

Melodramatic Television Serials: Mythical Narratives for Education

During the past decade or so, television audiences have expanded tremendously in such countries as China, India, Egypt, Indonesia and others. For instance, during the 1980s television sets increased by about 30 times in the People's Republic of China and by about 15 times in India. Television now reaches an estimated audience of 700 million of China's 1.2 billion people and 250 million of India's 850 million people.

National governments of such Third World countries as China and India, where television broadcasting is state-controlled, often feel obligated to broadcast educational-development programs (on such topics as agriculture, nutrition, family planning, hygiene and others). Such educational television programs usually require a heavy investment, are perceived by most audiences as 'dull', generally receive very low audience attention, and are unpopular with commercial advertisers. In the same countries, however, entertainment programs like feature films, comedies, serials (both imported and domestic) and game shows obtain spectacularly high audience ratings, are perceived by audiences as 'interesting' and are highly popular with commercial sponsors. Quite often television's entertainment and profit potential eclipses its educational-development potential. National governments of both industrialized and Third World countries worry about the dominance of entertainment television, which invariably drives away educational television.

In recent years, broadcasters of certain countries have realized that entertainment and educational television might, after all, *not* be at odds with one another. In fact, several countries now consciously use such entertainment formats as television serials, rock music videos and game shows to convey educational-development messages to audiences. More than any other entertainment format, the melodramatic television serial is being employed to educate viewers on topics such as gender inequality, sexual responsibility, family planning, and nutrition (Singhal and Rogers, 1988; Lozano, in press).

In the present paper we focus on the use of the melodramatic television serial as an instrument of education. We take a cultural perspective in investigating the melodramatic television serial as a form of mass entertainment and education. The mythical nature of televisual melodrama is analyzed and the role of myth in pedagogy is discussed. We present the Mexican experience with entertainment-education television melodramas, making a strong case for using mythical narratives for educational-developmental purposes.

The melodramatic serial as a mythical narrative

The melodramatic serial embodies several characteristics of a mythical narrative. A mythical narrative is one that expresses, recreates and gives voice to a *myth*. A *myth* is a symbolic

construct that articulates a community's understanding of the world, serving various explanatory and interpretive functions (Campbell, 1968; Hawkes, 1977)¹. A myth is a story which *transcends* any of its particular versions; in other words it is a story matrix from which different narrations can be generated (Hawkes, 1977, p. 43; Levy-Strauss, 1972). The myth consists 'of all of its versions and remains the 'same regardless of expressive variations (Levy-Strauss, 1972, p. 217). Here in the present section we argue that melodramatic serials have a close structural correspondence with mythical narratives.

Characteristics of Melodramatic Serials

Melodramatic serials are a highly popular televisual genre in the U.S. (where they are commonly referred to as soap operas), Latin America (where they are commonly referred to as *telenovelas*, literally television novels), and in various other countries (Allen, 1985; Frey-Vor, 1990a, 1990b). While American soap operas and Latin American *telenovelas* share several common elements, they have divergent histories and narrative styles. Even within Latin America, *telenovelas* differ considerably from one country to another. For instance, Colombian *telenovelas* started as literary adaptations of classic texts (instead of television translations of radio melodramas as was the case in other Latin American countries). Today Colombian *telenovelas* are a distinct narrative form, written specially for television by popular writers such as Martha Bossio, Alvarez-Gardeazábal or García Marquez (Martín-Barbero, 1987b). Given these differences, we use the more general term of 'melodramatic serial' in referring to soap operas and *telenovelas*. We focus on the commonalities of textual construction that exist in soap operas and *telenovelas*, in spite of their difference on the expressive and semantic levels.²

Critical studies reveal that soap operas and *telenovelas* are similar in several structural and aesthetic dimensions: they share the qualities of orality, repetitiousness, historicity, intimate stance, and caricaturesque plots³. These qualities emanate from two characteristics of this genre: (1) the serial format, and (2) the melodramatic content (Lozano, 1990a).

Historicity

In contrast to classic narrative formats, a serial is not required to end (Newcomb in Cassata and Skill, 1983). Whereas a *series* is composed of independent episodes enacted in static time (characters do not change over time, grow older, or change their status), the *serial*, on the other hand, 'appeals to a historical sense of time. Not only are a serial's episodes sequential, but time also lapses between episodes. The serial 'constructs the feeling that the lives of the characters go on during our absence' (Ang, 1985, pp. 52-53). The 'future' in the fictional world of the serial is constructed as being as open and uncertain as it is in the 'real' world. But this 'openness' of possible actions and events highly contrasts within the 'fixed', repetitive, and redundant *structure* of the action. Serials tend to be open at a *syntagmatic* level (the horizontal combination of stories), yet closed at a *paradigmatic* level (the vertical arrangement of choices and structural alternatives). This feature is especially true in the case of soap operas, which

often last indefinitely. While the possible combination of actions is unlimited in melodramatic serials (as are the number of possible combinations of letters in a language), the structural mechanism is parsimonious and stable (as are the number of letters which one can *choose* from in a language).⁴

A serial often questions the limits between fiction and reality, given its parallel unfolding of time, its preservation of memory, its continuous 'borrowing' of topics from daily news, and its focus on family affairs and interactions. Typically, the serial is perceived by its audiences as being 'realistic'. Such realism is defined in terms of the *treatment* of events, rather than on the empirical plausibility of the event. Events that one could call 'impossible' are treated within the *familiar* context of domestic life and relationships. Once the 'impossible' event is used as an occasion for domestic struggle, it becomes familiar, recognizable and *realistic*. What soap opera audiences call 'realistic' is not the content of the drama, but is a form of coding, selecting, and arranging the real.

Intimacy

Melodramatic serials emphasize dialogue, continuous interpersonal conflicts, family struggles, and a domestic stage that is at the center of all battles. Dialogic interaction takes precedence over 'grand events', public battlefields and climactic resolutions. By depicting intimate personal relationships, melodramatic serials can address certain social issues as no other narrative can. For instance, the spectre of AIDS is not that of '100 000 dead and more than one million affected but of Geoffrey who is dying of AIDS, who loves Susan, and whose suffering is also the suffering of his family. The 'victim' is not a famous person or a statistical number; he/she has a personal history, circumstances and weaknesses which the audiences know well. Since the victim has a face and an identity, the melodrama breeds intimacy between characters and the audiences (*Lozano*, in press).

Audience engagement

The narrative of a melodramatic serial continues even after a televised episode ends. Like gossip, its story continues through the continuous interpretation, articulation, and appropriation of its multiple 'witnesses'. The serial becomes a part of the public domain, behaving like a malleable substance. Often the future story plots are grounded on audience feedback. Scriptwriters constantly hear from audiences about what plots and storylines to depict (*Fiske*, 1987)⁵. Audiences often welcome the traits of a serial's heroes and heroines, suggest solutions, cheer or boo the shows, praise their realism or, in its absence, criticize them for falling short of audience expectations.

We conclude that melodramatic serials have certain qualities of mythical narratives.

- 1 The melodramatic serial is a narrative which is very flexible syntagmatically, and highly structured paradigmatically. It, therefore, can generate an unlimited amount of variations on a given 'theme' without losing its fundamental identity (*Lozano*, 1990a).

- 2 The melodramatic serial has a sense of historicity in that it follows, from an intimate and daily perspective, the life of a fictional community.
- 3 The melodramatic serial is a dialogic creation constructed with the continuous intervention and interpellation of the audiences. The serial, therefore, is closer to depicting a collective rather than an authorial imagination.
- 4 The melodramatic serial is extended, re-created, and reenacted in public gossip, that is, through oral and communal sense-making (Lozano, in press).⁶

The above characteristics make the melodramatic serial a *mythical narrative*, in the anthropological sense defined by *Levy-Strauss*. Mythologies perform a central function in maintaining social structure (Campbell, 1968, 1972). Mythologies resist or legitimize new social patterns, allowing for cohesion against the menacing-‘other’ (new, strange, alien and sinister) and for cooperation with the complementary-‘other’ (new, fresh and positive) (Lozano, in press). So what role can mythical narratives (such as melodramatic serials) play in maintaining or altering deep-rooted social structures?

Mythical Narrative as Pedagogy

The dual force of the televisual melodramatic serial as a (mythical) storyteller and as an (mass) entertainer endows it with a special ability to provide a ground for educational learning. Such learning can inhibit or facilitate social change; that is, it could reaffirm traditional social structures, or legitimize social change. As myth, a melodramatic serial can operate as ideology or as pedagogy (Lozano, in press). As ideology, a melodramatic serial could impede enlightenment and progress. As pedagogy, it could provide a *playful* ground, a fertile territory in which re-creation is welcomed, and reflection expected. Also, based on the cultural mediations through which they are read, mythic narratives can function as forms of social resistance or adaptation.

After conducting an ethnographic study of Peruvian families, *Alfaro-Moreno* (1988) concluded that ‘the para-social interaction with characters and contents of the telenovela helps viewers to develop their social identities.’⁷ Para-social interaction was especially significant among ‘members of lower class families who had recently migrated to the city and whom the telenovelas helped to develop an urban mentality and identity’ (Alfaro-Moreno in Frey-Vor, 1990a, p. 15. Emphasis added).

Educational and collective social learning (a primary purpose of development programs) represents a struggle between the safety of the known and the possibilities of the unknown; between the limitations of staying and the risks of changing (Scuder & Mickunas, 1986). Before deciding to change, one considers options, dramatizes choices, contemplates the actual and plays with the virtual. Storytelling provides a way to *recreate* reality through symbolic realization and appreciation of vital options (Lozano, in press).⁸

It is not by chance that the most ancestral form of human entertainment, storytelling, occupies as fundamental a place as cosmologies and ontologies of the world. Narratives, especially those embedded in myth, fulfill a fundamental epistemic task (Lozano, in press). If one can integrate the ‘new’ into one’s world, and relate to the ‘new’ through the density of the

past (i.e., memory) and the flexibility of the future (i.e., projection), then the new can *make sense*. To understand and *learn*, one requires 'logos' (reasoning) and *mythos* (storytelling).⁹

While *logos* is the explanatory dimension, *mythos* is the interpretive dimension, which is cultural, symbolic and situated. Logos and *mythos* are fundamental to any learning process, for their epistemic functions simultaneously provide for the new (in the form of technique and knowledge) and for the ground (as a cultural and symbolic foundation). Even though the mythological narrative has null value as *instruction* (in terms of informational, 'how-to' reasoning), it is *pedagogical* (Lozano, in press).¹⁰ The myth provides the ground, the support, the language, and the symbolic system in which instruction can make sense and be appropriated. If *mythos* addresses "the ways of the people," both the archaic and the daily, one should study the mythical dimension not only to understand the symbolic and cultural grounds of a community, but also to learn how societal structures can adapt and change.

It is not by condemning the ancestral beliefs of a community (and the stories on which it relies) that one gives the community room for change. Positive social change is more likely if the importance of these ancestral beliefs is recognized and understood. Pedagogy and instruction should be provided in a way that options are opened, alternatives explored and the autonomy of the community, in deciding its own ways, is preserved.

So the televisual melodramatic serial, as a mythical narrative, is endowed with a special quality to instruct and educate. However, barring a few exceptions, rarely has this unique quality of the melodramatic serial been consciously utilized to educate viewers about development issues. One use of the melodramatic serial for pedagogical purposes occurred in Mexico during the 1970s and 1980s.

Sabido's Pedagogic Television Serials

The concept of utilizing melodramatic serials for pedagogic purposes originated in 1975 in *Televisa*, the Mexican commercial television network. Between 1975 and 1982, *Televisa's Miguel Sabido*, a writer-producer-director at *Televisa* produced seven highly popular melodramatic serials which conveyed such educational-development themes, as gender equality, sexual responsibility and literacy (*Televisa Institute of Communication Research*, 1981). Previously, between 1967 and 1970, *Sabido* had produced four highly popular historical-cultural television serials which promoted the rich cultural heritage of Mexico (*Table 1*). Each of *Sabido's* melodramatic serials was created to educate viewers about dealing with somewhat urgent social problems.

Conception

The Mexican television serials capitalized on a lesson learned accidentally from a 1969 Peruvian telenovela, '*Simplemente María*'. This serial enacted the classic *Cinderella*-type rags-to-riches folk story of a migrant girl, *María*, who succeeds in achieving socio-economic status because of her sewing skills with a Singer sewing machine. *María*, a rural-urban migrant to Lima, was depicted in the television serial as hardworking, idealistic and able to succeed

Table 1: Miguel Sabido's Pedagogical Melodramatic Television Serials in Mexico

Year	Title	Theme
1. 1967	'La Tormenta' (‘The Storm’)	The French Invasion of Mexico
2. 1968	'Los Caudillos' (‘The Leaders’)	The Mexican Struggle for independence
3. 1969	'La Constitución' (‘The Constitution’)	Principles underlying the drafting of Mexico's constitution
4. 1970	'El Carruaje' (‘The Carriage’)	Story of Benito Juarez, a hero of Mexico's freedom struggle
5. 1975-1976	'Ven Conmigo' 'Come with me'	Adult education
6. 1977-1978	'Acompáñame' 'Come along with me'	Family planning
7. 1979-1980	'Vamos Juntos' 'When we are together'	Responsible parenthood
8. 1980	'El Combate' 'The Battle'	Adult education and literacy
9. 1980-1981	'Canimemos' 'Let's walk together'	Sexual responsibility among teenagers
10. 1981	'Nosotros las Mujeres' 'We the women'	Status of women
11. 1981-1982	'Por Amor' 'For love'	Family planning

Source: Based in part on *Televisa's Institute for Communication Research* (1981a).

socially by personal effort (for instance, María asked her employers for free time in the evening to enroll in adult literacy classes). This *telenovela* depicted some of the problems faced by migrants to urban areas, and, like most *telenovelas*, addressed issues such as the social situation of low-income migrant women, inter-class conflict and intermarriage between the urban-rich and the migrant-poor.

Wherever '*Simplemente María*' was broadcast (it was exported to several Latin American countries), young maids showed a sudden interest in learning how to sew, and requested time in the evenings to participate in adult literacy classes. Sales of Singer sewing machines boomed in Latin America. '*Simplemente María*' demonstrated that highly popular *telenovelas* could convey educational-development messages and contribute to foster social change.

Inspired by the audience and educational success of '*Simplemente María*', *Televisa's Sabido* began to design pedagogic melodramatic serials in Mexico in the mid-1970s. Sabido's melodramatic serials were a highly unusual type of television program, in that their designs were based on dramatic, social-psychological and human communication theories (*Televisa's Institute of Communication Research*, 1981; Nariman, 1990; Singhal and Rogers, 1989; Singhal,

1990). For instance, *Sabido* drew heavily upon *Bentley's* (1967) dramatic theory, which investigates the melodramatic nature and audience appeal of television serials, and upon *Bandura's* (1977) social learning theory, a social-psychological theory which explains how audiences can learn a repertoire of social attitudes and new behaviors from televised role models. Instruction in *Sabido's* serials was communicated not through abstract concepts, but through narratives, as is usually the case with myths.

Sabido views modern-day television celebrities and popular idols (heros and heroines) as purveyors of myths. The characters in his melodramatic serials are based on Jung's (1958; 1959) theory of the collective unconscious and archetypes. Archetypes are 'forms or images of a collective nature which occur practically all over the earth as constituents of myth and at the same time as autochthonous, individual products of unconscious origin' (*Jung*, 1958, p. 88). Archetypes exist 'independently of mediation in each individual' and comprise, therefore, an 'identity of experience' common to humankind (*Jung*, 1958, p. 130). Manifest through symbols, prototypes and myths, an archetype is 'the key to the understanding and use of mythological images' (*Campbell*, 1968, p. 19). For instance, the archetypal hero is represented in the mythical images of the Warrior, the Lover, the Emperor, the Tyrant, the World Redeemer and the Saint (*Campbell*, 1968, pp. 315-316). Archetypal figures, such as the Mother or the Virgin, attract, convince, fascinate and embody certain patterns of behavior (*Sabido*, 1980). Archetypes are multi-dimensional: – they are high and low, negative and positive, light and dark – and so they point to the multiplicity and ambiguity of the human condition.

In essence, *Sabido's* pedagogic serials served as purveyors of myth, providing meaningful, coherent and entertaining instruction to its audiences. *What is most intriguing about Sabido and his pedagogic serials is (1) his understanding of the mythical nature of the melodramatic serial, and (2) his attempts at re-enacting myth in his serials, based on his understanding of dramatic, social-psychological, and human communication theories.*

Implementation

Sabido's first pedagogic melodramatic serial was aired on Mexican television during 1975-76. The purpose of this serial, '*Ven Conmigo*' ('Come With Me') was to educate viewers about the importance of literacy, and to encourage them to enroll in adult literacy classes (*Galindo*, 1986). '*Ven Conmigo*' achieved high audience ratings (33 percent) and was one influence leading to the enrollment of about one million illiterates in adult education classes, an increase of 63 percent over the previous year. The enrollment in adult literacy classes increased by only 2.5 percent the following year, when '*Ven Conmigo*' was no longer broadcast (*Galindo*, 1986). Given those encouraging results from '*Ven Conmigo*', *Sabido* created another highly popular melodramatic serial, '*Acompáñame*' ('Accompany Me') in Mexico during 1977-78 (*Rogers and Antola*, 1985). '*Acompáñame's*' pedagogic aim was to promote family planning among Mexicans. This television serial, along with other factors, convinced half a million Mexicans to visit government family planning health clinics in order to obtain advice about contraceptives, an increase of 32 percent over the previous year (*Televisa's Institute of Communication Research*, 1981). Five other pedagogic melodramatic serials followed '*Ven Conmigo*' and '*Acompáñame*'

in Mexico each conveying educational-development messages, and each a resounding audience success (see *Table 1*).

The idea of *Sabido's* pedagogic melodramatic serials was adapted in *India* during 1984-85, when a highly popular serial, '*Hum Log*' ('We People') conveyed such educational-development messages as gender equality, family harmony, family planning and national integration (Singhal, 1990; Singhal and Rogers, 1988; 1989). Based on *Sabido's* methodology, *Kenya* created a highly popular, pedagogic television serial, '*Tushauriane*' ('Let's Discuss') and radio serial, '*Ushikwapo Shikimana*' ('When Given Advice, Take It'), both of which carried messages about family planning. *Sabido's* idea of utilizing highly popular entertainment formats for pedagogical purposes has been variously reinvented in several countries. For instance, *Sabido's* work inspired a highly successful rock music campaign in *Latin America* to promote sexual responsibility (Kincaid, Jara, Coleman and Segura, 1988).

Conclusions

In recent years, broadcasters in several countries have begun to discover that the entertainment and educational functions of television might not be at odds with one another. Popular television programs, like melodramatic serials, have the potential to entertain *and* educate.

Melodramatic television serials embody several characteristics of mythical narratives: (1) They are closed at a structural level, but open, and of unlimited variation in their events and actions; (2) they have a sense of historicity, that is, they follow the unfolding life of a community in a way that makes it *parallel* to the lives of the audience; (3) they enact a collective imagination through the continuous intervention and interpellation of the audience; and (4) they are re-created and re-enacted in public gossip, through oral and communal sense-making.

The television melodramatic serial, as a mythical storyteller and as a mass entertainer, is endowed with a special ability to provide educational learning. The myth provides the ground, the support, the language, the characters and the symbolic system in which instruction can make sense.

However, barring *Sabido's* melodramatic serials in Mexico, this unique quality of the melodramatic serial has been rarely utilized (at least consciously) to educate viewers about development issues. *Sabido's* work is unique at least in two respects: (1) *Sabido's* understanding, as a creative writer-producer-director, of the mythical nature of the melodramatic serial, and (2) his various attempts at re-enacting myth in his serials, based on dramatic, social-psychological and human communication theories.

Despite the promise of melodramatic serials in fostering education and development, various ethical and cultural problems exist (Brown and Singhal, 1990). For instance, *who is to determine what is right for whom?* It is dangerous to assume that the producers of melodramatic serials know better than the audiences what is good for the latter. Moreover, the line separating propaganda and promotion (of values, behaviors, knowledge) is a thin one when the organization that does the former also does the latter. Entertainment programs that explicitly transmit certain messages to achieve specific viewer reactions could potentially be more authoritarian than existing popular programs with no explicit educational purpose. If mythical

narratives manifest a collective imagination, then to *author* a myth is a contradiction in terms; a denial of the myth's communal nature. Myths are not the result of explicit intentionality (one cannot say: 'let us construct a myth'). When myths are consciously constructed they become *ideology*, manipulatory imagery (Lozano, in press). To what extent, then, is it legitimate to call pedagogic a discourse that is constructed with the conscious intention of being mythical or archetypal? Paradoxically, the willingness to educate can narrow the pedagogic potential of a program, if instead of offering possibilities it offers prescriptions. How is this undertaking different from advertising, publicity, or propaganda?

Recreating Mythical Narratives for Education

Programs for fostering social change should be cultural products which are able to express the aesthetics, dreams and mythological constructs of the community in which they are being implemented (*Sabido* tries to achieve this in a limited way). The melodramatic serial could potentially then play an important role in fostering social change in a community. But, like any mythical construction, it will be required to make sense of a mythology, a system of reference that backs it and legitimates it. Otherwise, the serial will appear to be 'just' a myth, a fairy tale, a legend. For the people who follow it, the myth is not a legend, but a way of understanding the world. *So how should mythical narratives for education be recreated?* Promote a communal discussion on the contents of the melodramatic serial to generate an appropriation and understanding of the serial's diverse contents. Promote the creation of communal narratives which express the community's life, pleasures, aesthetics, and cultural needs. A third recommendation in recreating a mythical narrative is to pay as much attention to the content of the melodramatic serial as to its structural characteristics, that is, its expressive, narrative, semantic and rhetorical levels (Lozano, in press).

Entertainment is not in itself emancipatory or reactionary. It can be 'sedative' (because of its power of relaxation) but also an energizer (because of its power of convocation, recreation and play). The entertainment appeal of mass culture is not reduced (or exhausted) in the capitalist logic of selling products (*Martín-Barbero*, 1988). The various modes of consuming mass-mediated forms suggest that the relationship between mass entertainment and development is more complex than their contradictory *purposes* would suggest. This plurality of consumption carries both 'good' and 'bad' news (Lozano, in press).

First, good or bad intentions do not imply positive or negative outcomes. For example, if the explicit purpose of a televisual program is the sexual education of the community, there is no guarantee that the program will accomplish its purpose (Lozano, in press). In spite of best intentions, a televisual program's components such as its language, its preferred 'metaphors', and/or its aesthetic sensibility can tell audiences the program is 'funny but unreal', 'boring', 'close-minded', or 'not for me'. On the other hand, a program might not have an explicit educative purpose and still be a 'de facto' pedagogy (*Estudios Sobre las Culturas Contemporáneas*, 1988; Lozano, in press).

Second, any televisual program (or text) is read and understood within a context, that is, a network of other programs, other texts, other discourses. A televisual program makes sense through interconnection with other cultural forms and within the practices of everyday life

(Silverstone, 1989; Lozano, 1991). The same televisual program can elicit different responses from peoples whose cultural experiences and aesthetic sensibilities differ. The producer of messages (the pedagogue or the entertainer) is never in total control of the product and can never fully predict its consequences.¹¹ But a text's polisemy does not exclude it from being enjoyed equally by peoples who might read it differently.

The quest for social change and education does not only require information but also imagination, flexibility and respect for the regional. If entertainment is distraction and obliviousness, it is also recreation of the daily and habitual; a form of symbolic transformation. And what else, one may ask, is development but recreation and transformation of one's own reality?

Notes

- 1 Myths and mythology function at four levels: (1) 'to reconcile waking consciousness to the mystery of the universe as *it is*' (transcendent/immanent ground); (2) 'to render an interpretive total image of the universe, as known to contemporary consciousness' (cosmological); (3) 'to enforce a moral order' (sociological), and (4) to unfold the individual in integrity with himself, his culture, the universe, and 'that mystery which is both beyond and within himself and all things' (pedagogical) (Campbell, 1968, pp. 4-6; 1988, p. 9).
- 2 While Latin American scholars have focused on *telenovelas* as an expression of popular motives and aesthetics (Martín-Barbero, 1987a; 1987b; 1988; *Estudios sobre las Culturas Contemporáneas*), Anglo-American scholars have focused on soap operas as an expression of feminine subjectivity (Brown, 1987; Feuer, 1987; Flitterman, 1987; Kaplan, 1987). That is, soap operas emphasize (1) relationships over action, (2) plateau over resolution, (3) multiple perspectives over linear development, and (4) intimate stances over grand panoramas. Soap operas have been studied from critical perspectives such as British Cultural Studies (Dyer, Geraghty, Jordan, Lovell, Paterson & Stewart, 1981); Feminist Criticism (Modlesky, 1982; Kaplan, 1987); Psychoanalytic Criticism (Flitterman, 1987); Genre Studies (Feuer, 1987); and Reader-oriented Criticism (Allen, 1985). *Telenovelas* have been studied from ethnographic, semiotic, and critical approaches (*Estudios sobre las culturas contemporáneas*, 1988). For a comprehensive review of studies on soap operas and *telenovelas*, see Frey-Vor, 1990a; 1990b. See also, Allen, 1987; Fiske, 1987; Hobson, 1982; Kaplan, 1983.
- 4 In this sense, soap operas are structurally arranged as a mythic narrative. A myth can be told in an unlimited number of versions and still remain the same myth for its essential characteristics do not reside in the style of storytelling or the surface content, but in the structure that subtends the actions (Levy-Strauss, 1972).
- 5 Soap opera magazines frequently give a public status to the fans' creative activity by publishing polls and letter columns. This 'makes the solitary imaginative activity of the fans into a collective public one, helping to construct a sense of the community of the viewers' (Fiske, 1987, p. 123).
- 6 For an analysis of the functions of gossip and oral culture in the reading of soap operas, see Fiske, 1987, pp. 77-80.
- 7 Parasocial interaction refers to the seemingly face-to-face interpersonal relationships between a television viewer and a television performer (Horton and Wohl, 1956; Singhal, 1990).
- 8 The relationship between aesthetic pleasure, entertainment and knowledge have been pointed out by cultural studies such as those of Bakhtin, 1968, 1981; Eco, 1977; Fiske, 1987; and Martín-Barbero, 1987a.
- 9 The Greek word *mythos* refers to the recreation of the 'ways of the people; of a community's world' (Walter Otto in Mickunas, 1982). 'Mythos' means, literally, to speak, and by extension, to express. It encompasses the multiple and diverse ways by which a culture expresses itself (Mickunas, 1973;

- 1982). The myth as narrative is not but one of the expressions of 'mythos', the ways of the people (Lozano, in press).
- 10 One of the central functions of mythology is the pedagogic enlightenment. The Iliad, for example, was considered "Paideia" by the Greeks, that is, a pedagogic narrative in which the youth learned the values, ideals, and ethics of their culture (Jaeger, 1945).
 - 11 If mass audiences are not uncritical or homogeneous receivers of information, a program for development might provoke alternative, negotiated or oppositional readings as any other program does (Fiske, 1987). The program for development, therefore, might prove to be reactionary instead of emancipatory.

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Summary – Zusammenfassung

This paper questions the dichotomy between entertainment and educational television and takes a cultural perspective in investigating the televisual melodramatic serial as a form of

mass entertainment and education. The mythical nature of the melodramatic serial is analyzed, and the role of myth in pedagogy is discussed. We present the Mexican experience with entertainment-education television melodramas making a strong case for using mythical narratives for educational-development purposes.

Dieser Beitrag behandelt den Unterschied zwischen Fernsehen als einer Form der Unterhaltung und als einer Form von Lernen/Bildung. Das melodramatische Fernseh-Serial als eine Form der Massenunterhaltung und des Lernens wird anhand einer kulturellen Perspektive untersucht. Die mythischen Eigenschaften des melodramatischen Serials werden analysiert und die Rolle der Mythe in der Pädagogik besprochen. Die Autoren legen damit eine Fallstudie über ihre mexikanischen Erfahrungen mit Unterhaltungs-/Bildungs-Fernsehmelodramen an, bei denen mythische Stoffe und Erzählungen innerhalb pädagogischer Bestrebungen und Lernziele angewendet werden.

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