated with them. These were two of the many happy coincidences that led Louise and me to collaborate on a four-volume Nahuatl Theater set. We plan to include all extant Nahuatl plays from the sixteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries.

The inspiration for our work is Fernando Horcasitas’ El teatro náhuatl (1974). Horcasitas’ original intent was much more ambitious than ours. The first volume on “ancient missionary theater” was to be followed by five more volumes that would conclude with pieces still being performed today in Nahuatl-speaking communities. Although other scholars came before and after him, this first installment of his grand plan is the best known of any publication on early Nahuatl theater. In fact, it is probably one of the most popular books containing early Nahuatl texts. This is undoubtedly due to two factors: the relatively lively nature of the theater genre, and the seemingly inexhaustible appeal of religious topics like Christian morality and sin.

By current standards Horcasitas’ work is somewhat deficient. His transcriptions deviate so much from the originals that they are misleading; there are also a number of outright omissions. His translations need considerable updating, and several difficult passages were left not only untranslated but unmarked. His commentary has been decisively superseded by that in Burkhart’s Holy Wednesday.

Yet he set himself a task whose reach compensates for all the deficiencies that are so easy to see in hindsight. Louise and I are sharing the work with many other people. We have the benefit of technological and scholarly resources well beyond what he had. Even so, we do not plan to do nearly as much as he envisioned doing more or less on his own. He intended to follow, with essentially no major gaps, a common textual thread in an indigenous language from the sixteenth century to the present. Except for the necessary focus on a particular language and area, he welcomed a wide range of approaches to his materials. In his own mind he was probably just being pragmatic and comprehensive, utilizing whatever texts and useful commentary came to hand. His instincts were correct then, and they are correct now. There is much about El teatro náhuatl that needs improvement, but his broad vision remains valid today.

1 © Barry Sell 2007. I dedicate this effort to Charlie Mack and Jeff Pott.
2 Burkhart 1996.
The first volume of *Nahuatl Theater* (2004) has the most visible ties to the efforts of Horcasitas and his predecessors. It contains seven plays. Several of them appear in *El teatro náhuatl* including “The Three Kings” and “Final Judgment.” Others have appeared elsewhere, most notably in Marilyn Ekdahl Ravicz’ *Early Colonial Religious Drama in Mexico*. Only one is entirely new, a previously unknown piece held by The Academy for American Franciscan History.

In many respects our initial offering presents old material in significantly updated and corrected versions. The mere fact that some material had been previously published, however, did not automatically make our task any easier. For example, what Nahuatl transcriptions did exist were so radically different from the originals that they were worse than useless. At the very beginning I made a digital transcription of a published version of one of the plays at the Library of Congress. I thought it would save me time and effort when I went to the LC. I was dead wrong. At one point I counted up the deviations between part of my copy of the published version and the original: there were over 2,000. This after already making hundreds of corrections! I went back to basics. The other transcriptions of LC materials were made from scratch with the originals literally in front of me. This proved infinitely more efficient and reliable.

An unexpected pitfall with previously published materials was misinformation about their current whereabouts. It was the considered opinion of experts on early Nahuatl theater that three crucial plays continued to be unaccounted for as late as the year 2000. All had appeared in some fashion in print: “The Three Kings,” “The Sacrifice of Isaac,” and “Souls and Testamentary Executors.” Nevertheless, Schwaller had already pinpointed their exact and continuing location in a 1987 article in *Estudios de Cultura Náhuatl*. I double-checked with Fritz, wrote the Clements Library at the University of Michigan, and sure enough the plays had never been “lost.” This was an important lesson about the necessity of questioning even the seemingly most trivial assumptions about early Nahuatl theater.

Translations were a somewhat different matter than transcriptions. Although in the main Louise and I translated directly from the originals, we very occasionally consulted the Spanish and English interpretations made by Horcasitas, Byron McAfee, and John H. Cornyn. In my opinion some of this previous work, dating back as far as the 1930s, is still good, and I tip my hat to them. Here as in analysis we relied mainly on the gains made in Nahuatl Studies since the 1970s. Speaking only for myself, I would include the following works on Nahuatl: Frances Karttunen and James Lockhart’s *Nahuatl in the Middle Years* (1976), Karttunen’s article on “Nahuatl Literacy” in *The Aztec and Inca States, 1400–1800* (1982), Karttunen and Lockhart’s *The Art of Nahuatl Speech* (1987), and the 1983 photoreproduction of Horacio Carochi’s *Arte de la lengua mexicana* (originally published 1645). Works of a broader nature include Arthur J. O. Anderson et al. *Beyond the Codices* (1976), Lockhart’s *The Nahua After the Conquest* (1992), and Louise’s own *Holy Wednesday* (1996).

While the analysis of mundane writings has made great advances in the last thirty years, there has been significantly less work done on most of the ecclesiastical corpus. When attention has been focused on writings associated with the
church, it has been mainly directed to two kinds of texts. The first type is grammatical. This would include the many different editions of fray Alonso de Molina’s *Vocabulario* (1571) and Carochi’s *Arte.* The second type comprises unusual texts which include at least some purported prehispanic lore. This would include the Florentine Codex, the Bancroft Dialogues, and fray Juan Bautista’s *Huehuetlahtolli* (1600). The vast corpus of manuscript and published routine materials such as sermonsaries, confessional manuals, and books of Christian doctrine have not usually received the same careful treatment. Some notable recent exceptions are Alva’s confessional manual of 1634 (see Sell and Schwaller 1999), Burkhart’s excellent *Before Guadalupe: The Virgin Mary in Early Colonial Nahuatl Literature* (2001), and my (with Larissa Taylor and Asunción Lavrin) *Nahua Confraternities in Early Colonial Mexico* (2002).

Yet routine ecclesiastical texts are the most obvious general framework for understanding and translating the moralistic and hagiographic dramas which make up volume one of our series of Nahuatl plays. Louise and I are among the very few, even within the small ranks of Nahuatl scholars, who have worked extensively with these texts. This background has been tremendously helpful in our first volume. References to people, places, and events, as well as turns of speech, have usually turned out to be already familiar to us.

Our work on volume two has been another story altogether. The basis for this book is a manuscript held by the Bancroft Library of the University of California, Berkeley. It consists of Nahuatl translations by Alva of three Spanish plays and a comic intermezzo. Only one of these four pieces has appeared in print. In 1960 William A. Hunter published “The Calderonian Auto Sacramental El Gran Teatro del Mundo: An Edition and Translation of a Nahuatl Version.” This was not even a separate publication but appeared as part of the larger *The Native Theatre in Middle America.* Hunter’s work is well below the standards of Horcasitas in *El teatro náhuatl* some 14 years later. This is the sum total of substantial scholarship on these plays, and it has had almost no part in our work. Hence in effect Louise and I were starting from zero. We transcribed directly from the originals at the Bancroft. We are far advanced in translating the Nahuatl and have begun analyzing the texts. We have enlisted Elizabeth R. Wright as a co-editor; she is an expert on Spanish theater of the period. On a research trip to Spain she located the most relevant Spanish counterparts of the plays, although the *entremés* continues to be problematic. We have already transcribed the Spanish texts and begun translating them.

This stage of our work has prompted some reflection on my part. The things I have just said did not seem to exhaust the differences I felt existed between our work on the first volume of *Nahuatl Theater* as compared to the second. But I was unable at first to put my finger on what else was involved. The matter was brought more sharply into focus when I was fortunate enough to be given copies of some notable works: Luis Reyes García’s critical edition of the “Juan Bautista” annals (2001), Lockhart’s critical edition of Carochi (2001), and his *Nahuatl as Written* (2001).

Luis’ edition joined a growing group of well-thumbed works which line my
shelves. The body of work on early Nahuatl and Nahuas has now reached a certain critical mass and state. A considerable body of quality publications exist, most of the key dissertations have been published, updated reeditions of classics (they can now be considered classics!) like *Beyond the Codices* and *The Testaments of Culhuacan* are planned, and more books are in the pipeline. All in all one can speak of a certain maturing and refinement of the scholarship that relates in some fashion to the superficially rather esoteric field of Nahuatl studies. Thus I received Luis’ fine book in a spirit of thankfulness, with the expectation that it would be, as it was, of the same high quality as other books in this line, and that I would be consulting it for years to come. In other words, I have become so used to quality work on early Nahuatl and Nahuas from certain people that I assume it, and am rarely disappointed.

My reaction to Jim’s two books was rather different. Here, I thought, was Carochi for the rest of us! Or at least, for those of us who work directly with early Nahuatl writings—I mean no disrespect to already existing fine grammatical publications that I much admire. Woody Allen once said in a movie that a relationship is like a shark: it has to keep moving forward or it dies. Scholarship is much the same. It is not enough to simply continue in the same fashion the truly fine projects and ideas that have appeared over the last thirty years. To stay fresh and relevant, things need to be periodically shaken up, reconstituted where necessary, the bar raised. From my own very personal vantage point this process starts with improving the transcribing and translating of early Nahuatl writings, and then using those improved renderings to make even more subtle interpretations and far-reaching connections. In this sense I think Jim’s two works mark a new stage in Nahuatl Studies.

With specific reference to early Nahuatl drama, volume one of *Nahuatl Theater* attempts to meet the standards Louise set in *Holy Wednesday* in 1996, and we hope that in some respects we have even exceeded those standards. We aim higher yet for future volumes. One of the reasons we can do so is that Carochi 2001 enables us to translate and analyze Alva’s texts in ways not possible before its appearance. In part this is because there is a special relationship between Carochi’s and Alva’s works.

My work on Alva’s plays began before the transcriptions were completed. My previous work on Sahagún’s sermon of 1548 and the three extant versions of Molina’s 1552 cofradía ordinances had made me acutely aware of the value of small clues to the identity and number of scholars and scribes who produced such texts. While at the Bancroft Library I called up not only the Alva texts but the Bancroft Dialogues. Both are known to contain the diacritics peculiar to Carochi’s grammatical studies. I compared these originals directly for a couple of hours.

There are at least four distinct hands in the two manuscripts. First, the main texts. There are two well-trained hands at work in Alva and another in the huehuetlatolli. Now, to the small handwritten super- and subscript additions.

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These are in a very different hand (hands?). Even assuming that Carochi wrote all the extra comments, that still leaves three others working on his behalf. Perhaps Alva must be added, for his hand may not be directly present in the manuscript bearing his name. There are also several references in the huehuetlatolli text to a don Miguel who served as a consultant; there is similar mention of a don Fernando in Alva’s manuscript. It is difficult not to lean toward the unprovable supposition that the second titled expert was Alva’s older brother, a professional interpreter well qualified to assist the distinguished Jesuit grammarian. Be that as it may, Carochi’s circle of scholars and scribes appears to be very much like that of his predecessors like Sahagún and Molina.

Once Louise and I were well advanced on producing reliable transcriptions, my investigations proceeded on a firmer footing. My initial impression that the Alva pieces were literally copied down by two different scribes was confirmed by the orthography. The two plays “El Gran Teatro del Mundo” and “La Madre de la Mejor” along with the untitled entremés are similar to Alva’s 1634 confesionario in the spelling of such items as tlen, miac and noyan, whereas the third play “El Animal Propheta y Dichosa Patricida” spells them (sans diacritics) much as we are accustomed to seeing them in The Bancroft Dialogues and in Carochi’s Arte, as tleyn/tlein, miec and nohuian. Whether viewed as orthographic peculiarities, Carochi’s preferences, or reflecting the speech habits of the scribes, these are patterns worth noting.

The presence and absence of diacritics reinforced these findings. There are absolutely no diacritics in the entremés and “Gran Teatro,” while 160 instances of items bearing diacritics are scattered about in “La Madre.” The number of such items in “El Animal” are many times that of “La Madre,” but the differences go beyond sheer numbers. There are selected sections of “El Animal” that are so heavily marked with diacritics that they make “La Madre” look unnotated. The approximately two dozen examples of a circumflex being used are found only in “El Animal.” A number of items that contain long vowels, such as the object prefixes -netch, -tech, and -amech, can be found only in “El Animal.” In short, three of the four pieces are in the same hand and relatively raw by Carochi’s standards, while “El Animal” is in a distinctly different hand and well on its way to becoming a Carochi-approved product.

Yet “El Animal” is by no means another Bancroft Dialogues. This is well illustrated by the ubiquitous Nahuatl item for “no, not.” It is written numerous times as amo, 41 times as ahmo, 37 times as âhmo, three times as âmo, and once as âmo. If the three undernotated pieces are Alva’s drafts—or just relatively clean copies of his drafts—then “El Animal” represents the next stage, as incomplete and inconsistent as it is, of beginning to rework those plays to serve Carochi’s philological purposes. The many copies speak to the enormous time and effort involved in preparing texts for Carochi. If so many were needed it is no wonder that his system never caught on.

In spite of the incomplete nature of “El Animal,” it is often consistent with the practice of whoever worked on the Bancroft Dialogues. I pick three examples from the back of Karttunen and Lockhart’s critical edition. The first has to do with âmô, which is “always written âmo without a macron on the o” in the Ban-
croft Dialogues (p. 200). The same in Alva, if you consider the presence or absence of a macron on the o and look at the examples just above. Another is áxcâñ, which is “written uniformly as áxcan without a macron on the second a” (p. 200). The only time this item appears in the Alva manuscript with diacritics is in “El Animal” and all five times as áxcan, i.e., only the first a has a macron, never the second. Lastly, nicâñ appearing “without the macron is far more common” (p. 202). Once again, the only instances of this item with diacritics is in “El Animal.” Despite it great frequency there, it appears only nine times as nicâñ.

While my attention turned for a short while to measurable similarities or differences between Alva’s manuscript and the Bancroft Dialogues, my real interest lay in any possible direct connections between Alva’s work and Carochi’s grammar. After all, the Bancroft Dialogues in the form in which we know them served as one of the few known sources for Carochi’s Arte of 1645. Alva’s manuscript bears various dates from 1640 and 1641, placing it more or less during the time Carochi must have been preparing his grammar for the printer. Furthermore, the last piece in Alva’s manuscript literally begins:

Comedia de Lope de Vega Carpio intitulada la madre de la mejor.
Traduçida en lengua Mex, na y dirig, da al P. e oração Carochi de la compa de JHS.

Finally, my own reading of Carochi over the years (from the 1983 photoreproduction done by the UNAM) had often made me wonder about his famed Book Five on “adverbs.” He includes some seemingly obscure particles, adverbial expressions and idioms which he illustrates with examples taken from equally obscure sources. I began coming across some of these items in my translation of Alva’s Nahuatl version of “Gran Teatro” (Louise had taken charge of translating “La Madre”). More specifically, I wrestled with the meaning of the idiom Quen nitlacatl (in both the first person singular and plural) which appears five times in “Gran Teatro” and once in “El Animal.” This is not a common idiom, at least in my experience.

I found my answer most easily in Jim’s critical edition. I had tentatively hit upon the meaning “What kind of a person am I?” which did fit the context of the various passages where I had encountered it. Carochi gives an unequivocal and direct solution to my uncertainties in translating Quen nitlacatl: “Literally this seems to mean, How am I a person . . . but it [really] means, What will come of me[?]” (pp. 419–21). It is difficult to express in words how gratifying it is to find such a pointed resolution to such a specific problem.

While celebrating this small victory I happened to take a closer look at a subscript addition to “El Animal.” In referring to the passage “àhmo huècåuh” the unknown glossator had written “No ay saltillo sobre el ca.” Of course there should be no saltillo above, or glottal stop following, the ca in huehcåuh, “a long time, something old” (Karttunen 1983, p. 83). Then it struck me. This was obviously no correction. Rather it was an expert if random observation, one that must have been made by Carochi himself. Then I had a minor epiphany. This piece was precisely the one that was more worked over than the other three combined. Suddenly other features of “El Animal” made more sense. For example, the only
references to an expert consultant—the mysterious don Fernando—appear in “El Animal” (three times). Just as if this were the one piece of the four that Carochi found most useful, hence put the most effort into. If I were to find any direct connection between Alva’s plays and Carochi’s grammar, it surely would be here.

I then proceeded to go over “El Animal” much more closely than I had previously, trying to familiarize myself with any peculiar or striking phrases. I also went back over Book Five of Carochi. I hoped that perhaps I might find something in the one that would remain in my memory long enough to be present when I encountered it in the other. As sometimes happens, it was the absence of something, rather than its presence, that proved crucial. On page 448 of Carochi 2001 Jim observes in a footnote that “Achichi as C. describes it here (and I admit that I have never found it in a text) is extremely hard to pin down to a translation.” Given Jim’s broad familiarity with the early Nahuatl corpus this is a most striking statement. Especially since this item, absent in the many texts he has gone over, is present in Alva’s “El Animal.”

My luck held. Carochi directly cites Alva in the paragraph where he discusses this particle. The relevant passages follow:

Tiçoc y Achichi yn tehuatl tambien se dice chic in tehuatl ca otitemicti
ca motlátlacol yn tictzaqua auh yn nèhuatl aíc mānel čah če
pínčacatl nomāc miqui cuix ticnequi no yuh nitalayıyōhuiz yn iuh
titlāyōhuia (Alva f. 43r)

achichi in tehuatl ca ötítémicti, ca motlátlacol in tictzaqua; auh in nèhuatl aíc mānel čaczēpínčacatl nomāc miqui (Carochi 2001, p. 448)

The clincher (if one is needed) comes at the end of the paragraph. Carochi reacts directly to (his own/someone else’s?) added remark in Alva’s text that “tambien se dice chic in tehuatl.” As Jim translates Carochi’s observation, “Some say chic instead of achichi, but it is an abuse” (449).

Although the latter part of the dialogue is not used here it can be found elsewhere in the grammar. Where Alva has “cuix ticnequi no yuh nitalayıyōhuiz yn iuh titlāyōhuia” Carochi 2001 has “cuixticnequi nōyuḥ nītlāiyōhuiz, inīyuḥ titlāiyōhuia?” (442).

There are other examples as well. I include them here so that future critical editions of Carochi’s grammar can take them into account in the commentary and footnotes. The above citation from Alva is from the very bottom of 43r; the next is almost at the top of 43v: “Tiçoc y Ma yc nītlācnoπihui yntlācaco yxquich yc ynetic ynīn dīablō ycnōtlācauh aχo aχi huel nīcōltlaotcit.” On page 396 the Jesuit uses only part of it: “mānic māma intlacamo ixquich ic etic.” However immediately following on the same page is “tleinmāch ic otiomoxhuītī in iuhquic ic tetic?” which is based on dialogue a little further down on Alva 43v:

Tiçoc y xiquich to mictlān cocoxquic tleyn mach yc otiomoxhuītī yn iuh-
quic yc tetic cuix yc otiomoxixicuino yn ēlōTLapāhuaxttl D. fern.o
in [ēpa?]huaxttl yhuan āyōtlātxapanallī āyōtlātxapanallī cābaça cōcida
hecha pedaços. tleyn mach mitzetitīa
In the above Alva material used by Carochi there is some creative explanation of context to suit didactic purposes. However, the last bit from Alva to appear in the grammar is explicitly related to “El Animal.” First I give Carochi’s version of the Nahuatl followed by the original passage from Alva, and then Jim’s translation of this section. Carochi 2001, p. 404: “an ca çañeltiz inic miquizquè in nonãntzin, in notàtzin.” which is taken (slightly modified) from Alva, f. 27v. The passage in question forms the first part of a medium-sized piece of dialogue by Julian, who has heard a prophecy that he will kill his parents: “Yeçè Tleyn nictihua anca ça nelli ynic miquizquè yn nonãntzin notàtzin.” Jim’s translation in Carochi 2001, p. 405: “One who has been told that his parents would die soon, seeing some signs of it, said, Anca çañeltiz inic miquizquè in nonãntzin, in notàtzin. As it appears, it will infallibly be fulfilled that my parents will die.”

More could be said regarding the relationship between Alva’s manuscript and Carochi’s grammar. For example, the above citations reconfirm Carochi’s tendency to modify the passages he used as illustrations of good Nahuatl. More importantly, they establish without doubt that Carochi not only relied on previous scholarship as exemplified in the Florentine Codex and the Bancroft Dialogues but that he actively solicited the creation of new texts like Alva’s translations of Spanish dramas. Furthermore, since “El Animal” bears the dates 1640 and 1641, this indicates a period some four to five years before the publication of the Arte when Carochi was busy creating, annotating, and incorporating material for his grammar.

I will go into more detail on the Alva-Carochi connection in a future article for Estudios de Cultura Náhuatl, but I am going to shift my discussion to another track of inquiry. In Carochi’s introductory “TO THE READER” he speaks of his grammar as being “so clear and so well adorned with examples that anyone could learn this language with enough study.” He specifically points out that his last book on “adverbs” was “very profitable for the many examples and excellent phrases from very good authors which during my long experience I have collected and which perhaps will be found nowhere else” (Carochi 2001, p. 15).

Of course, I now know that among his “very good authors” he counted some peninsular writers whom we would today identify as exemplars of Spanish drama. Yet as Elizabeth R. Wright, my co-editor along with Louise for volume two, has pointed out, we must be careful not to confuse twenty-first century appreciations of Lope de Vega Carpio (“El Animal”) and Calderón de la Barca (“Gran Teatro”) with those of the first half of the seventeenth century. The following is taken from a recent presentation by her:

For scholars of early-modern Spanish literature, this particular use of Castilian plays in Mexico represents a milestone that gives us insight into

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4Undoubtedly more of Alva’s text will be found in Carochi’s Arte. Shortly before final submission of this essay I found the following: “Malin, y Nechcapa xihuetzi xiquicha” (Alva 17v), and then in the grammar “nechca, vel nechcapa xihuetzi, vete de ai, o vete en hora mala; à la letra dize: caete aculla” / “Nechca or nechcapa xihuetzi, Get out of there, or begone; literally it says, Fall over there” (Carochi 2001, 330-33). As in the other cases, Carochi uses Alva’s translation of “El Animal.”
the process through which the peninsula’s popular and profitable entertainment form underwent canonization, to become institutionalized as the “Golden Age” theater enshrined in statues, street names, and curricula. . . . [T]his canonical status, which can seem inevitable and natural from our vantage point, cannot be taken for granted where early-modern writing is concerned. In the case of Alva’s manuscript, a seemingly simple series of name identifications tells an important story. Here is the heading that identifies the longest of the four texts: ¶ Comedia famosa de lope de bega carpio del animal Propheta y dichosa patriçida traduçida en lengua mex. na propio y natural ydioma Por el B. Fr d. Bart e de Alba el año de 1640. Alva’s choice of recent plays that come from the popular stage, his identification of playwrights, and the likely use of such texts within the Carochi circle are signs of a development in the international reading culture, whereby the seventeenth-century dramatic corpus became a standard-bearer of Hispanic language and culture. In short, Alva and his collaborators confer, or confirm, canonical status on the Castilian dramas as he uses them as a currency that will facilitate the encounter of one “propio y natural idioma” with another.

She points elsewhere to how “plays and playwrights did not have an undisputed claim to the cultural capital that would guarantee their preservation in a literary canon,” to the “problematic status of theaters in civic life,” and to the “textual instability that characterized all early-modern writing.” She also points to an interesting inversion of the typical colonizer-colonized axis. The oldest known extant Spanish version of “El Gran Teatro del Mundo” is dated 1655, while Alva’s Nahuatl translation is from circa 1640. Hence the oldest version of a well known Spanish dramatic piece must be studied in Nahuatl.

This move from New Spain to Spain, from Nahuas to non-Nahuas, from a Jesuit stationed at Tepotzotlan to the worldwide Society of Jesus and its role in cultural interchange via translations, flows quite naturally and easily out of the materials we are working on. Nahuatl texts associated with the church have always had the potential to tie in rather immediately with much of the broader Spanish-speaking world.

This potential was not completely unrealized during the colonial period. Centuries ago the non-native scholars of Nahua culture and language were priests like the nahuatlatoque (experts in Nahuatl; translators) fray Bernardino de Sahagún, OFM, fray Alonso de Molina, OFM, fray Juan de Mijangos, OSA, and Father Horacio Carochi, SJ. Sometimes they explicitly made comparisons. Here is one comment from fray Juan Bautista, OFM. It is taken from his Advertencias para los confesores de los naturales (vol. 1, 1600, 58v-59r). His extensive published corpus was coauthored and typeset by the Nahua teacher and latinist Agustín de la Fuente.

Y bien manifesto es que su rudeza no es tanta que pueda dezirse dellos que son tontos, bobos, mentecaptos, y del todo priuados del buen juzyio de razon, porq el que mas barbaro parece dellos tiene sufficiente discrecion, para segun su modo de viuir obrar las cosas necessarias a su estado, sin
disorden de la razon: como paresce en la policia y gouierno en su
gentildad, que con estar priuados de la lumbre de la fee and tener demas
de la Idolatria otros muchos vicios, tenian su policia muy grande en su
gouierno politico. Veemos tambien quan habiles son en los officios Me-
chancios que aprenden, y quan habiles, y resauídos los que tratan con
Españoles. De donde claramente se hecha de ver que la rudeza que en
ellos vemos no es natural sino falta de instrucciõ y comunicacion de gente
habil y discreta. Y los que han tractado el villanage de muchas partes de
España, dizen que son mas rudos y de mucho menos policia que estos
naturales: y si a estos Españoles torpes, y rudos se les negasse la Co-
munion se tendría por mal hecho por entender que aquella rudeza y baxeza
de entendimiento no es bastante a prìuar a vno de la Comunion:

Naturally none of this—or any scholarship for that matter—can be taken
purely at face value. However, this citation is rich in analytical possibilities, in-
cluding commentary on the effects of Hispanization, on the promotion and self-
promotion inherent in almost any clerical text, and on the glorification of the
prehispanic era so prevalent in some clerical sources.

A more local connection—the most fascinating for me—also can be inves-
tigated using these plays. The bilingual Nahua or Hispanic was a critical point of
articulation between the Nahuatl- and Spanish-speaking worlds. It is precisely this
kind of individual who is a primary focus of volume two and a strong secondary
focus in volume four of Nahuatl Theater. I have already mentioned one of the
central figures of volume two, the mestizo priest and translator don Bartolomé de
Alva, active in the mid-seventeenth century. Volume four features a similar figure
in the person of Faustino Galicia Chimalpopoca, like Alva a native speaker of
Nahuatl and translator but active two centuries later when the Nahuatl paper trail
runs very thin indeed.

The attention we give the contributions of these two is deliberate. Jim points
out at the end of his The Nahua After the Conquest (1992, p. 450): “The invisible
hero of the present study is the bilingual Indian, whose importance is seen only
through a large imprint left on Nahua culture. The group deserves more direct
attention, although beyond professional interpreters the avenues of approach are
anything but clear.” It is our good fortune to work on a project which touches so
directly on such a crucial topic.

Alva’s writings are comparable in at least one sense to many of those of his
near-contemporary, the Nahua annalist Chimalpahín, and to the general run of
ecclesiastical Nahuatl texts. There are relatively few “facts” of the kind to be
found in notarial documents. Instead there are written expressions of the mental
architecture of a Nahua writer of a specific time, place, and status. Thus the most
direct comparisons between our handling of Alva’s writings and published studies
are Susan Schroeder’s Chimalpahín and the Kingdoms of Chalco (1991) and
Burkhart’s Holy Wednesday (1996). This sort of approach does not deny the im-
portance of studying the notarial corpus but rather rests on, complements, and
extends analyses based on those sources.

Alva did not come empty-handed to his task of translating. He brought the
sensibilities of a parish priest who had written a confessional manual, of a native
speaker of Nahuatl from Tetzcoco, and of a Christian familiar with the Nahuatl dramas of his time. In other words he operated within the tradition of seventeenth-century utilitarian Nahuatl writings and not that of twenty-first century literary translators preoccupied with “accuracy” and “preserving tone.” So it is no surprise that we see Alva—seemingly unconcerned—transforming polymetric Spanish verse into Nahuatl prose, or paying little attention to preserving Spanish allegory, or failing to reproduce Spanish cultural stereotypes and dramatic conventions. In his hands, however idiosyncratic his specific renderings may be (like those of Chimalpahin), he cut these plays from Spain to the fit of the moralistic and hagiographic dramas then current in Nahuatl-speaking communities of New Spain.

Given Carochi’s purposes, the length of Alva’s manuscript, and the demonstrated expertise of both these nahuatlatoque, these plays are one of the most significant extant samples of early Nahuatl conversation. In fact, although the Florentine Codex and the Bancroft Dialogues are fascinating and illuminating in this respect for the later sixteenth century, they do not cover quite as wide a range as do these Spanish plays in Nahuatl translation. Moreover, the exact circumstances of their production are often vague. Alva’s manuscript is quite different in all those regards. It also poses an intriguing question: were the verbal protocols and high rhetoric of the Florentine Codex and the Bancroft Dialogues still in use during the early 1640s?

The short answer, at least for one named and relatively well-known individual, is a resounding yes—if you pick the right play. The first piece in the Alva manuscript (1r–12r) is “El Gran Teatro del Mundo,” followed by the untitled entremés (12v–16v). “Teatro” is too abstract and allegorical to suit this type of investigation, the intermezzo too full of comic hijinks. “El Animal Propheta y Dichosa Patricida” (17r–56v) would be somewhat helpful but is more suited for a different line of inquiry. It has the most extensive running samples known to me of what can best be described as amorous (albeit conventional and sometimes hysterical) chitchat in Nahuatl, and not the prohibited sinful type occasionally illustrated in confessionals and the like.

The very last piece is “La Madre de la Mejor” (57r–71v). It is a hagiographic drama about the birth of the Virgin Mary. The very theme lends itself to extreme formality and speechifying. In addition there are characters typifying a variety of social and familial types, all assigned by Alva to traditional Nahua sociopolitical categories. This gives him the opportunity to utilize early Nahuatl’s extensive repertoire of polite protocols and idioms in ways suited to a variety of circumstances and according to each character’s station in life, age, and gender. Even a more-than-cursory glance at the manuscript would reveal little of this if one started at the beginning of the whole manuscript. By the time one got to the last piece one’s energy, attention, and interest would be flagging. This is another reason why such Nahuatl texts, if they are to be fully appreciated, must be worked out in their entirety.

Unlike the well-known drama “Gran Teatro” for which the Nahuatl translation is the oldest example, we do have an earlier version in Spanish of “La Madre.” It appeared for the first and only time in 1621 in the seventeenth part of a serialized anthology of plays. We know of no other surviving versions. While we
cannot be sure whether Alva worked directly from the publication or a manuscript copy of it, there is a close correlation (apart from outright errors of omission by Alva) between the Spanish and Nahuatl versions of the play. It must also be mentioned that Alva only translated the first act and a half, stopping just short of a section which contains a ludicrously stereotyped example of so-called “Indian” song in Spanish.

The general tenor of the Nahuatl is well-illustrated by the following excerpt from our transcription and Louise’s translation.

An. Ninotolinia, quēñ niez yn noçel? yn Ayac nonamicṭiz quēñ ye quītoa in nechcahua Catli yn noJoachintiz Ca ye tlapehuia in notlaocol. ça nehuatl Notlatlacol in ye tictzacuhtihui inic atle tech.momaquilititzinoznequi in Dios, nican mochoquiliz Jacob Tlaçotitlacatzintle, Cihuapille, Nopiltzintzine, Ma yxquich in choquiztli in yxayotl; macamo xicmotetepēhuilli in motlaço-xyayotzin aço quimonequiltitzinoz in Teotl, aço amechmotluatilititzinoz in amoconetzin, aço Ylhuicacpa hualaz in amoneyolla-liltitzin. (Alva 62r)

Anne. I am afflicted. How will I get along by myself with no spouse? How is it that now he says that he is leaving me? Where is my dear Joachim? Now my sadness increases. It is just my own sin for which we are now going to suffer the penalty, as God does not want to give us anything. At this point she weeps.

Jacob. O precious personage, O noblewoman, O my noble person. That’s enough weeping and tears. May you not scatter down your precious tears. Perhaps it is the deity’s will, perhaps he will grant you your child, perhaps your consolation will come from heaven.

We see also the expected use of metaphorical doublets or diphrases such as that for sustenance (“in Cochcayotl in neuhcayotl” [59v and passim]) and the presence of common idioms like those for giving thanks (“Otechmocnelili O çencà otla-cāuhqui in iyolotzin” [59v and passim]). There is a greater formality in the Nahuatl that is not obvious at first glance; Alva adds the title saint in many places where it is lacking (especially with regard to Joachim) and, following Nahua polite usage, he cuts down drastically on Lope’s use of people’s names in direct address (almost all instances in the Nahuatl are peer-to-peer and social superior-to-social inferior).

This heightened decorum is accompanied by the use of indirectness, extension and inversion of the kind so well illustrated and explained in Karttunen and Lockhart’s edition of the Bancroft Dialogues. There are a number of examples which I will highlight by including the Spanish to which Alva was reacting. It makes the distance between Spanish and Nahuatl verbal proprieties even clearer. For ease of presentation I include Louise’s translation only, except for the end where I include the Nahuatl in order to make my point more clearly.

The differences begin with the very first meeting in the play of Anne and Joachim. At this point they are still childless. The Spanish version has “Ioa. Ana mia. / An. Mi Ioachin.” (238v), which Alva renders as “Joachim. O noblewoman,
O my precious Anne. / Anne. O my son, O my child.” (59r).\(^5\) Shortly thereafter Joachim again addresses Anne: “Ioa. Ana corona dichosa / de mi cabeça Ana santa / ramo de tan alta planta, / mi dulce y grande esposa.” (238v) which Alva gives as “Joachim. O mistress, O noblewoman, O my precious spouse, you are my jewel, you are my jade.” (59r). Near the end of the first act the two meet after having found out that they will be getting the child they have both desired. Lope’s rendition of this joyful encounter is brief: “An. Ya cumple Dios mi desseo / dulce esposo. Io. Esposa amada. \ An. mi Ioachin. Ioa. Ana querida.” (244v). Alva is more expansive: “Anne. O my precious spouse, the heart of the master, our lord, has been generous, for he has now shown us favor. / Joachim. O noblewoman, O my spouse. / Anne. O my precious youth, O my child, O my son.” (67r–v).\(^6\)

Anne has two more occasions to address her husband in traditional Nahua fashion in that part of the second act which Alva translated. For the first Lope writes “Ana. Dulce esposo.” (246r) and for the second “An. Esposo mio.” (247r) which Alva renders as “Saint Anne. O precious personage.” (69v) and “Anne. O precious personage, O my son.” (70v), respectively. The last example is the most striking and also occurs in the second act. Raquela informs Joachim of Joseph’s arrival: “Ra. Aqui ha entrado tu sobrino.” (246v). In Nahua terms this is a very low-status servant, a mere commoner addressing a member of the high nobility, yet they are on very familiar and affectionate terms, so Alva renders this as “Tlacatl notelpotzin ca ohuala in momatzin” (69v), i.e., “O master, O my son, your nephew has come.”

Concerning the relationship between the Spanish and the Nahuatl texts, we are trying to be very careful about making assumptions because even the most expert opinions can lead to false starts. One of the most accomplished nahuatlatoque of colonial Mexico, the Franciscan fray Juan Bautista, published a sermonary in 1606. He unequivocally states in his prologue that regarding Nahuatl “a line of the Spanish or Latin language can hardly be translated into it that would not be doubled” (See Sell 1993, p. 162). He was assisted in all his numerous publications by the Nahua teacher and Latinist, Agustín de la Fuente, who not only proofread the Nahuatl in Bautista’s works but literally was the typesetter for the sermonary. In addition the team of Bautista/de la Fuente prepared but never published “tres libros de Comedias” (ibid., 143). There is a very strong possibility that several of the plays appearing in volume one of *Nahuatl Theater* were among those three volumes. Hence this gifted duo of translators was not only well experienced in actively moving between Latin, Spanish, and Nahuatl texts, it was also very familiar with Nahuatl drama. Nonetheless, Bautista’s observation applies only in part: Alva did expand on some parts of Lope’s text, but in some rather longish sections he also condensed, and rather considerably.

On the matter of Alva’s translation preferences, I have been struck by a small but persistent difference between the stage directions in the plays of the first two

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\(^5\)The slashes in the Spanish delineate versified lines whose order and length cannot be altered without changing Lope’s original intent, while those in the English translation serve only to differentiate one speaker from another.

\(^6\)Alva did indeed miss or ignore the last bit, i.e., “Ioa. Ana querida.”
volumes. The composers/copyists of the first volume often use Nahuatl *oncan* “there” in a temporal rather than locative sense, i.e., “at that moment in time” which we render as “at that point” something happens (a door is opened or closed, someone leaves or enters, a character commences speaking or goes silent, and so on). Alva never uses *oncan*. Instead he uses *nican*, “here,” in a similar fashion, i.e., as meaning “at this moment in time” which we translate as “At this point (something happens).” The accumulation of such subtleties goes far toward making an author’s style individual and identifiable.

I move now to the rest of our Nahuatl Theater project. Volume three will include Nahuatl pieces about the Virgin of Guadalupe, and volume four will include everything that didn’t fit into the first three installments. Stafford Poole, C. M., noted expert on the history of the Tepeyacac apparitions, is our coeditor for the third volume. Stafford has noticed that the Guadalupan plays include dialogue taken directly from the published account of 1649 (see Sousa et al. 1998). This establishes definitively that these apparition pieces postdate the first securely dated and attributed Nahuatl version.

Elizabeth R. Wright joins us again as coeditor on volume four. We plan to include a transcription and updated translation of Louise’s “Holy Wednesday.” There will also be some completely new material. Mark Morris brought to our attention that a previously unknown Passion play in Nahuatl had been discovered in a Tlaxcalan archive. Through further inquiry we discovered that a student of Luis Reyes García was working on a transcription and translation of the piece, with commentary, for his *tesis*. Through Richard Trexler’s good offices Louise got the email address of this student, Raúl Macuil Martínez, and Raúl is now on board for volume four. This is an invaluable addition to our Nahuatl Theater project.

To close my remarks on this project, here is the last paragraph of our introduction to volume one:

None of the above [accomplishments] would be possible without the difficult and groundbreaking work done by our predecessors, first the Nahua and priests who wrote the plays and later those who copied, rearranged, and commented upon them. Priest-grammarians of the later colonial period would look back—with much justification—at the first half of the colony as a golden age of Nahuatl written expression. No subsequent period could hope to equal the time when the most original, germinal, and innovative texts (including the plays) were created, but the present could be considered another kind of golden age, one in which a great deal of previous lore and knowledge has been reclaimed for future generations, native and non-native alike. If the period up to circa 1650 was the “Golden Age of Production” of Nahuatl texts, the time from circa 1970 to the present could be considered the “Golden Age of Recovery” of that rich and varied corpus. That such is possible for Nahuatl plays is due above all to Fernando Horcasitas whose *El teatro náhuatl* (1974) was so many years ahead of its time. Truly we stand on the shoulders of giants.

I conclude my paper with my own perspective on the state of Nahuatl studies
and prospects for future work. My first point is that there have been developments in other fields from which we can learn and which can support and extend our work. For example, it seems to me that anyone working in our field should have read Paul Saenger’s *Space Between Words: The Origins of Silent Reading* (1997) even though it was published as part of the “Reading Medieval Culture” series. In a more direct way, one can often find valuable outside collaborators on specific topics if one cares to look for them. While working with Fritz on our critical edition of Alva’s confessional manual, it seemed a given to me that we should and would find an expert on the Spanish side. Our search was very brief because Fritz was thinking along these lines too and had already made a pick. Lu Ann Homza not only wrote a fine essay on “The European Link to Mexican Penance: The Literary Antecedents to Alva’s Confessionario,” but also later recommended to Louise and me an expert on early Spanish theater for *Nahuatl Theater*. Elizabeth R. Wright has proven again that parallel developments in another field mesh well with ours. I do not say “related” because an almost infinite number of fields would be in some way related to our project.

My second point is directed specifically at those working on early Nahuatl and Nahua. There is an old saying: it’s not the size of the dog in the fight, it’s the size of the fight in the dog. With the appearance of Jim’s *Nahuatl as Written* and his critical edition of Carochi we need to stop acting as if Nahuatl Studies is a scrappy little subfield in early Latin American history. It is time to recognize the big gains that have already been made—and are still being made—in this very active area of study. We have begun doing this with *Nahuatl Theater*. Elizabeth has been giving presentations to her peers and other interested parties on Spanish plays in Nahuatl translation. The extremely warm response she has received has exceeded even my high expectations and bodes well for the reception and use of our four-volume series.

With the right projects, teams, and approaches I think this success can be duplicated. Even if our results do not fully measure up to our intentions—as with Fernando Horcasitas’s memorable *El teatro náhuatl*—they can have a large impact on the future. Ambitious thoughts and actions are the key.

Bibliography


