

## Let's Get Ready to Rumba: Wrestling with Stereotypes in Kristoffer Díaz's *The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity*

by Kimberly Ramírez

*The views and opinions expressed in the following do not represent the views of THE Wrestling. In fact, on behalf of THE Wrestling, I would like to condemn the comments to which you are, unfortunately, about to be subjected (Díaz 28).\**

-from *The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity*

Drawing millions of live and television spectators each week, televised professional wrestling supplies one of the widest arenas for the production of cultural stereotypes.<sup>1</sup> This popular sports genre has been epitomized as "THE Wrestling" (avoiding direct citation of any trademark organization) in Kristoffer Díaz's play, *The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity*—a finalist for the 2010 Pulitzer Prize for Drama, now widely produced around the country and published by Samuel French. *Chad Deity*'s action accommodates a few matches in the ring, but the plot's essential structure depends on a series of presentational and revelatory monologues delivered by a former childhood wrestling fanatic turned professional wrestler, Macedonio Guerra. It is immediately evident from the play's prologue, which offers an informal history and analysis of wrestling action figure toys, that wrestling—from the minds of impressionable children to the bodies of trained athletic adults—is intensely and fundamentally theatrical.

Wrestling's transplantation from the ring to the formal theatrical stage underscores that this internationally broadcast U.S. pseudo-sport is *already* a performance. As Roland Barthes declares in his 1957 essay *The World of Wrestling*, "Wrestling is not a sport, it is a spectacle" (15). Fanatics know this. So why do viewers willingly implicate themselves as accomplices in worshipping phony warriors, cheering on pre-programmed poses for a fixed competition? Sociologist Thomas Henricks reasons that fans who understand the competition is "fake" still crave "the action" and want performers to "put on a show" that, however false, does indeed spotlight genuine athletic power (Henricks 185). "The scene is a melodrama," Henricks insists, "agents of good and evil in a simplified contest for some reward" (Henricks 181). His view reinforces Barthes's ultimate claim that "wrestlers remain gods because they are, for a few moments, the key which opens Nature, the pure gesture which separates Good from Evil, and unveils the form of a Justice which is at last intelligible" (Barthes 25). If "wrestlers remain gods" for the sake of staged simulations of justice, then the title character in *The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity* is aptly named. As a "deity," he is set in motion to uphold divine righteousness, to represent, through idolized flesh, the epitome of all that is honest, fair, and moral. Chad Deity throws dollar bills into the air when he appears in the arena, where he is welcomed by pyrotechnics. Wrestlers' entrances into the ring are hailed by varying

degrees of fanfare, in proportion to the star quality of the persona being introduced and what that persona signifies:

**EKO:** Chad Deity's elaborate entrance, by proxy, is America's elaborate entrance, ongoing, giving proof through the night that the flag is still there. Chad Deity's Elaborate Entrance defeats demons, and we feel like our demons deserve that defeat, and we feel, more importantly, that we can be the ones to defeat them. (Díaz 22)

"Demons" become personified by one-dimensional opponents scripted to challenge the moral fiber of America, and because Deity serves as a vehicle to render justice, we (spectators) fight vicariously through him to avenge the enemy.

The good versus evil polarity identified by Barthes, Henricks, and Díaz is hardly exaggerated; matches are arranged between "good guy" and "bad guy" and it is precisely this clear-cut binary that renders justice "intelligible." Portraying characters rather than competing as sportsman, pro wrestlers must insert themselves into the enduring themes and storylines of worldwide wrestling. And by "worldwide" of course, wrestling officials mean only the United States—which they most often erroneously refer to by invoking the name of an imagined territory—"America." Geographically challenged narratives often spin jingoistic, xenophobic scenarios packaged as patriotism.

Professional wrestling in the U.S. is not just a performance of carefully choreographed "powerbombs" and "superkicks," but of personas synthesized for the purpose of pitting hyper-deified "American" bodies against adversarial ethnic others. In *Chad Deity*, Díaz scripts the sort of conversation that must transpire between wrestlers and executives as they conceive plotlines. In the following scene, Chief executive Everett K. Olson (EKO) entertains a proposal from Nuyorican fall guy Macedonio Guerra (Mace) to hire a new underdog, Vigneshwar Paduar (VP):

**EKO:** Your boy, this, this kid, this—where is he from anyway?

**MACE:** Brooklyn.

**EKO:** No, I mean, he's brown, not like you, and that's not racist, so relax. What is he, Afghan? Oriental?

**MACE:** That's a rug. And a rug. But I don't tell my boss that. I tell him Vigneshwar Paduar is from India.

**EKO:** He's not a fundamentalist, is he? I think I might be able to sell a fundamentalist. (Díaz 22)

While EKO considers reducing Mace to a manager to facilitate a potential Muslim fundamentalist heel, the reigning world champion, Chad Deity, intercedes to help improvise a strategy to promote the pair:

**CHAD DEITY:** Make him Mexican... Mexican guy, hates America, hates freedom, comes here to steal away jobs, leech off services, make our good hard-earned American money and send it back to his little militant revolutionary comrades in Mexico. And he's got connections with Iran for the nukes and Kenya for the – what does Kenya have?

**EKO:** Socialism!

**CHAD DEITY:** –and those all connect him with Al-Qaeda and Hamas and The French for the destruction of the greatest country on Earth. And the Mexican enlists this great Kabuki warrior, trained in the deadly MMA -- Muslim Martial Arts -- where they believe you can murder a man with pressure points and prayer.

**EKO:** You gotta admit, the kid has that look.

**CHAD DEITY:** And the Mexican and the Middle Easterner come to the States and they want to bring us down from the inside—

**EKO:** So they figure the best way to do that is to start at the top with a major symbolic victory --

**CHAD DEITY:** so they come to THE Wrestling --

**EKO:** They come after Chad Deity --

**CHAD DEITY:** They come after the heart of America.

**MACE:** (*direct address*) I definitely don't tell them that there is no country named America. (Díaz 26-7)

While this behind-the-scenes improvisation may seem too parodic to be plausible, it does evince pro-wrestling's tendencies toward crafting pro- (good) and anti- (evil) American scenarios at the expense of cultural or geographical accuracy.

Though the *L.A. Times* characterizes *Deity* as “flamboyant satire” written by an “unabashed pop culture geek” (Rooney), it is sometimes difficult to distinguish Díaz's seemingly overblown characters with popular wrestling counterparts. Part executive officer and part ring announcer, EKO operates as an amalgam of Worldwide Wrestling Entertainment chairman Vince McMahon and WWE announcer Michael Buffer. Mace corresponds to countless professional wrestling personas that have been conceived in cooperation with Latino stereotypes, most of whom are marked with simple signifiers that function to simultaneously conceal and expose identities. Twice-branded WWE bandit Rey Mysterio not only sports his signature *lucha libre* mask, but wears his ethnicity literally etched onto his body: a large, legible tattoo spanning the stomach marks him “Mexican.” Another tattoo on #1 contender Alberto del Rio's left shoulder brands him “Hecho en Mexico.” The comical Carlito, a fruit-spitting Puerto Rican bad boy, has his exaggerated afro hairstyle “straightened” by the likes of military good boy John Cena. *Chad Deity's* Bronx-born protagonist Macedonio Guerra—whose name is truncated to “Mace” because no one in the sport can pronounce it—is repackaged by THE Wrestling's chairman as “Che Chavez Castro,” a bongo-beating, Spanglish-spitting jobber who conspires with the equally absurd “Fundamentalist” (really a Brooklynite, of Indian descent) to terrorize wholesome American heroes. EKO disclaims the characters he has crafted before Mace and VP deliver the scripted scenario:

**EKO:** The views and opinions expressed in the following do not represent the views of THE Wrestling. In fact, on behalf of THE Wrestling, I would like to condemn the comments to which you are, unfortunately, about to be subjected.

**MACE:** I don't mention that it's his fault that people are about to be subjected to our comments...or that he wrote our comments. Instead, as usual, I go ahead and do what I have been paid to do.

*(VP enters as The Fundamentalist. VP prays.)*

*(Mace changes to his Che Chavez Castro costume. He speaks with an exaggerated Mexican accent and delivers a bad, over-the-top wrestling promo.)*

**MACE (AS CHE CHAVEZ CASTRO):** Attention Capitalist pigs! I am Che Chavez Castro, Mexican revolutionary and denouncer of all things American! I have traveled long y far in search for freedom, in search for a better life, in search for...America. And now I have crossed the border. I have found riches and happiness and the American Dream...and I hate it.

**VP:** From the audience, silence. They want to boo us. They want to do exactly what Everett K. Olson expects them to want to do, which is wrap themselves in an American flag and tell us to go back where we came from... (Díaz 28).

Mace's and VP's asides to the dramatic audience offer "views and opinions" never before expressed in THE wrestling—those of the exploited minority wrestlers themselves. While the dramatic audience becomes privy to their thoughts, the "views and opinions" of the larger wrestling crowd remain manipulated by the good (American) vs. evil (anti-American) conventions of the pseudo-sport—as evidenced by VP's account of the audience's collective reaction. Díaz's drama exposes worldwide wrestling's mania for creating cultural distortions that bait crowds into assuming the roles of xenophobic patriots who mechanically root for the home team in predetermined matches.

Spectators have been complicit in wrestling's fakery well before chairman Vince McMahon's 2002 admission that the sport was indeed really a spectacle (45 years after the Barthes essay), shifting the conglomerate's acronym from WWF to WWE. Instead of investing in wrestling as a competitive sport, fans grow euphoric from the ritual sensation that Victor Turner calls "communitas"—a shared spirit of togetherness (131-2). In *Professional Wrestling as Ritual Drama in American Popular Culture*, Michael Ball describes how spectators become "stripped of their identit[ies] and become part of the larger [wrestling] crowd" (Ball 9-10). Ball expands Barthes's claim that "wrestling represents a sort of mythological fight between good and evil" (Barthes 23) to suggest that matches are frequently not just between individuals, but between nations. Stereotyped performers often stand in for countries. Even "racial heroes," as Ball terms it, take secondary positions to "white heroes." The "white hero" always wins in a fair fight, intimating that he possesses "God-given talent" (Ball 110; 112). More often, the ethnic other in professional wrestling takes on the stereotype of "foreign menace" or "masked villain." The victories attempted by stigmatized villains who "represent perceived enemies of America" pose a "threat to society" (Ball 68-69)—a society represented by thousands of live spectators and millions of television viewers chanting "USA, USA!"

In *Wrestling to Rasslin: Ancient Sport to American Spectacle*, Gerald Morton and George O'Brien point out that while "The evil foreigner scorns all rules: the patriot follows them," exposing an established and ready-made scenario for many a rasslin match (Morton and O'Brien 148). Contemporary wrestling's most revered patriot is

indubitably the blue-eyed, 6 foot 2 inch, 250 pound John Cena, a former marine—well, he isn't really, but he played one in a Hollywood film, sports signature fatigues and a military buzz cut in the ring, and is frequently photographed in USMC t-shirts—and that works well enough for worldwide wrestling to market a faithful symbol of “America!”

That Cena's comparatively diminutive Puerto Rican opponent Carlos Colón remains unmiked during a 2007 WWE *Raw* match underscores his voicelessness. In place of language, he licks and bites his silenced lips in fear. Cena growls into his microphone at a quivering Carlito: “I have your number. You think you've been overlooked. You want to be in the main event” (WWE *Raw*). His assumption suggests the marginalization of Latinos who presumably strive to be equal to white Americans who get to work and play in the “main arena.” Cena, the “world” champion [an exaggerated title that evinces the insular, ethnocentric global perspective of U.S. pro wrestling, not to mention other sports] grants Carlito an opportunity to face him in the ring. At the same time, he forecasts his silent opponent's failure, threatening “I'll rip off your apples and stuff them straight up your cabana” (Ibid). Carlito shakes his exaggerated afro of curls while Cena indulges him in a match that this commonwealth underdog ought to consider a privilege. Carlito is immediately dominated by the all-American world champion, who effortlessly lifts and manipulates his smaller, Puerto Rican opponent. Announcers Jim Ross and Jerry Lawler remark that as a result of Cena's casually executed powerbomb “Carlito's hair almost straightened out” (Ibid). While Cena flashes an all-American good ol'boy smile and raises one mighty arm to wave to the cheering crowd, a slimmer but sinewy Carlito scrambles over to deal a backstabber move to the champion, suggesting that the only way a monolithic white American strongboy might be overpowered by his small inferior commonwealth citizen is through unlawful or “dirty fighting.” The crowd, programmed by the political conventions of the spectacle, boos the minority adversary's illegal victory. A weak strain of tropicalized music—a melody that would be clobbered by Cena's thundering theme music—trumpets through the loudspeakers as Carlito raises his arm—much smaller than Cena's—in triumph, but when his win remains unacknowledged, he chews and spits fruit onto the champion's celebrated body. Still silenced, the announcers guide spectatorial opinion with choral expressions of bewilderment and disapproval for Carlito's backstabbing behavior.

Had Cena won the match, his “superiorly honest” powerbomb finisher was pulled from a stock of finishing moves designed to signify his monumental strength. It is the same finishing move of the celebrated champion in Díaz's play, who chants “Pick 'em up, Powerbomb 'em, and pin 'em” (Díaz 14). This alliterative recitation exhibits the fullest extent to which Chad Deity is able to articulate his technique. Chief executive EKO, as the gently caricatured stand-in for WWE's Vince McMahon, attempts to assign a finishing move to his newly manufactured “The Fundamentalist.” When he insists on the “Camel Clutch,” Mace delivers an aside to the audience to inform that the Camel Clutch is a signature move historically associated with real-life wrestlers Iron Sheik, Sabu, and Muhammad Hassan—reminding us how close the play's unrestrained stereotypes are to pro-wrestling's. EKO ascribes the terminologies “sleeper cell” and “Koran Kabbalah Kick” (KKK) to characterize VP's frozen stance in the ring followed by a delayed reaction superkick that floors his opponent (Díaz 41). “Just remember your game plan: Nothing, nothing, sleeper cell” (Díaz 46). EKO's prescription of this

insidious, terrorizing approach for The Fundamentalist stands in deliberate contrast to the honest, patriotic power that Chad Deity demonstrates.

Finishing moves like these are sometimes originally choreographed, rather than merely plucked from a list of stock maneuvers, in order to best punctuate a wrestler's persona. For example, Huracán Ramírez's finisher, the huracanrana—a Spanish portmanteau of “hurricane” and “frog”—denotes a move that categorizes his strength as a powerful tropical storm that must also be gymnastically amphibious. It is significant to note here that pro wrestling's Huracán Ramírez and the huracanrana were crafted in the fictional world of a 1952 film, underscoring the blurred boundary between “real life” professional wrestling and its dramatizations.<sup>2</sup> The acrobatic or even, as Sharon Mazer classifies it, *balletic* training in the lucha libre tradition (Mazer 67) casts *luchadores*' lithe bodies in opposition to stereotypically monolithic, masculine power of most opponents against which they are intentionally paired. Wrestling often utilizes this discriminatory tendency to “feminize” the other in order to reassert the brut, aggressive masculinity of the champion—a scheme that is equal parts racist and chauvinist.

The huracanrana has been modified by well-known luchador Rey Mysterio, who launched lucha libre into extreme popularity with pro wrestling television audiences. Mysterio's appeal led to a kind of mania for luchadores that left wrestling officials searching for a way to weave a positive appreciation of the Mexican tradition into the WWF storyline. The solution? The LWO: Latino World Order. In 1998, Mysterio was grouped with other Latino wrestlers who commandeered the mic to demand more airtime with championship opportunities (WCW *Thunder*). While well-rehearsed commentators questioned the motives of Latino wrestlers who “must be up to something,” Phillip Serrato notes that the LWO storyline threatened to destabilize the unfair racial organization of the “sport” (Serrato 249). Fans were unsure how to react to the group's fair proposal: should they reinterpret the bad guys as good?—and if so, will lucha libre masks be sold alongside other merchandise? The writers ultimately revised the storyline and dissolved LWO when legendary white wrestler Ric Flair bribed its members with money, liquor, and women if they renounced their reasonable agenda.

Pairing a luchador in the ring with a miked wrestler trained in the “American” tradition (really an odd pairing of styles in one match, like teaming rugby and football competitors) leaves the subjugated opponent twice silenced and amplifies the erasure of another indeterminate, “mysterious” minority identity. Such effacement inspires the ring name of another contemporary WWE luchador, Sin Cara, which literally translates as “without face” or “faceless.” In the context of American wrestling the lucha libre mask also becomes re-signified as sinister, provoking spectators to wonder “what does this guy have to hide?”—and just in case audiences aren't wondering that, the top of Mysterio's mask is sometimes adorned with devil horns. In a bizarre episode of wrestling's inexhaustible good vs. evil plotline, the limber luchador broke the nose of the babyface all-American “Dashing Cody Rhodes” (WWE *Smackdown*). In subsequent matches, Mysterio's mask stood in stark contrast with the handsome hero's new clear-plastic protective facial plate. This curious marking of visages underlines the metaphor for the concealment and exposure, the protection and the exploitation, of mainstream and minority countenances.

Heather Levi insists in her *World of Lucha Libre* that “the body and mask signify [while] the voice seldom does” (114). It is rare that Mysterio speaks, though he is

occasionally permitted to rant and rave in Spanish as the commissioner demands that Mace do in Kristoffer Díaz's play. Having otherwise silenced wrestlers fulminate in Spanish is a way of sneaking in pro-Latino commentary to potentially-offended Latino audiences without alienating non-Spanish speaking audiences who dismiss it as unintelligible blather inserted between disparaging remarks delivered in English, penned to provoke jingoist applause. If masks are too obvious, other costume props will do. In *Chad Deity* Díaz pits Mace and VP against wholesome heroes like flag-waving Billy Heartland; when Heartland turns around, Mace—as Che Chavez Castro—is choreographed to slam his bongos against the flat of his back, a deceitful, prop-enhanced maneuver akin to Carlito's backstabbing finisher.

Aside from being the backstabber or the fall guy, Latinos can be hailed as popular champions if their differences are glossed over, if, as Guillermo Gómez Peña insists, they are “domesticated” enough to provide “entertainment without confrontation...as in an Esperantic Disney World sporting “culti-multuralism” rather than multiculturalism (*The Multicultural Paradigm*). American audiences might be more accustomed to celebrating black sports heroes like two-time world champion Bobby Lashley, likely the source of inspiration for Díaz's fictitious Chad Deity. VP explains to the audience: “We got a Black world champion and he's rich and he God Blesses America, and he's non-threatening unless you yourself are a threat to that which he God Blesses” (Díaz 34). Deity and Lashley are more likely to be hailed as champions than Latino minorities as long as the mythical notion of “black athletic superiority”—a perception most widely disseminated in 1988 with infamous remarks made by Jimmy the Greek—governs popular opinions.<sup>3</sup>

VP's aside about black world champions continues the narrative conventions established by Mace in his opening monologue in order to consistently offer their “views and opinions.” The presentational style of Kristoffer Díaz's play re-assigns the power of commentary to the silenced wrestlers themselves, with Macedonio Guerra performing first person monologues in direct address of the audience, helping to expose the machinations of a professional sport turned spectacle. *New York Times* critic Charles Isherwood suggested that *Elaborate Entrance* had a few too many elaborate monologues, citing the play as one in a 2010 list of examples evidencing that “[d]irect address,”—the practice of speaking directly to the audience—“has become the kudzu of new playwriting, running wild across the contemporary landscape and threatening to strangle any and all other dramaturgical devices” (*Arts Beat*). He laments that “[i]t's come to the point that I'm almost disarmed if I make it through a whole play in which the ‘fourth wall’ isn't regularly if not relentlessly breached” (Ibid). As a young Latino playwright, Díaz is baffled that the work might be measured against 19<sup>th</sup> century box set conventions and quick to point out that there is no fourth wall in the wrestling arena—where, by the way, performers are on the mic more than they're in the ring (Díaz *Heavy Lifting*). There is, however, a concentrated effort to maintain the illusion of reality in pro-wrestling. As performers of scripted spectacles, wrestlers are cautious not to “break kayfabe,” or to destroy the illusion for audiences who willingly suspend their disbelief. Breaking kayfabe is analogous to “breaking the fourth wall” or “breaking character” in the theatre. Since in *The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity* the wrestling ring designates a second, metatheatrical acting area—a stage inside a stage—the illusion is twice shattered by direct address. There is added significance to the lengthy narrative vignettes that Díaz

pens, which in the published script, read almost like autobiographical prose. Mace, in his descriptive monologues and asides, advises the audience to conduct their own informal research, urging them, for example, to use their phones at intermission to Google the 2005 incident that abruptly ended Muhammad Hassan's career—initiating an interactive, instructional theatre in contrast to pro-wrestling's passive audience's submission to programmed spectacle.

The audience's Google assignment obliquely points to WWE's controversial 2005 *Great American Bash*, during which anti-American heel Muhammad Hassan knelt to the soundtrack of a Muslim prayer call after his partner Davari was defeated by Undertaker. The prayer summoned five masked, club-carrying men in black who choked Undertaker before Hassan finished him with the Camel Clutch. The episode happened to air on 7/7 2005—just hours after the fatal London terrorist bombings—inspiring journalist Don Kaplan to script the headline “‘Terrorist’ wrestles after Bombing” for the *New York Post*, the public reception of which forced a silenced Hassan into early retirement. WWE Executive Producer Kevin Dunn insisted that the broadcast be taken “tongue-in-cheek,” explaining: “We try and be sensitive with everything we portray, but there's got to be protagonists and antagonists on our TV shows” and “[w]e just happen to reflect the politics of the world sometimes - especially with these Arab-American characters” (qtd. in Kaplan). *Chad Deity's* indirect citation of this scandal parallels Vigneshwar Paduar's characterization by “THE Wrestling,” fueled by widespread post 9/11 Islamophobia that ensures spectatorial complicity. Díaz fashions VP as a multicultural, multilingual urbanite, suggesting that the character exists as kind of amalgamated proxy for a multitude of exploited cultural identities while the play maintains an economical five character cast.

*Chad Deity's* depiction of “THE Wrestling” as an organization that scripts anti-American scenarios to be enacted by New York City natives almost downplays some racist extremes reached by professional wrestling storylines. In 2006, Total Nonstop Action (TNA) broadcasted a group of Latino wrestlers dubbed LAX—Latin American Exchange—directing them to the mic to provoke audiences by threatening to burn the American flag. The flag of the U.S.A. was ultimately defended by white Canadian wrestler Petey Williams, who is presented as more “American” than even Bronx-born Nuyorican Ricky (Machete) Vega (*Impact!*). Rather than acknowledge U.S.-born Latinos as the citizens that they are, pro-wrestling packages a white Canadian as the U.S. patriot—a scenario embraced by pre-programmed spectators (after all, there had been no talk of erecting a fence at the Canadian border).

Women wrestlers have not been historically exempt from racist scenarios. The Gorgeous Ladies of Wrestling paired the wrestler “Spanish Red” with a tag-team partner from Hawaii against team USA (that is right, the 50<sup>th</sup> U.S. state Hawaii characterized as a foreign adversary against U.S.A. itself) in the 1980s. Spanish Red and The Hawaiian fought dirty, and announcers rationalized that Spanish Red's smoldering temper derives from her purported love of “bullfights,” “hot sauce,” and “hot peppers” (GLOW). While there are no female characters in *Chad Deity*, Vigneshwar Paduar supplies a quote from his girlfriend to punctuate the play's epilogue. Having quit the world of professional wrestling, VP is watching a match on television during which he witnesses Mace finally commandeer the mic to speak from no one's script but his own:

VP: And Macedonio Guerra goes ahead and gives voice to our little corner of the world.  
 And when he's done, Chad Deity comes out.  
 And they stare down.  
 And they stand off.  
 And the referee rings the bell.  
 And we watch  
 Live via satellite  
 From someplace in the heart of THE United States as  
 To the cheers of an ecstatic throng  
 Chad Deity defeats Macedonio Guerra  
 In near-record time. The crowd goes wild.  
 Mace exits through the audience, almost unnoticed,  
 as Chad Deity celebrates, the conquering hero.  
 And my girl, she turns to me, and she says:  
 Why are they rooting for the bad guy? (Díaz 63)

VP's girlfriend's "naïve" comment cleverly inverts perceptions toward which the popular spectator has been conditioned. Mace's uncensored ring speech traces his own journey: it begins by describing the posable wrestling action figures he played with as an impressionable child and culminates with his exploitation as a professional wrestler. Publicly proclaiming that THE wrestling does "not represent my American Dream," Mace finally fulfills his life's mission to tell his story, to speak for himself. As a fellow minority, VP describes Mace's speech as one that "gives voice to our little corner of the world" (Díaz 58). Mace's monologue inspires VP's girlfriend's resonant, concluding line, which signals the potential for a significant shift to take place with the television audience's reception of wrestling.

The agents behind "THE Wrestling" and real-life wrestling commissioner McMahon and TNA founder Jerry Jarrett are not, of course, the only popular figures in television to package and proliferate Latino stereotypes. The popularly fetishized actress Sofia Vergara, a natural blonde, is forced to dye her hair dark because being blonde does not satisfy viewer expectations of the idea of the "Latina" she is cast to portray. *Latina* magazine points out that while *The George López Show* succeeds "without a cholo, drug dealer, maid, single mother or gangbanger in sight," López often exploits his Latinidad to elicit laughs from audiences by reinforcing stereotypes (Rosario). Colossal wrestling conglomerates and sitcom superstars appear immune to critical objections, ready to cash in laughs at the expense of cultural accuracy or sensitivity. However, the recently piloted ABC show *Work It*, a second-rate reimagining of the 80s sitcom *Bosom Buddies*, was pronounced dead-on-arrival when viewers disapproved of lines like "I'm Puerto Rican; I'll be great at selling drugs"—spoken when a principal character considers the prospect of taking a job peddling pharmaceuticals (Cohen and Reich). Objections made by Boricuas for a Positive Image—following arguments made by the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation that *Work It* mocked the transgender community—lit up the Latino blogosphere and provoked protests outside of ABC studios, contributing to the show's cancellation (Llenas). Changing the course of a long-established television institution like wrestling would prove a more arduous endeavor than nipping one

situation comedy in the bud. With a U.S. population of more than 50 million Latinos and counting, it is our responsibility as spectators and citizens to actively listen to Latino voices, rather than passively digesting language scripted for us/them by profitmaking industries. Latino performers must also cease complicity in our/their own exploitation for “entertainment,” because, as Díaz’s protagonist Mace explains, it all comes down to teamwork: “in wrestling, you can’t kick a guy’s ass without the help of the guy whose ass you’re kicking” (38).

If scenarios like the one scripted for WWE’s 2005 *Great American Bash* are to be taken “tongue-in-cheek,” as Kevin Dunn advised, one might argue that professional wrestling’s pro- and anti-American good vs. evil scenarios intentionally invoke stereotypes in order to mock them. If this is so, audiences exposed to such cultural lampooning are keenly aware that they are participating in the refutation of cultural stereotypes. Significant portions of wrestling spectators, however, are impressionable youth who also support a vast sub-market of licensed action figures and accessories. Since younger audiences tend to interpret what they see and hear literally, believing that even the athletic combats staged in this televised pseudo-sport are “real,” such “tongue-in-cheek” intentions are lost on this demographic who remain unsusceptible to the irony intended.<sup>4</sup>

Too often, in many parts of the U.S., an individual’s first exposure to ethnic minorities is through popular cultural icons—often synthetically cast as plastic and rubber effigies that echo limited perceptions, like wrestling action figures. Approximating their real-life counterparts, the figures’ exaggerated ethnic costuming, branded tattoos, proportions, and pre-posed postures circulate commercialized stereotypes. But as the bodies of dolls and action figures become increasingly articulable (the newest wrestling action figures are manufactured with as many as 30 points of articulation), they must also become articulate. Manufacturers and consumers must offer up the mic for first person narratives, self-authored language to eclipse posable minority stereotypes—whether on the shelf or the ring. We must break character, kayfabe, and fourth walls, deliberately destroying toxic illusions of reality. For now, impressionable audiences remain manipulated by the narrative voices of executives, script writers, and managers in a vast arena where audiences shouting “USA, USA” are more likely to root for a white Canadian than a Chicano U.S. citizen. Kristoffer Díaz’s seemingly cartoonish cast of cultural characters in *The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity* proves not altogether different than pro wrestling’s roster—revealing how fabricated U.S.-Latino personas are performed into the nation’s youngest, most malleable minds.

## NOTES

\*Unless otherwise indicated, all quotes attributed to Diaz throughout this text are from *The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity*.

<sup>1</sup>Viewership for weekly WWE *Monday Night Raw* and *Friday Night Smackdown* broadcasts total between 8-10 million, with annual live and pay-per-view spectatorship approximating 1.5 million. See [www.nielsen.com](http://www.nielsen.com) and [www.tvbythenumbers.com](http://www.tvbythenumbers.com).

<sup>2</sup>The film is *Huracán Ramírez* directed by Joselito Rodríguez and distributed by Videovisa (Mexico) in 1952.

<sup>3</sup>James Snyder a.k.a. “Jimmy the Greek” stated to a Washington reporter that any black athlete is “bred to be the better athlete because, this goes all the way to the Civil War when ... the slave owner would breed his big woman so that he would have a big black kid” (Mitchell, et al.). The controversial notion of “black athletic superiority” has been tackled by Harry Edwards, Jon Etine, Ian Kerr, John Milton Hoberman, and many others. In *Darwin’s Athletes*, Hoberman points out that a 1991 poll reveals that black athletic superiority is a dominant attitude among U.S. spectators (146). See *Jimmy ‘The Greek’ Snyder Canned for ‘Racist’ Remarks*, CNN-Sports Illustrated Video Almanac, 1988, < <http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/almanac/video/1988/> >, Accessed 21 March 2012; Hoberman, John M. *Darwin’s Athletes: How Sport Has Damaged Black America and Preserved the Myth of Race*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997.

<sup>4</sup>For studies on children and televised professional wrestling, see Waxmonsky, J. “Taking Professional Wrestling to the Mat: a Look at the Appeal and Potential Effects of Professional Wrestling on Children.” *Academic Psychiatry*. 25.2 (2001): 125-131. Print.; Bernthal, Matthew, and Frederic Medway. “An Initial Exploration into the Psychological Implications of Adolescents’ Involvement with Professional Wrestling.” *School Psychology International*. 26.2 (2005): 224-242. Print.

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