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## КОНЦЕПЦИЯ КАРНАВАЛА М. БАХТИНА В РОМАНАХ РОЛАНДО ИНОХОСЫ

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**Аннотация:** Статья посвящена исследованию романов писателя-чикано Роландо Инохосы *Klail City* и *The Valley*, рассказывающих о жизни мексикано-американской общины в XX в., в рамках теории карнавализации. Анализ опирается на теорию карнавала М.М. Бахтина. Изучение карнавалых фигур и рассмотрение приемов, создающих образ бесконечного праздника, показали всепроникающий характер карнализации в раннем творчестве писателя. Художественный мир Инохосы существует по правилам карнавала, жизнь общины чиканос построена вокруг городской площади, где травируются религиозные обряды, проводятся типичные карнавалы ритуалы: праздник глупцов, выборы и развенчивание короля, принесение в жертву городского шута и пиршества. Анализ творчества Инохосы в рамках теории карнализации Бахтина позволил объяснить идейно-смысловую сторону цикла писателя *Klail City Death Trip Series* через народно-пиршественные образы и различные проявления материально-телесного низа как торжество жизни над смертью. Макабрический смех мексикано-американской общины, по замыслу писателя, призван победить смерть и страх.

**Ключевые слова:** Роландо Инохоса, Бахтин, карнализация, карнавал, чиканос, мексикано-американская литература.

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## THE BAKHTINIAN CARNIVAL IN CHICANO NOVELS BY ROLANDO HINOJOSA

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**Abstract:** The article discusses Rolando Hinojosa's novels *Klail City* and *The Valley* about the 20<sup>th</sup> century Chicano community. The analysis bears on the carnival theory by Mikhail Bakhtin. Carnavalesque images and literary devices examined in the novels create the feeling of the infinite festivity and prove the omnipresence of Bakhtinian carnival in the novelist's early works. The fictional world of Rolando Hinojosa operates following the rules of the carnival. The life of the Chicano community is organized around the town square, where religious ceremonies are travestied and typical carnival rituals such as "the feast of fools," election and dethroning of the King, carnival sacrifice, and "the funeral banquet" are performed. The analysis of Hinojosa's novels using Bakhtin's carnivalesque theory sheds light on the main ideas of *Klail City Death Trip Series*. The festive character of the bodily imagery represents the triumph of life over death, while the macabre laughter helps Chicanos to defeat their fear of death.

**Keywords:** Rolando Hinojosa, Bakhtin, carnivalesque, carnival, chicanos, Mexican-American literature.

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In their paper on Chicano humor José R. Reyna and María Herrera-Sobek, building upon the ideas of other studies, argue that in the middle of the twentieth century “jokes not only had supplanted the traditional folktale as the most popular prose narrative genre among Chicanos, but also have become the most popular genre altogether” [13, p. 203]. Studying Chicano literature today, we therefore cannot ignore the humor inherent to Chicano culture and literature. The unique Chicano humor clearly has dual Mexican-American roots. Octavio Paz explains the difference between Mexicans and Americans in the following words: “Ellos son crédulos, nosotros creyentes <...> Los mexicanos son desconfiados, ellos abiertos. Nosotros somos tristes y sarcásticos, ellos alegres y humorísticos” [11, p. 2].

According to the poet, Americans are eager to believe, Mexicans are believers <...> Mexicans are suspicious, Americans are open. Mexicans are sad and sarcastic, while Americans are cheerful and humorous.

Today, Chicano humor attracts the interest of many scholars: José R. Reyna and María Herrera-Sobek, Jennifer Alvarez Dickinson, Guillermo Hernandez, José Angel Gutiérrez, Carl Gutiérrez-Jones, among others. In this context, a discussion of Rolando Hinojosa’s polyphonic novels appears relevant and revealing as his works are not only canonical for Chicano literature, but also offer vast material for exploring Chicano humor.

Rolando Hinojosa-Smith (1929–) is a Mexican-American writer, one of the founding fathers of Chicano literature, a winner of literary awards *the Quinto Sol Awards* and *Casa de las Américas Prize*, the author of *Klail City Death Trip Series (KCDTS)*, which comprises fifteen volumes linked by recurrent characters, repetition of themes, scenes and retelling of historical events. Hinojosa calls the *Series* “cronicón” since his novels deal with the life of Mexican-American com-

munity on the Texas-Mexico border in the fictional county of Belken from the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century till the present day. KCDTS is a multigeneric series which encompasses detective fiction, a short novel in verse, an epistolary novel, a Bildungsroman and estampas, to name a few. Although each of his books can be read separately and independently, Hinojosa's fragmented novels are intertwined, each novel complementing another installment of the *Series*. The narrative of the sequence develops chronologically, but still relies heavily on frequent retrospection. Hinojosa's stories are mainly narrated from the point of view of two main characters, Rafe (or Rafa) Buenrostro and Jehú Malacara. Being adults, Rafe and Jehú reconstruct the past, the history of their community by remembering their childhood and communicating with other members of the community.

Nicolás Kanellos explains Hinojosa's contribution to Chicano literature in the preface to *The Valley / Estampas del Valle* as follows: "One of the three foundational works of Chicano fiction, having won the Quinto Sol Awards that forever designated Rolando Hinojosa's *Estampas del Valle* (1973), along with Tomás Rivera's... *y no se lo tragó la tierra* (1971) and Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless me, Ultima* (1972), as the models for the nascent literary movement that would inspire and guide hundreds of Mexican-American and other Latino narrators for at least the next forty years. <...> *The Valley / Estampas del Valle*, along with the first novels by Tomás Rivera and Rodolfo Anaya, constitute what the Quinto Sol editors hoped would be the basis for a Chicano literary canon, a bulwark for the creation of a Chicano cultural nationalism" [8, p. 5].

Chicano humor, without doubt, has originated mostly from Mexican humor. Investigating the sources of Mexican humor in her book, Martha Elena Munguía Zatarain observes that Mexican literature is based on chiaroscuro, somewhere in between tragedy and roar of laughter, solemnity and festivity, so that laughter, being an essential part of Mexican culture and literature, goes hand in hand with tragedy. Consequently, she comes to the conclusion that the principal characteristic of Mexican humor is melancholy, adding that humor serves as a mask against all the difficulties Mexican people face in their everyday life [10, p. 4].

Juan Bruce-Novoa suggests that Hinojosa's "ironic and subtle humor comes from the Hispanic tradition [3, p. 104]. It is true since in his books we can find components of Mexican "laughter," identified by Martha Elena Munguía Zatarain, such as sarcasm, grotesque, parody, sometimes even Mexican didactic tendency, represented by colloquial oral language.

At the same time, it is important to note that Hinojosa's humor seems to bear a Faulknerian tinge, which is not surprising as Hinojosa expressed his admiration for Faulkner many times in his interviews. In Hinojosa's novels, we witness the same techniques employed by his predecessor, ranging from verbal games based on speech errors and peculiarities of pronunciation to grotesque characters and unpredictable conflict resolutions. One of the distinctive features of Faulkner's style is democratism that allows nearly all characters to be involved in comic and humorous situations regardless of their social status, age or gender. Hinojosa adheres to the same strategy, making a multitude of voices heard. He tries to convey the oral culture of Mexican-Americans or their "popular" language with its *humor callejero* (street humor) that merges the tragic with the comic. This allows Hinojosa to reveal the contradictory inner world of an individual juxtaposed against the controversies of the American South that stem both from the historical past and the social conflicts of the present.

Various scholars highlighted the everyday ironic, sometimes melancholic, sometimes tragic, folk humor of Hinojosa's novels. For instance, describing Hinojosa's early works, Joyce Glover Lee characterizes them as "at once comic and tragic, ironic and ingenuous" [9, p. 6]. Lee notes the tragic atmosphere of Hinojosa's humor "which shifts rapidly from irony to humor to pathos to tragedy" [9, p. 20–21]. María I. Duke dos Santos and Patricia de la Fuente call the anecdotal narrative one of Hinojosa's trademarks [4, p. 72]. Rosaura Sanchez argues that "irony and humor are the outstanding characteristics of the Hinojosa novel" [15, p. 80]. José David Saldívar emphasizes Hinojosa's rhetoric — "its mix of wit, "el chateo," and pathos, its oral expansiveness and its dialogic novelistic form," adding that situational and verbal irony are author's favorite tropes in *Klail City y sus alrededores* [14, p. 52].

Anyway, up to date none of the scholars has consistently looked at Hinojosa's humor in the light of Bakhtin's theory of carnival, except for some occasional glimpses such as given by Hernández who mentioned the Bakhtinian concept of disintegrated personality in Hinojosa's novels, or Saldívar who studied "heteroglossia" in Hinojosa's novels [7; 14]. However, the analysis of Hinojosa's humor in the framework of Bakhtin's theory provides new insights into the author's novels and Mexican-American humor in general, it enables us to understand and describe Mexican and Mexican-American worldview not only in ethnic terms but also in a wide, universal perspective.

Carnival is an indispensable component of folk culture, which “overturns the established hierarchy and sets up a popular, democratic counter-culture. In the place of repressive seriousness comes laughter. A single voice is challenged by a plurality of voices” [12, p. 137].

For Bakhtin, one of the main features of carnivalesque novel is its dialogic or polyphonic form that we can find in Hinojosa’s novels [2, p. 33–34]. Hinojosa’s novels are highly fragmented and polyphonic. The narration constantly switches not only between the main characters as the principal narrative points but also between secondary characters.

Throughout a novel the same fragment is recounted from different points of view while the characters switch roles, assuming the active role of the narrator, the “semi-active” role of the subject of narration or the passive role of the listener. That is to say, the line between the roles is blurred. Hinojosa also merges voices of generally anonymous characters and creates carnivalesque polyphony. According to Guillermo Hernández this oral technique “converts the readers into quasi-oral listeners, embedded in a community context” [7, p. 13].

This polyphonic manner of narration fits into Bakhtin’s definition of the carnival, according to which “carnival does not know footlights, in the sense that it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators... Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people” [1, p. 7].

As Bakhtin states in *Rabelais and his World*, carnival establishes a special form of free and familiar contact among people who are usually divided by the barriers of caste, property, profession and age. This contact forms an essential element of the carnival spirit, while people are being reborn for new, purely human relations [1, p. 10].

The wild and turbulent carnival spirit reigns among Chicanos when they participate in sheriff elections in the city square of Klail. Although Sheriff Wallace Parkinson, called Big Foot, who “could barely read, let alone write his own name; that he was duller than an average mother-in-law” is a representative of authorities, he is the king of fools at the same time. He was elected or crowned before, and he is to be reelected again, but his reelection is denigrated by the crowd.

**“Big Foot usually talked only at barbecues (when people eat, drink and seldom hear or listen)”**

... and there he stood: **beaming and wearing a wide shit-eating grin all over him.**

“Migos meos...Mah friends...first woman I ever marry was a Meskin girl from Bascom and then she went and died on me...”

Applause.

Measuring the crowd, **grin in place.** “I married again — a second time, see? — and again I married a Meskin girl from Bascom, but she too passed on; died, don’t you know.”

Applause.

“Well, I married for a third time, a Klail City girl this time, and Meskin a-course... and then she died.”

Here and there voices of dissent would be heard, but barely: **“You’re feedin’ ‘em shit, you red-neck!”**

**“They died on purpose, Asshole!”**

**“Yeah; it’s that breath a-yours!”** [5, p. 109].

The carnival familiarity is reflected in people’s abusive language and insults. The accent of the fragment is on a special connection between food, body and death within the principle of the material body and the lower stratum of the body, “the life of the belly and the reproductive organs.” This degradation, as stated by Bakhtin, has not only a destructive, negative aspect, but also a regenerating one [1, p. 21]. Hinojosa highlights that Chicano community undergoes a renewal. Although there are fools “who’d been bought and paid for,” who “would applaud on cue... even try to shush the hecklers to show that at least they were educated; decent folk,” and who elect the king of carnival, the majority of Mexican-Americans see through the authorities. The sheriff tries to bribe Mexicanos with free food and drinks, information about his marital experience and knowledge of few Spanish words. The fact that Big Foot is reelected underlines the timeless essence of the carnival.

The town square also becomes the place of sacred parody when religion is carnivalized. One of the main characters and narrators Jehú is a *picaro* type: he is an orphan who has to change homes and continuously look for new places where to stay as his relatives are unwilling to take care of him. Therefore the road is a recurring motif in these books. First, the boy travels with Peláez Tent Show, but when the owner of the Show and Jehú’s “second father” dies, he becomes an acolyte, living under the roof of a catholic priest, Don Pedro. After that, he

escapes from Don Pedro's custody with a lay preacher, Brother Imás and finally settles in the house of his uncle. When travelling with Brother Imás, Jehú sells Bibles to earn money for food in the square of Klail City. The boy tries on the role of a canny trickster, thus coming full circle in his metamorphosis from a carnival barker into an acolyte and back into the barker.

Trying to sell books, Jehú uses just the same tricks he learned with the Peláez Tent Show. First, he distorts and exaggerates the facts, then lies through his teeth, sometimes talking nonsense, and, finally, uses flattery. His stylized speech in the second novel, *Klail City*, seems grotesque and ambivalent as it fuses the high with the low, sermon clichés with carnival spiel techniques which he mastered in the first novel, *The Valley*. To achieve this grotesque narration, Hinojosa combines hyperbole with gradation, repetition and alliteration. Jehú uses long simple sentences with homogeneous parts, where exclamatory and interrogative sentences, including rhetorical questions, predominate.

The Peláez Tent Show, **the cleanest and most moral of all tent shows; the one and the only real, genuine Peláez Tent Show – the most prestigious, the one you've selected above all others, is happy, proud, pleased** to present an **unforgettable performance! A clean, sanitary, fast-moving show** for the entire family! <...> And listen to this: **the most educated dog in the world and in all of the visible planets of our present universe [6]!** (*The Valley*)

...

**I worked and labored, long and hard, here and there, and everywhere. But I was lost! And then? Lost and found.** Yes, a servant to **the reverend Father Pedro** Zamudio from Flora – a **saintly man** – and though him **I saw the light, and I saw the way** [5, p. 98]; (*Klail City*)

...

This tender tome, **today, tomorrow, practices, preaches and protects** us here and **hands us happiness for the entire family** [5, p. 97]. (*Klail City*)

Jehú's deceitful discourse ends up in fallacy and sophism when he tries to assure Mexican-Americans that having a Bible provides salvation, he parodies catholic preachers and profanes Christian doctrines. Anyway, whereas Jehú is a temporary trickster, Don Pedro, the priest of the town of Flora, is a full-fledged Pope or Bishop of Hinojosa's carnival. Although Don Pedro is a clergyman,

judging by the way he treats people, it appears that Don Pedro is wearing a mask of the priest. It becomes clear, for example, in the fragment when Bruno Cano, “a successful merchant as well as the sole owner of a slaughterhouse,” asks Don Pedro to help him out of the hole, which Bruno and his compadre Burnias were digging at Doña Panchita’s lot in order to find hidden treasures: “That was me, but I’m okay, really. Now, **for God’s sake**, hurry up and get me the **hell** sorry.”

“And what was it you were about to say, my son?” (Knowingly)

“Nothing, **Reverend Father**, sir — just get me out o’ this hole. **Please**.”

“Well, it’s this way: I’d like to, but I don’t think I can, you know. I mean, you are a little, ah, heavy, ah, a little fat, you know.”

“Fat? Faa-aaaaat? **Your Mama’s the fat one!**”

“My whaaaaaaat?”

“Your mother! that’s who! **That cow!** Now, **get me the hell out o’ here!** Do it!”

“Speaking of mothers (sweetly), friend Cano, maybe yours can get you ‘out o’ that hole!’”

“Why, you pug-nosed, pop-eyed, overripe, overbearing, overeating, wine-swilling, son-of-a-bitch! You do your duty as a priest!”

“I will, my son, I will,” he purred” [6].

The hierarchical line between the priest and the parishioner fades, the alarmingly lofty remarks of the priest combine with the vulgar abuses of the entrepreneur, establishing the familiar contact. Hinojosa creates a farcical situation by means of frustrated expectations as both of the characters break the norms and social rules in line with the carnival tradition. Don Pedro is depicted as an arrogant, vulnerable person prone to scolding and taking revenge, who considers himself superior. When Don Pedro comes across a person in need, he is not eager to help, but finds it appropriate to teach Bruno Cano a lesson, and a cruel one: he begins to read Bruno Cano a prayer for the deceased.

In this passage, Hinojosa creates a vivid, bright, cinematographic picture by using parallelism and alternating between the descriptions of Don Pedro and Bruno Cano. The description sounds polyphonic: the Mass for the Dead, another firm reminder of Don Pedro’s mother, a low growl exploded into a high-piercing scream.

It should be noted that Bruno Cano embodies the motif of the carnival death. Bruno curses Don Pedro and all his family with death. Instead Bruno dies as he can't survive Don Pedro's desire to guide him into the right path: "Somewhere just after one of the mysteries or one of Bruno's motherly recollections, Bruno stopped breathing and thus delivered his uneasy soul to the Lord, the Devil or to Don Pedro's mother" [6].

Strictly speaking, Don Pedro's reading the Mass while Bruno Cano is still alive results in Bruno's death. The ambivalence "dead-alive" becomes obvious; Bruno Cano is a living corpse. Under the carnival theory, Bruno Cano can be perceived as a carnival sacrifice, considering that later Bruno's death triggers a grotesque funeral celebration.

When Don Pedro learns about Bruno Cano's passing away, he feels neither guilty nor responsible for his death. Quite the opposite, when the Carmona brothers, who have taken charge of the funeral, visit the priest's house, Don Pedro, with a hyperbolic remark, puts himself on the same footing as the Church: "I'm not about to bury him, and the Church certainly won't" [6]. The Carmona brothers have to spend no small time before the priest agrees to bury Bruno Cano. The derision of the clergymen reaches its climax when Don Pedro who considers himself a worthy-of-God churchman and finds his decision equal to that of the Church, agrees to perform a funeral service after being offered a drink and promised that it won't take long. This ruthless ridicule to which the author subjects Don Pedro is a clear manifestation of Hinojosa's anti-clericalism, which Nicolás Kanellos identifies as one of the deeper layers for his readers to explore [8, p. 5]. In this disparaging portrayal of the priest, Hinojosa takes up the tradition of Mexican satire, harking back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, that has invariably targeted the greed of the clergymen.

The Carmona brother's comment that "everybody's entitled to at least one burial" brings us to the idea of a timeless cycle of life and death represented by the carnival. Thus, for example, the citizens of Flora die and are resuscitated in Don Pedro's thoughts and prayers, when the priest returns home after a seven-hour service. Jehú, a young acolyte at the time of the events and a grown-up bank employee at the time of the narration, witnesses Don Pedro's fury: "I heard his voice, **a low rumble at first and then that clear baritone, and finally the words started horning out here and there**, and choice ones, too. The **parishioners were among the first casualties**, then **the town of Flora came under fire**,

after that, **the Valley went up in flames**. At every inch of the way, though, the Carmona brothers and Bruno Cano **were put to death, sent to Hell, resurrected and put to death again**" [5, p. 81].

Hinojosa resorts to the euphemistic metaphor, describing Don Pedro's cursing as a battle which is based on gradation and anticlimax.

The image of the Valley in flames also reminds us of the burning of the carnival King or another carnivalesque representation of the evil. Jehú finishes his story, noting ironically that Don Pedro was enjoying the sermon "for once": "Seven hours! Seven! You sinners! No lunch, no merienda and no supper either! No bathrooms! Prisoners all" [5, p. 81].

As for the parishioners, the community members swear by church, but it is obvious that the church is losing ground as an establishment of spiritual unity. Instead, it is trying to keep Chicanos together with mere traditions which put ritual first rather than the meaning of human life. In his works, Hinojosa captures the change in customs when funeral is not "somber" anymore. As Norma Williams states in *The Mexican American Family: Tradition and Change*: "Many persons, particularly those in their 30s and 40s, were deeply disturbed about the loss of respect for the diseased. They are torn between the longing for tradition and a recognition that times have changed. Today, the familial and friendship gatherings turn into a party — a time when relatives and friends who have not seen one another in years can reminisce and discuss the divergent paths they have taken in life" [16, p. 59].

In other words, Hinojosa shows the other side of the coin: however well-attended, the funeral is a part of social etiquette, a matter of habit which often doesn't stir up any genuine emotions in people, whose principal motivation is to amuse themselves.

The author travesties Mexican-Americans' festive attitude to the funeral in Carmona brothers' speech: "We bring good news, as the brother says. We got ourselves a funeral, boys <...> you know what to do: get at that hole, and spread the word" [6]. Hinojosa uses the phrase "we got ourselves a funeral," which more likely implies "we got ourselves a party" and the biblical quote "spread the word," which combined together have an effect of dissonance and frustrated expectations with the reader.

Although Hinojosa exposes the Mexican-American obsession with rituals and traditions to ridicule, portraying the funeral; the description of Bruno Cano's

burial makes us think of the tradition of the Roman State, the Roman Saturnalias, where the funeral ritual involved both lamenting (glorifying) and deriding the deceased [1, p. 6].

Thus, during the funeral, Bruno's grotesque metamorphosis reaches its final stage. Having become a living corpse when Don Pedro was delivering the sermon, Bruno undergoes the process of objectification: he is not a person any more. That is why he is held in the beer locker: "When they came up to Germán Salinas' cantina, they found that Cano's body was still in the beer locker" [6].

Hinojosa's description of Bruno Cano's funeral is the culmination of the grotesque that represents a contradictory and double-faced fullness of life [1, p. 62]. First of all, the scene is set with exaggerated numbers of every kind. The funeral, which Don Pedro wanted to be a fifteen-minute matter, turns out to take seven hours attended by four thousand people from all over the Valley, with four orators, four choirs and three candy men selling several hundred pounds of ice-cream.

Hyperbole becomes the main device, which underlines that people overdo absolutely everything looking for an "excuse to get out of the house." Thus, hyperbole is combined with amplification in the description of the orators: "Four orators showed up unannounced but dressed to the teeth: black flower, white hat, gold book, and serious as Hell" [6]. In spite of Don Pedro's "keen disappointment," he tries to catch up with the rest of the funeral participants and "came through with no less than three hundred Our Fathers, between Hail Marys, Hail Holy Queens, etc" [6]. When the orators jump up "having gotten their respective second winds," the funeral begins to transform. First, it turns into a contest between the orators, as they "began to compete with one another until a time limit was set" [6]. Later the transformation continues and the following metaphors become in order: "funeral-competition," "funeral-one-man show" starring Don Pedro, "funeral-street party" with choirs "taking requests" and candy men.

The main thing that Hinojosa derides, utilizing different narrative techniques and devices, is funeral as an excuse "to get out of the house." For example, in the following phrase "when he (Don Pedro) began to cry (anger, hysteria, hunger) the crowd understood, or thought it did: they dedicated their prayers to Don Pedro", irony is accompanied by bathos with free indirect speech "and to Don Pedro's dear, departed friend, **the respectable what's-his-name**" [6]. Chicanos' free indirect speech is also used as an understatement for the funeral: "People

from all over the Valley **got word that something was up in Flora** and there they **came in trucks, bikes, hitchhiking**, while the more enterprising ones from Klail **leased a Greyhound** that already had some people in it who had boarded the bus back in Bascom, and they too joined the crowd" [6].

Using gradation Hinojosa describes Chicanos' exodus to the town of Flora where they were coming chaotically, driven by the idea of involvement and belonging, but not caring much. This indifference gets special emphasis in a parallel sentence, which describes Chicanos' reaction to the lack of ice-cream syrup: "the candy men having run out almost from the start. It mattered little since the people didn't care, and one could hear the chant for blocks around: ice, ice, ice, they cried." People's chanting for ice becomes the climax of the grotesque and farcical funeral, which according to Jehú's ironic conclusion was a "first class funeral."

Ultimately, the socially important event for Mexican Americans is profaned and turned into a true carnival with sacrifice, actors, musicians, all fools' Pope of the carnival and the amusing crowd. In the description of the funeral, Hinojosa creates a carnivalesque image of the anonymous masses, shoveling, eating and talking, which can be considered as a "universal triumphal banquet," "the triumph of life over death" [1, p. 283, 299]. It means that Chicanos regard Buno's death as a "moment in the triumphant life of the people and of mankind, a moment indispensable for their renewal and improvement" [1, p. 341].

Hinojosa's representation of religion follows the rule of the carnivalesque "turn-about" when "the logic of the "wrong side out" and of "bottom up" is also expressed in gestures and movements [1, p. 410-411].

Chicanos' religion combines Catholic doctrines that came from Spain with Indian polytheistic rituals. Superstitious folk rituals, with their bizarre mixture of magic healing and Catholic practices, come under the scathing wit of the main characters. For example, after his father's death, Jehú calls on his aunt Chedes, who is a grotesque archetype of a superstitious Mexican-American. She "never attended funerals" because of "her fear that if she did, then everyone there would die <...> so she always stayed home, ironing" [6]. According to Jehú, his aunt had a case of hiccups from time to time and went off in trances, the day when he visited her, she was "fixing to faint or something, but she was frightfully absent-minded" [6]. Being a grown-up, Jehú describes his aunt's ritual in detail because, however skeptical he was about the community rituals, the procedure made the nine-year-old boy feel ill at ease and frightened:

...when she stopped her ironing, placed her middle finger — all of it, to the hilt — inside her mouth. She then placed the iron on the trivet and, finger in mouth, she turned, opened the walnut ice box and proceeded to fill a tall glass of water. The house was quiet, and she hadn't said a word in about five minutes. Placing the glass on the ironing board, she dipped that middle finger in the cold water, made the sign of the cross in the air and then on my forehead: Drink this, she said, drink this whole glass of water, Jehú. All of it, now, and don't stop till you do. While you're doing that, **I'm going to say an Our Father backwards** for today's the day you're to meet your new Pa [6].

Aunt Chedes's ritual parodies the Catholic baptism ceremony, her carnivalesque backward "blessing" initiates Jehú's picaro trip around the Valley. Yet, with all her devoutness, Aunt Chedes does not rush to invite Jehú to stay with her family. Instead, Jehú joins the Peláez Tent Show, where he really "meets his new Pa," Don Víctor, the owner of the show.

Rafe also goes through a religious-magical treatment when he gets ill after an armed assault on him and his father. Being unable to cure the boy's stammer after a nervous breakdown, the family turns for assistance to Auntie Panchita, the community *curandera* (healer). Chicanos respect and consult her with all their maladies. Auntie Panchita offers an impressive range of services. On the one hand, she is known as a "bone healer, midwife and general gynecological factotum (G.G.F.) and a fare-the-well mender of preowned virgos belonging to some of the neighborhood girls of all ages" [6]. On the other hand, she cures with prayers and magic rituals and makes Chicanos believe in their recovery. For example, Rafe confesses: "Had it not been for Auntie Panchita and her prayers, I might have never recovered" [6]. In Auntie Panchita's treatment, representation of "material body lower stratum" is found side by side with religious prayers.

Finally, we will try to characterize Hinojosa's carnival and determine its type. Rolando Hinojosa calls his series "Klail City Death Trip Series" (KCDTS), thus referring the reader to the theme of death from the very beginning. Rolando Hinojosa's KCDTS becomes an illustration of the Dance of Death. Throughout the novels, Death, like Mexican La Catrina, escorts or accompanies the main characters with constant reminders of its imminence. Rafe and Jehú are orphans. Many of their classmates died in war. Their friends and relatives participated in the Second World War or the Mexican Revolution and some of them didn't return

home. Some Mexicanos were killed in accidents or by other Valley inhabitants. In other words, Death is a recurring motif in KCDTS. The main device that the author employs to represent Death in his novels is macabre grotesque. Many characters die under strange circumstances, let alone Bruno Cano's demise in a hole. For instance, one of the members of the antagonist family Diamantina Leguizamón "died as mad as she could possibly be after being bitten several times by a rabid dog as Diamantina alighted from her carriage after High Mass." Hinojosa also describes "death caused by happiness and joy" [1, p. 408]. Pius V died "when he heard Gabriel's blast calling him to join that great number, just happened to be resting a bit on top of Viola Barragán." In both examples, death and religion are degraded. According to Bakhtin's theory of laughter, "when death and birth are shown in their comic aspect, scatological images in various forms nearly always accompany the gay monsters created by laughter in order to replace the terror that has been defeated" [1, p. 151]. In other words, macabre laughter helps Chicanos to defeat the fear of death. That is why commenting on his father's death, Jehú says: "He died as he was telling me a joke." Since humor goes hand in hand with tragedy in his life, Jehú becomes an embodiment of Mexican "melancholic humor" that Chicano members of the community use to defend themselves against pain. It means that Chicanos and Mexicans alike have learned to "transform life's daily inequities and the pain they cause into sources of humor" [13, p. 219]. By objectifying particular experience and sharing it in the form of jokes Chicanos build a sense of solidarity and set up a public forum for the release of feelings of anxiety as they "laugh at their foibles [13, p. 224]." Chicanos inherited this perception of the world from their Mexican progenitors. In his "El laberinto de la soledad" Octavio Paz explains that by means of "fiesta" or celebration of the Day of the Dead the Mexican community protects itself against the envy of the gods or the men [11, p. 50].

Paz's description of the Day of the Dead demonstrates the universality of Bakhtin's theory of carnival. On the Day of the Dead, according to Paz, order disappears and chaos comes back, anything is permitted, the customary hierarchies vanish, along with all social, sex, caste distinctions. Men disguise themselves as women, gentlemen as slaves, the poor as the rich. The army, the clergy and the law are ridiculed. Obligatory sacrilege, ritual profanation is committed. Regulations, habits and customs are violated. Respectable people dress up in gaudy colors, hide behind a mask, and escape from themselves [11, p. 51]. Indeed, the Day of the

Dead — or previously known as “Paseo o Verbena de Todos los Santos” — celebrated by Mexicans not only has a lot in common with Catholic medieval celebrations like All Saints’ Day and All Souls’ Day, but, according to Elsa Malvido, historian and anthropologist, even originated from these Christian festivals brought to Mexico by the Spanish.

Paz considers “fiesta” as a limited period of time for liberation that helps a sorrowful country like Mexico to escape, not to “explode” [11, p. 53]. Throughout Hinojosa’s novels, however, we can see that this festive perception of the world is pervasive in Chicanos’ life rather than restricted to a particular time. And it is certainly not something unique to Mexican or Mexican-American culture. The carnivalesque perception of the world has a long history and a long way to go before its understanding could claim some degree of completeness. In this context, the scope of Bakhtin’s theory proves to be even more comprehensive than we expect.

The drama of laughter presents at the same time the death of the old and the birth of the new world [1, p. 149]. For Mexican-American community, this is not only a Trip of Death, but a new revival and transition from the old to the new, from death to life. In the epigraph to *The Valley*, Hinojosa alters Mathew Arnold’s famous lines from “Stanzas from the Grand Chartreuse”: “Born between two worlds, one dead and one as yet unborn” [9, p. 6]. Hinojosa depicts a new stage in the development of Mexican-American community, integrating into the Anglo-American society, when a new Mexican American is to be born. Rolando Hinojosa shows a transitional Mexican-American community undergoing some dramatic transformation of its views on religion, marriage, family and work that define their sense of collectivity.

The analysis of Rolando Hinojosa’s novels in the framework of Bakhtin’s theory of carnival gives us a new understanding of KCDTS. Carnival is omnipresent in Hinojosa’s works and all the characters are involved in it. The novels are polyphonic as they are populated with an anonymous crowd of the Mexican-American community. We hear these anonymous voices mainly in the town square that is the center of attraction in Mexican-American culture. The life of the Chicano community revolves around this place where free, familiar contact can be established. The town square becomes the setting for dethroning the authority of official culture, parodying the institute of church, and, as a result, decrowning and unmasking of the carnival King. Hinojosa’s carnival features a variety of carnivalesque characters such as the Pope, the jester, and the fool as well as

some typical rituals including the carnival sacrifice and the “funeral banquet.” These ceremonies establish a special connection between food, body and death. These and some other manifestations of the material body and the lower body stratum have both destructive and regenerating functions at the carnival. The animalistic metamorphosis, sacred parody and “comic” death aim to defeat Chicanos’ fear of death and replace it with laughter. The Chicano community is summoned to renewal and revival as death of the old leads to the birth of the new world. “Birth-giving death” and the trip of death become recurring motifs in KCDTS along with the motif of bad luck that bring up the idea of a timeless cycle of life and death represented by the carnival.

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