



BLADE TO THE HEAT

by Oliver Mayer

*a critical
edition edited
by*
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Glossary for *Blade To The Heat*

Algo: something

Andale, vámonos: Hurry up, let's go.

Aquí estamos: We're here

Cabrón: asshole (literally, a huge goat)

Cálmate: Calm down

Campeón nacional de México: National champion of México

Chicanas/os: Politicized, left of center Americans of Mexican decent, (antonym: Hispanic)

Chingadera: Fucking thing

Come mierda: Eat shit

Como se dice: how do you say...

Como-se-llama: what's his name

Con esa sonrisa comemierda: with that shiteating smile

Corazón: heart; will

Dáme candy: Give me love.

Desgraciado: Low-life

El gancho al hígado: The hook to the liver

En la panza: in the stomach

Hijo de la chingada: Son of the fucked woman

Hijo de la gran Puta: Son of the "great bitch"

La raza: The [Mexican] people

Las gané todas, con esto, con el Suzie Q: I beat them all with this with my Suzie Q.

Latinos--los mejores del mundo: Latinos--the best in the world

Le debes romper las bolas. Los putos huevos:

You should break his balls. His fucking balls.

Maricón: slur-term for a gay man

Me llamo Martillo. El ponchador martillo: They call me the hammer. The punching hammer.

No lo soy: I am not

Oye: Listen

Panocha: pussy

Pendejo: idiot/asshole

Pero: but

Pinche rucas: Damn wenches

Por favor, chica: Please, girl

Qué bien te ves, chica: How good you look tonight, baby.

Quién sabe: who knows

Si es afeminado: if he is effeminate

Soy todo hombre: I'm all man

Todo hombre. ¡Cómo esto!: All man. Like my fist here!

Tremendo golpe, como cañonazo--y nada: major blow, like a canon--and nothing

Tú: you

Un derechazo como relámpago: A lightning-like right

Vénga a verme: Come see me.

Véte a la chingada, ¡idiota!: Go to fucking hell, idiot!

Yo soy boricua. Pura sangre: I am Boriqua (indigenous to Puerto Rico). Pure blood.

¿Cómo está la novia?: How's the girlfriend?

¿Es macho o no es macho? ¿Contigo?: Is he a man or is he not a man? With you?

¿Qué honda?, chula: What's up, gorgeous?

¿Te gusta meter mano?: You like to get some?

¿Y tú, qué sabes?: And what do you know?

¡Chingao!: Fuck!

¡Espérate!: Wait

¡Muévete!: Move!

¡No coño!: No damn it!

¡No me toques!: Don't touch me!

¡No, tonta! Mi inteligencia: No, stupid, my brain.

¡Payaso!: Clown!

¡Qué chulo!: How beautiful!

¡Qué lindo eres!: How beautiful you are!

¡Seguro! ¡Sin duda!: For sure! Without doubt!

¡Tira!: Hit him

¡Tira, coño!: Hit him, damn it!

¡¡¡Carajo!!!: Damn!!!

¡¡¡Dime!!! ¡¡¡¿por qué?!!!: Tell me!!! why?!!

¡¡¡Mátelo!!!: Kill him!!!

A bull terrier barking.

DRUMS. Then BELL rings. THE GYM, heavy bags, speed bags, ropes skipping, shoes squeaking. Sweat and cigars smoke. Men working out with each other and in front of mirrors. Then MUSIC, loud and strong. Garnet enters, the spitting image of Jackie Wilson. He sings an intense rhythm and blues number which is strongly imitative of Jackie Wilson. As he sings he executes a tight one-leg shimmy to perfection. Lands a split, then pulls the mike close. As the song builds to climax, and he is about to land the backflip on the downbeat -- BELL rings. Two FIGHTERS spar. THREE FINGER JACK and ALACRAN shout instructions.

JACK

(to one) The head!

ALACRAN

(to the other) **Tira!**

JACK

Punch him in the head!

ALACRAN

El gancho al hígado! Al hígado!

JACK

Punch a man in the head it mixes his mind.

ALACRAN

Work the body! Break him into little pieces! **Tira, coño!**

His man goes down.

ALACRAN

They no listen.

JACK

Neither did we. We didn't listen to nobody.

ALACRAN

That's 'cause nobody listened to us!

JACK

You and me, we was the uncrowned champs!

ALACRAN

You mean chumps!

BELL rings. The fighters towel off, resting. Only PEDRO, alone in a corner, continues to shadow-box.

JACK
Yeah, but there's still hope. The boy who wins nowadays got to have the heart, the fire, and he got to be a roman'ic.

ALACRAN
Ah, you always talking poetry.

Cameras flash. MANTEQUILLA DECIMA, the champ, enters with entourage. REPORTER approaches.

REPORTER
Hey Champ! Give us a good shot! Which hand you gonna knock him out with?

MANTEQUILLA
(brandishing the right hand) **Ei** Suzie Q.

REPORTER
Smart money's on you, as always. You beaten everybody else. So what's next? Retire? Run for president? What?

MANTEQUILLA
I was born to fight. To wear the belt. Is a beautiful sport. A mang can be a mang. You dance, you play, you get angry. But in the end it all come down to **corazon**. And this too. (makes a fist) My dream? I beat this guy -- retire undefeated -- then I go home to my country. My people, I love them very much. So after we get rid of this **como-se-llama** Castro, then **quien sabe?**

REPORTER
You got my vote!

MANTEQUILLA
Too bad you' not my people! (BELL rings)

ALACRAN
(pointing at MANTEQUILLA) **Que chulada!** That man is like a god. I useta fight just like that -- **igualito!** Decima, he's a trainer's dream, if he gave me a chance, **hijole** --!

JACK
(pointing at PEDRO) Now that's beautiful. Most beautiful thing in the world, a boy working his little butt off. Pure gold, and you can bet he listens! (to PEDRO, who is still boxing) Don't burn yerself out now! Take it slow now, 'cause we want you to take that title! Yes we do. Take it on back for all us never got the chance! 'Cause you our boy!

ALACRAN
Ain't mine.

JACK
But he a Messican!

ALACRAN
With a name like Quinn?

JACK
Don't blame him, blame his daddy!

ALACRAN
Mick-Jew-whoever the hell he was.

JACK
But to go agin yer own --

ALACRAN
Y tu, que sabes? You look in the mirror recently? He ain't black and ugly like you, but he is black!

JACK
But that don't count, he' a Cuban!

ALACRAN
Talk trash at me....Support your own, **cabron!**

JACK
Boy like that, you give him half a chance, he' dangerous. Like one of them pit bulls.

ALACRAN
That mutt?

BELL rings. Reporter approaches Pedro.

REPORTER
Got anything to say, Kid? No one expects too much, you going up against the best pound for pound and all that. What do you get for a fight like this? besides a beating? Do you really think you

can take him?

PEDRO
Me?

REPORTER
Yeah you! Who else?

PEDRO
I'm just gonna do the best I can.

REPORTER
(exiting) He's dead!

Pedro exits the other way.
ALACRAN
(looking at MANTEQUILLA) There's the man.
Todo hombre. Como esto! (raises his fist like an erection)

JACK
Is that what I think it is? I swear sometimes you' queerer than Dick's hat band.

ALACRAN
Who?

JACK
You who!

ALACRAN
Tu!

JACK
Tu-tu! Always knew there was something funny about you, sucka!

ALACRAN
Who you calling sucka, sucka?

They slap-box for a few moments, both ending up on the floor, winded.

JACK
Damn!

ALACRAN
Cabron!

JACK
Gonna be a great fight! Two fellas washed in the

blood. Just like we was. Two young men with their whole lives ahead of 'em. Two mighty mighty men. Fighting for us. And for that belt. That beautiful belt. Them two --(DRUMS) They deserve every damn thing they get.

BELL rings. Cheers, jeers, catcalls. A growing animal hum from an immense crowd. THE RING. Mantequilla and Pedro come together in ring center for the FIFTEENTH and FINAL ROUND. The REFEREE makes them touch gloves. They fight. DRUMS punctuate punches landing or whizzing by. Pedro fights moving forward, throwing punches constantly. Mantequilla retreats boxing beautifully and scoring combinations. Each man scores well and heavily. There's an unintentional head-butt -- Referee checks for cuts. Pedro apologizes.

REFEREE
Box!

Mantequilla lies back, then throws the vaunted SUZIE Q -- a wide bolo punch which corkscrews up like a machete cutting sugarcane. It lands like a shotgun blast on Pedro's chin. FREEZE on what ought to be a knockout -- you simply cannot throw a punch any better. Mantequilla steps back, admiring his work. But Pedro absorbs the blow. His body shakes from the impact but he won't fall. Then, inexplicably, he SMILES. A mysterious, unsettling smile. Then Pedro drives Mantequilla to the ropes and rains blows. Mantequilla tries to hold, but Pedro yanks himself free. BELL rings. The fight over, they stagger apart. They embrace. Mantequilla confidently does a victory lap around the ring, while Pedro shrouds himself under a towel. The microphone drops from the rafters.

ANNOUNCER
After fifteen rounds.... (sound echoes in the stadium)
We have a split decision....The winnah, and NEW CHAMPION OF THE WORLD.... PEDRO QUINN!!! QUINN!!! QUINN!!!

Pandemonium. Cheers, boos. Pedro disbelieving as his hand is raised and he receives the championship belt. Flashbulbs. Mantequilla alone in defeat. MUSIC, very Perez Prado. DRESSING ROOM. Mantequilla unwraps his hands. The right is hurt. SARITA, in a black turtleneck and pants, lights a cigarette.

MANTEQUILLA
HIJO de la gran PUTA --!!!

SARITA
So you lost.

MANTEQUILLA
Hijo de la gran PUTA!!! (flexes the injured hand)
Come mierda -- (hits himself hard with it) **COME MIERDA!!!!**

SARITA
Don't do that. You're still my champ. Well you are, aren't you? You look good. Not a mark on you. That counts for something. And God knows you dressed better. You won that hands down -- he had some very ugly accessories. And the tassels on his shoes. Please. Promise me baby, don't ever wear tassels, tassels went out a long time ago. Lampshades wear tassels, and they're so girly -- when you get hit they make you shake like a good-time girl --

MANTEQUILLA
Por FAVOR, chica!!

SARITA
So I'm nervous. I never seen you lose.

MANTEQUILLA
I never lose.

SARITA
Everybody loses, baby.

MANTEQUILLA
No' me. I beat them all. La Havana, Oriente, Ciudad Mexico, Miami Beach, Estockton, Las Vegas -- **las gane todas -- con esto** -- (the left hook) **con el** Suzie Q -- (the right bolo) **y con esto!** (pounds his forehead)

SARITA
Yeah, you got a pretty mean headbutt.

MANTEQUILLA
No tonta! Mi inteligencia! Mi imaginación!

SARITA
Just a joke. Little joke --

MANTEQUILLA
(not a compliment) **Chicanas.**

SARITA
Don't say that word. I don't like it. Say Spanish.

MANTEQUILLA
Chicanas!

SARITA
I'm Spanish! I'm from El Lay, all right?

MANTEQUILLA
Como Quinn?

SARITA
Yeah. Like Quinn.

Pedro crosses the stage. He has a black eye. He looks like a kid. Inexpensive clothes and worn gym bag. Opens a door -- camera FLASHES, screams, shouts of "PEYDRO" -- he reacts as if caught in headlights. Door closes behind him. Meanwhile, Mantequilla strips naked and is about to enter the shower.

SARITA
Hurt?

MANTEQUILLA
(gestures) This hurty.

SARITA
I got a feeling it'll swell back up to size.

MANTEQUILLA
(under the spout) He no' even punch hard! I hit him goo' **pero** he no wanna go.

SARITA
Us Mexicans are pretty tough.

MANTEQUILLA
Alla time I hit him, he stang there in fronta me, just stang there, **con esa sonrisa, comemierda!**

SARITA
He was smiling?

MANTEQUILLA
(still showering) You no see it?!!!

SARITA
A smile?

MANTEQUILLA
He makey fun of me?!!!

SARITA
My pop always said when you see a guy smiling
like you didn't hurt him -- you hurt him.

MANTEQUILLA
Seguro! Sin duda! I hit him purty goo' **en la panza** -- he gonna go hurty when he go pee-pee. He no feel too sexy now.

SARITA
He never did.

Mantequilla turns off the shower. Advances on her
naked.

MANTEQUILLA
What you say?

SARITA
Dry off baby. We don't want you catching cold.
(throws him a towel) Kinda sexy when you're mad.

MANTEQUILLA
Oye. I am always sexy. (embraces her) **Que bien te ves, chica.**

SARITA
Just your basic black.

MANTEQUILLA
Pero I wish you' wear a dress, **coño!!**

SARITA
They're not beat.

MANTEQUILLA
Pero you look like a little boy.

SARITA
That's why you like me.

MANTEQUILLA
(pushes her away) No play like that! (he dresses,

clothes expensive and well-tailored)

SARITA
So touchy! Come on. Let's go listen to some jazz.
Let's go uptown and dance!
A little rum and coke, a lotta me.... You sure you
okay?

MANTEQUILLA
Algo....

SARITA
What?

MANTEQUILLA
That guy --

SARITA
Who?

MANTEQUILLA
Quinn!

SARITA
Forget him!

MANTEQUILLA
Too...**como se dice**...nice. I no like nice. We
fighting in close, como esto -- (demonstrates on her)
and I hitting him in **el higado**, in the liver, and he
hit me with his head -- BOOM! --
and he say "Excuse me." Excuse me? What is that?
He makey fun of me? I pop this guy -- **tremendo golpe como cañonazo -- y nada.** El Suzie Q -- and
he just kinda smile. You no see that smile? I gonna
see that smile in my dreams! (stares at himself in
the mirror) I gonna see it in my dreams.

SARITA
You hit him so hard I thought you killed him.
Some people smile when they die. Maybe he died a
little. (as he dresses in silence) You know, I got a
pretty good smile too! You ever dream about my
smile?

MANTEQUILLA
Not like that.

SARITA
Well I'm smiling. So forget about Petey Quinn.(a
moment, then) Are you hungry, --

MANTEQUILLA
Esperate --!

SARITA
Let's go get something to eat --

MANTEQUILLA
D'you say Petey? Petey Quinn?

SARITA
What do you mean?

MANTEQUILLA
D'you know this guy? This Petey Quinn?

SARITA
Of course I know him!

MANTEQUILLA
CARAJO!!!

SARITA
Don't do that.

MANTEQUILLA
D'you go with him?

SARITA
No I didn't go --

MANTEQUILLA
D'YOU WENT WITH HIM?

SARITA
Don't be jealous --

MANTEQUILLA
COME MIERDA!!!

SARITA
I don't go out with **Chicanos.** Gimme a little credit
here. And DON'T INTERROGATE ME. (silence)
So he's cute. So shoot me.

MANTEQUILLA
CUTE?!!!
SARITA
I can't even talk about a guy --!!!

MANTEQUILLA
NO OTHER GUYS!!!

SARITA
YOU SEE!!!

MANTEQUILLA
I'm the only guy! I'm the mang!

SARITA
Not anymore. (silence)

MANTEQUILLA
Hmm. (collects himself) Maybe this time he win.
Pero the next time --(makes fist) **me llamo martillo. El ponchador martillo.** I gonna dead him sure with my hammer.

SARITA
You gonna show him your hammer? I thought I was the only one gets to see it.

MANTEQUILLA
You joke alla time.

SARITA
Not all the time.

MANTEQUILLA
You no like me no more?

SARITA
I like you.

MANTEQUILLA
Pero, like that.

SARITA
Yeah, like that. (they come together, reflected in the mirror) Do you ever think about me when you're in the ring? When you're in there, doing what you do, you ever see us making love? (kisses his knuckles)

MANTEQUILLA
You no make love in the ring.

SARITA
I wish you did. (beat) You look like a champ.

MANTEQUILLA

Pero I no champ no more. Chit. Chit chit chit.

SARITA
I love it when you talk dirty.

MANTEQUILLA
I win next time. I get back my belt. I work so hard for that belt!

SARITA
We both do. Let's get beat.

MANTEQUILLA
I no wanna get beat.

SARITA
Not "beat" -- Beat. Red hot and cool.

MANTEQUILLA
Tha's my goo' bad girl. (cracks his Sugar Ray Robinson grin) I look okay?

SARITA
Baby, you're the champ.

MUSIC. Classic R&B as GARNET imitates Jackie Wilson and James Brown. THE GREEN ROOM. James Brown plays distantly. Garnet enters, sweating. Pedro is waiting there.

GARNET
No stuff! (they slap five) I guess I can call ya Champ. (grabs the belt) Aw man -- I always wanted one of these! (walks around with it) Local Boy Done Good! (resumes undressing) I knew you could.

PEDRO
(listens to the tune) James Brown?

GARNET
The man sweats too much. Can't be healthy. Shouting and wheezing and slaver all over the place. (beat) Wish I coulda been there tonight --

PEDRO
Naw, you had a gig --

GARNET
Shoulda took the night off. But I knew you'd win. (drinks from flask) Here's to the King. And long may he reign.

Pedro doesn't drink. He seems wound-up, ill at ease. Garnet picks up the championship belt.

GARNET
Fit?

PEDRO
Nope.

GARNET
Lemme see.

PEDRO
Didn't think it would be like this.

GARNET
Didn't figure you'd come here. Tonight of all nights. I mean, why aintcha out on the town? Must be a victory party or something --

PEDRO
I walked out on it.

GARNET
You what?

PEDRO
Didn't feel right.

GARNET
But it was for you!

PEDRO
I don't want a party. I don't deserve a party.

GARNET
But you're the Champ! You won --

PEDRO
It was just a decision. That's no way to beat a king.

GARNET
(with the belt) But it's yours --

PEDRO
But it doesn't fit.

GARNET
Don't they size these things?

PEDRO

Look. You beat the man who beat the man --

GARNET

Maybe you're supposed to wear it over one shoulder --

PEDRO

Like a line of kings. It's supposed to fit. Fit Mantequilla like a glove. He deserved it. He earned it. And now I got it and it just don't fit --

GARNET

(showing him) Little clasp on the back.

PEDRO

He's the Man.

GARNET

No, you the Man.

PEDRO

But --

GARNET

Don't matter what you think. You the Champ. You passed the test. you come out the other side.

A new song by Jackie -- something raucous and gospelly.

GARNET

Here. Listen up you damn sad sack. This'll set you right. This belt will protect you!

Suddenly Garnet is on his feet lip-synching and dancing to the song, landing a leg-drop, then popping up to a one-leg shimmy. it's wild and sexy and fun.

PEDRO

Wow! You're great!

GARNET

Not me. Jackie is the king.

PEDRO

Jackie Wilson?

GARNET

He's an emperor. But Brown wants the crown.

PEDRO

They're both kings.

GARNET

But there's only one crown. (beat) I'd take Jackie any day. Better looking. James just don't look wholesome. Not exactly what you wanna take home to Mom and Pop. Yeah, well neither of them. But see, that's the thing. Don't matter how you look. It's who you are. (tousles PEDRO's hair) You wanna know something? Listen up. James Brown was a boxer.

PEDRO

Naw!

GARNET

Yep. He boxed. And you know what else? Jackie too.

PEDRO

Jackie boxed? No way.

GARNET

Hey I know some things about boxing too.

PEDRO

But -- I mean, he's so cool -- I mean the moves --

GARNET

Those moves of his? Boxing moves. What he learned he learned in the ring. See, he always saved a ringside seat for his Ma. So this one time she doesn't show, and he keeps looking over at the empty seat. So they're grabbing and clutching and leaning on each other and all sudden Jackie sees her and he can't help himself he just says "Hi Ma!" and -- (three punches) Wop. Bop. Mop. See, he learned the hard way. Don't be looking to nobody. Not even Mom. Get down to business. And watch yerself in them clinches. Don't wanna get hit any more than you have to. (touches PEDRO's eye)

PEDRO

Useta dream about it all the time. And then tonight. There I was. Getting smacked around by the Man himself. I had to smile. I was so happy to be there. It made me smile. Even when he really hit me. Weird getting hit. You feel so alive. (beat) That's the thing.

GARNET

What?

PEDRO

It doesn't last.

GARNET

What doesn't last?

PEDRO

That feeling. That...thing.

GARNET

How's your eye?

PEDRO

I don't feel it.

GARNET

You got to feel something. I mean, you're the champ. You been working your whole life for this! You been dreaming about other guys all these years. Now people gonna start dreaming about you. (PEDRO reacts) They will. Probably are already.

PEDRO

But I'm not good enough.

GARNET

(clasps his shoulder) It's all right. You got what you wished for. It's hard to get what you wish for.

PEDRO

I wish I could be like you.

GARNET

You don't wanna be like me.

PEDRO

And do what you do onstage. And move like that --

GARNET

Like what?

PEDRO

Like that move. You know -- the one, the one --

GARNET

It's a tough one, you gotta keep your concentration. I studied Jackie like a book, worked on it for days and days in front the mirror. You gotta look super-sharp, you gotta look the people in the eye, you gotta be able to top all the knee-drops and one-leg shimmies them other contenders be putting up, you gotta be right in the middle of the song when they're right in the palm of your hand, when it's all on the line, and you gotta (demonstrates) land that backflip on the downbeat, come right on back with a shooby-doo-wop, and your pompadour not even mussed! Yeah I nailed it. (they slap five on the backhand side)

PEDRO
I've spent my whole life in front the mirror, and I never been that good. I never been there. If I could be like you, and not get hit --

GARNET
Oh I get hit. Every damn day of my life. Half the time they're talking through my set. Bust my gut, they don't give a good goddamn --

New 45 plays -- Jackie Wilson classic side.

PEDRO
He's the King. (sings along tentatively) Help me out, wouldya?

GARNET
Naw, this ain't my key. (gives in, sings a bit, then breaks off) Nuh-uh. Can't touch that. Too good. (beat)

PEDRO
I better go.

GARNET
Lemme see you with the belt on.

PEDRO
No I can't. I don't wanna --

From the back, Garnet puts the belt around Pedro. Each backs away.

PEDRO
What? Does it look dumb? Is it that bad?

GARNET
It's beautiful.

PEDRO
It's what?

GARNET
You the man. No more doggin' around.

DRUMS. Spot on WILFRED VINAL as he hits the heavy bag -- also curses, sweet-talks, even dry-fucks it. Jack and Alacran watch.

JACK
Boy got more tricks than a hooker. And just as cheap.

ALACRAN
That's **El Chapo** Vinal. He's famous! He's from New York City!
He's in the Top Ten.

JACK
Top ten?!! Top ten what? Public Enemies? You gotta be kidding --

ALACRAN
He's better than he looks. He come out here to fight Mantequilla and the wiener gets your boy -- Quinn. For the title.

JACK
I'll be doggone. (as VINAL exits flamboyantly) He's a tomato can!

ALACRAN
So Mantequilla crush the tomato can, make a little **salsa**. Then he get the rematch **con** Quinn, and this time'll be different. This time we find out who's the better man. Who's the real champ around here. (spits) Quinn? **Chingao! Cabron** think he's too good for us! We throw him a victory party, he hardly even show up! What? Something wrong with us? We ain't good enough? Little bastid got no respect --!

JACK
You just sore 'cause he beat the flies offa your boy

Mantequilla.

ALACRAN
Watchale, amigo. Decima will be king again. (DRUMS) Vinal first. Then Quinn.

THE ARENA. TENTH and FINAL round. Mantequilla and Vinal at ring center. BELL rings. Mantequilla stalks Vinal, who thrusts, grabs, and clinches. To the beat of the drums, he makes a ballet out of fouling. Referee cautions him.

REFEREE
Watch the elbows!

VINAL
(to MANTEQUILLA) Watch the elbows!

REFEREE
(pointing at VINAL) You!

Mantequilla attacks. Vinal sidesteps, then punches him in the ass. They trade viciously. Vinal fouls him, then clinches.

VINAL
Don't clinch me baby. I don't do no bendover.

REFEREE
You two wanna dance, do it in the dark!

VINAL
What are you, some kinda faggot?

Vinal blows him a kiss from a safe distance. Enraged, Mantequilla crushes him with the right hand, then punishes him in perfect rhythm with the drums. Vinal in trouble on the ropes as Mantequilla sets him up for the coup de grace -- the Suzie Q. Vinal goes down. Takes the eight count. Rising, Mantequilla flurries and Vinal goes down hard. The Referee stops the contest.

VINAL
What're you doing?!! Don't walk away from me --

Referee raises Mantequilla's glove in victory. Vinal nearly hits the Referee, who exits fast.

VINAL
How could you stop it?!!! I wasn't hurt. I had him

right where I wanted him! I was gonna knock him out! I had him! I had him right here in the palm of my hand!

Commotion in the ring. Vinal plays the crowd. Microphone drops from the rafters.

ANNOUNCER

The winnah, by knockout, Mantequilla Decima --!!

Mantequilla raises his glove. Vinal throws a tantrum, Into the microphone:

VINAL

Decima?!! That faggot? He din't knock me out!! You give it to that faggot?!! You can't give it to that faggot!! No, you can't give it to that faggot --!

MANTEQUILLA

Faggot?

VINAL

Faggot! **Tu** baby! Let that little fag kick your ass. Fucking Pedro Queen! Ain't no fag ever gonna beat me -- (rhythmic, as in a chant) Come on, say it with me! **Ma-ri-con! Ma-ri-con!**

As Vinal continues to chant in and out of the ring, TV REPORTER and CAMERAMAN approach.

TV REPORTER

(on the move) ...The ex-champion definitely had the high-spirited New Yorker in trouble on the ropes... (sidles up to MANTEQUILLA) Here we are with the victor, Mantequilla Decima, in a bit of a wild scene. Were you bothered by Vinal's tactics?

MANTEQUILLA

Huh?

TV REPORTER

Tactics. He seemed to be talking to you during the contest. What was he saying? Was he trying to tell you something? I'm sure our viewers at home would be very interested to hear -- Like the word he's saying now. **Marigold**? Perhaps you could translate. Go ahead, give us the gist if you c --

MANTEQUILLA

(grabs the mike) I win this fight no problem, **pero** I no rest till I get **la revancha con** Quinn.

TV REPORTER

You want to fight Pete Quinn again?

MANTEQUILLA

I want to fight Quinn. I prove I am a real mang. I dead him. I promise.

Exits.

TV REPORTER

Well there you have it! And just remember you heard it first on--

VINAL

(grabs the mike) He din't beat me! He's a fag! They're all fags! And Pete Quinn, he's the biggest fag of all!

TV REPORTER

Cut it or chrissakes!

VINAL

(into camera) Hi **Mami**.

DRUMS. MUSIC, mixed the ongoing chant of **MA-RI-CON** give way to the sounds of the gym. Pedro skips rope. Radio plays James Brown. Alacran and Jack watch from a distance.

ALACRAN

Mira, cabron!

JACK

What am I looking at?

ALACRAN

See? There!

JACK

Where? Man I don't believe it.

ALACRAN

The way he moves. Look! That little sashay.

JACK

Man, if that's a sashay --

ALACRAN

It's right there in fronta your face --

BELL rings.

JACK

Say Champ!

PEDRO

Say Jack.

JACK

How ya feel?

PEDRO

I feel good.

JACK

You catch Mantequilla and Vinal? They stunk up the joint pretty bad. They didn't show me nothing. I think you got their number.

PEDRO

Don't jinx me. (each knocks wood)

JACK

I gotta admit, I wasn't sure we was gonna beat him, you being the unknown commodity and all that. But I like the way you do business. Real straight up. You done us proud.

PEDRO

Thanks, Jack. (they shake hands boxer-style)

ALACRAN

Say Champ.

PEDRO

Alacran.

ALACRAN

Como esta la novia?

PEDRO

Huh?

ALACRAN

La novia. What? You no speaka Spanish? Your girlfriend. How's she doing?

PEDRO

Don't got one.

ALACRAN

Que no! There's gotta be somebody. Come on!
You can tell me. **Te gusta meter mano?**

PEDRO

Huh?

ALACRAN

Meter mano? Well. Ain't that a shame. Young fella like you and no **panocha** to be had. Don't you like a little tail between fights? After all, you the Man --

JACK

(gets between them) Don't mind him, Champ. He don't know nothing, wetback always talking out his ass. (BELL rings, Pedro resumes workout, to ALACRAN) What the fuck you doing?

ALACRAN

I'm tryna show you something!

JACK

You mammyjamming old buzzard. You punch-drunk or what?

ALACRAN

You don't believe me? Are you blind?

JACK

I wish I was deaf!

Garnet enters. Alacran and Jack instinctively form a human wall between him and Pedro.

JACK

Can I help you?

ALACRAN

You got business?

JACK

Um...I'll come back another time -- (about to exit)

PEDRO

Hey! It's okay. Let him through. He's with me.

Jack moves aside, but Alacran doesn't budge.

Garnet slides past him with a dance move.

PEDRO

Make yourself at home.

Garnet does another tight dance step.

PEDRO

Wow! What was that?

GARNET

You ain't the only one been working hard. I'm breaking in a new song tonight at the club.

PEDRO

Jackie? James?

GARNET

Just me. Been waiting a long time. Now it's my time. No more impersonating.

PEDRO

Cool.

Alacran shadows him.

GARNET

(looking around) So this is it.

PEDRO

Not like the movies, huh?

GARNET

Place could use a good clean.
(ALACRAN slams a locker shut) Where is everybody?

PEDRO

(shrugs) I prefer the quiet.

GARNET

(as ALACRAN continues to shadow him) I'ma go -
-

PEDRO

No! I mean it's okay. I never had a friend come up before.

GARNET

Hey, you the Champ, you got a million friends.
(ALACRAN scoffs) Well there's a line of

teenyboppers down the block waiting to get a look at the champ.

PEDRO

I wish!

GARNET

You look good. (ALACRAN whistles) Here, I mean.

PEDRO

It's what I know.

BELL rings.

GARNET

(awkward) Pedro. Be at the club tonight?

PEDRO

I'll be there.

GARNET

All right.

Garnet exits quickly. Pedro works the heavy bag for a moment. Then looks up.

PEDRO

That's my friend! (resumes workout)

ALACRAN

You see? You see?

JACK

What? It's a friend, ya damn fool! What's wrong with that?

ALACRAN

I knew it. It's what I told you, except it's worse!
Fucking little **chicano** bastid! He's pissing on us.
On the belt. On the game. On us. You shoulda listened to me.

JACK

You get outa his business.

ALACRAN

It's our business.

JACK

What the hell's it got to do with you?

ALACRAN
Everything, Jack. Every goddamn thing.

JACK
That boy deserves respect.

ALACRAN
Respect my ass!

JACK
Goddamn gossip! You're like some old woman!
I'm sick of it --

ALACRAN
Now this is what we do. Cut him off. No talk. No
warning. Just cut him off.

JACK
But he' my boy --

ALACRAN
Not if you know what's good for you. (silence) So.
You with me?

JACK
Respect!

ALACRAN
Don't walk away from me!

JACK
(to PEDRO) I'll hold the bag for ya, Champ.

ALACRAN
What you get angry with me for? He's the one!
HE'S THE MARICON!!!

Pedro freezes. Feels all eyes on him. Then resumes
hitting the bag one blow at a time.

JACK
That's it boy....Stay within yourself....Don't pay
that fool no nevermind....That's it!

Pedro wears himself out on the bag.

ALACRAN
(laughs at PEDRO) He don't even deny it. He
knows who he is! **CUT HIM OFF!!!**

DRUMS. MAMBO. Cuban flags. AIRPORT
TARMAC. Mantequilla enters dancing with Sarita
to the hottest sexiest mambo you have ever seen.
Both of them dripping with style. They finish to
applause. Mantequilla addresses a crowd.

MANTEQUILLA
I bery bery glad to be here in Miami. And to the
Cubanos who are here, **le quiero decir que viva
Cuba! Que Viva Cuba Libre!**

SARITA
Give us room please!

REPORTER
Say Champ, the word was you were gonna retire
before ya got beat. Care to comment? (he doesn't)
Aren't you getting a little too old for the game?

MANTEQUILLA
(smiling through anger) I gonna be champ again real
soon.

REPORTER
What about Quinn?

SARITA
What about him?

REPORTER
What about all this stuff coming from Wilfred
Vinal?

MANTEQUILLA
Vinal? **Un imbecil. Pero** he taught me something.

REPORTER
You mean it's true?

SARITA
Payaso! He just told you --

MANTEQUILLA
Calmate, baby. (they kiss, very sexy and public)

SARITA
He's all man! You see? You see? Get a picture.

Cameras FLASH.

MANTEQUILLA

We no' married yet, but we will be soon. (motions
for silence) **Soy todo hombre. Todo hombre!**
That's why I gonna win. You no can win **si es
afeminado -- como se dice** -- un FAGGOT, **un
maricon**. Vinal, he teach me you can no' trust the
other guy. The other guy can be a bad mang. Or no
mang at all. Now I have no mercy. Just like these
beautiful Cuban people gonna have no mercy for **los
malos Communistas! Revolucion? Mierda?**
**Buncha maricon drogadicto, hijos de la gran
puta se llama Comunismo.** Castro? Guevara?!!
Who are these guys? Get a shave, put on some
decent clothes! Then talk to me. Freedom fighters?
Aqui estamos! The real freedom fighters! And me, I
yam a freedom fighter! I fight for the goo' people --
the normal people -- of these beautiful **Estados
Unidos!** How can I lose? T'ank you.

Applause, the million-dollar grin. Chants of **MA-
RI-CON** mixed with DRUMS. Terrorizing
nightmare sounds mixed with way-out jazz. As in a
bad dream, images float past in darkness. TWO
FIGHTERS, their faces obscured, are grabbing and
clutching each other. The Referee appears.

REFEREE

I keep having this dream. I'm in there working, but
it's like I'm in molasses. I can hardly move. And
the fighters, well they're just teeing off. Not just
punches. I'm talking headbutts and elbows and
laces and there's blood everywhere. I know I oughta
stop it, I mean hell, everybody knows, they're
screaming at me. I feel
like screaming too, but I got the cotton mouth,
can't get nothing out. And it's getting bad. The
one fella, he's just getting ruint. Finally I get the
feeling back, I can move. I can stop this thing. But
the thing is, I don't. I let it go. I just let it go.

The fighters continue, more like they're fucking
than fighting. DRUMS intensify. The fighters
disappear as Mantequilla wakes from the dream.
Sarita beside him. They are alone in bed.

MANTEQUILLA
NO LO SOY!!!!

SARITA
What?

MANTEQUILLA
No lo soy.

SARITA
What are you talking about?

MANTEQUILLA
Por que maricon?

SARITA
I don't know.

MANTEQUILLA
Por que?!!

SARITA
Dammit!!

MANTEQUILLA
Dime!!! Por que?!!!

SARITA
NOT YOU!!! (silence)

MANTEQUILLA
Quinn?

SARITA
Look, it's not true.

MANTEQUILLA
How you know?

SARITA
We went to school together. High school! They put all the Mexican kids in the same school --

MANTEQUILLA
D'YOU WENT WITH HIM?!!!

SARITA
You gotta be kidding! He's from El Monte, wrong side of the tracks. I'm from Montebello, we know these things. (he stares at her) He wouldn't go out with me, okay? You satisfied?

MANTEQUILLA
He no go out with you?

SARITA

No he no go out with me. That bastard Vinal. He was just messing with your mind. He was just trying to hurt you, to make you mad, make you crazy --

MANTEQUILLA
Oh no. (slaps himself)

SARITA
What?

MANTEQUILLA
I lose to a...? No no no. (slaps himself)

SARITA
Don't do that!

MANTEQUILLA
No me toques! Everybody know. Now I know.

SARITA
Nobody knows anything! I mean, come on! This is the Fifties! What's the problem --

MANTEQUILLA
(grabs her) No lie. This Quinn -- this Petey -- **es macho o no es macho?** No lie. This cute guy. Did he...? **Contigo....?** (gestures lewdly) **Que paso, baby? Que paso --?**

SARITA
NOTHING! We did nothing!

He lets her go.

MANTEQUILLA
Then he is.

DRUMS. Mantequilla grabs his pants and gym bag and exits in a rush. LIGHTS, LIVE MUSIC INTRO.

GARNET
(onstage at the club) I'd like to do something different and dedicate this to a special friend.

Garnet launches into song. An Edith Piaf standard in a rhythm and blues version, sung in his own voice. Garnet hits the high notes as best he can -- no imitation, just him -- we can tell how much it means to him. He sounds great, but the CROWD

boos him off the stage. Down and dirty stripjoint sax in the distance. Pedro finds Garnet in the Green Room.

PEDRO
You were great!

GARNET
Muthafuckas!

PEDRO
No, you were great.

GARNET
Two-bit bastids --

PEDRO
You'll get another gig --

GARNET
I was good!

PEDRO
A better gig!

GARNET
They wouldn't know talent if it kicked 'em in the ass.

PEDRO
You could even play the Apollo Theater --

GARNET
You gotta be kidding.

PEDRO
I was just tryna --

GARNET
Well don't. Don't be so got-damn positive about me. When I sang that song, the Boss said "What the fuck is that? Who the hell do you think you are? Josephine Baker? Some piece of French toast? You think we wanna hear you? See you? Singing in French? Singing in your own sorry-ass voice? What the fuck is that? And he fired me. And he was right. (silence) There won't be any more gigs.

PEDRO
But --

GARNET

Look. I'm an impersonator. Get that in your head, please. I fake Jackie Wilson. I fake James Brown. I shoulda known. Nobody wants to hear me. That's the way it is. That's who the hell I am. And that's it.

PEDRO

But -- That's the thing. You don't have to be yourself.

(silence) The rest of us, we gotta be ourselves all the time.

GARNET

You're not getting it --

PEDRO

I got it. I felt it when you sang. When you moved. That -- thing. You got it, man. You hit me right between the eyes. You knock me out.

GARNET

But you're not getting --

PEDRO

You.

They are close together. Garnet looks at Pedro conflicted -- confused, flattered -- not sure what to say.

GARNET

So what do we do now?

PEDRO

We do the best we can.

DRUMS. Mantequilla at the gym on the heavy bag. With each blow he sends it swinging. Alacran watches.

ALACRAN

You look beautiful! **Como chocolate! Que lindos eres!**

Mantequilla suffers his attentions with some embarrassment. BELL rings.

ALACRAN

Precioso! Chingonazo! You look like a fucking god! That little

half-breed **pendejo** --! (spits) He's dead! Listen **m'hijo -- quiero hablar contigo** -- I need to talk to you -- Sarita appears. Tension in the room. Long pause.

SARITA

Hey. I figured you oughta get the lay of the land. So here I am.

ALACRAN

Pinches rucas! It ain't like I don't like girls, I like 'em fine. **Pero en la cocina con una pata rota.** (the men laugh)

SARITA

In the kitchen with a broken leg? Is that how you want me?

ALACRAN

Come on, **mamacita**, it was joke --

SARITA

Who the hell are you, Cantinflas? (to MANTEQUILLA) Is that how you want me? (thrusts her leg out) Then break it. I'll call you when dinner's ready.

MANTEQUILLA

Siempre con las bromas. (bangs the bag hard) No more jokes.

SARITA

Who's joking?

ALACRAN

I thought it was purty funny.

MANTEQUILLA

(suddenly dangerous, commanding) You shut up, okay? **Pa' fuera!** Get outa here! (ALACRAN exits, hurt) What the hell you doing here?

SARITA

What am I supposed to do?

MANTEQUILLA

No come to the gym no more. **Por favor.** Is hard...**es duro.**

SARITA

You no like me no more?

MANTEQUILLA

I got to stay clean! I got to beat this guy! This Quinn! Is my last chance!

SARITA

What? You see me you gotta lay me right here? In the ring? Not a bad idea.

MANTEQUILLA

I got to be strong!

SARITA

I love you.

MANTEQUILLA

I no wanna lose.

SARITA

Nobody's gonna lose. (she takes off items of clothes, he tries to look away) Baby....

MANTEQUILLA

No, **chica** --

SARITA

No more losing --

MANTEQUILLA

Por favor, no --

SARITA

It'll be okay. You fight better when you're relaxed -
-

She touches him. He reacts as if from electric shock.

MANTEQUILLA

No, **coño!!!**

SARITA

I know you. If you hold it in too long, you'll explode --

She has both hands on him. By now he's caving in.

MANTEQUILLA

Ay yi yi --

SARITA
And you know me. I'll explode --

MANTEQUILLA
Ay no.

SARITA
Yes.

MANTEQUILLA
Please.

SARITA
I'll handle everything.

They grab each other like hungry animals. She goes to her knees.

SARITA
You're beautiful --

He hears the chant of **MA-RI-CON**.

SARITA
You're the champ --

He looks away in pain.

MANTEQUILLA
NO LO SOY!!!

Exits.

SARITA
You're not gonna cut me off!!!

DRUMS. Flashbulbs. Vinal jumps rope wildly, masterfully. A display of utter ballet and contained violence. Reporter watches.

REPORTER
So who you gonna call a fag today?

VINAL
You. (unsure laughter) I tell it like it is. (takes the speed bag) See that? That's Pete Quinn's little head. And this is what I'm gonna do to it. (bangs it) I ain't no mixed blood. **Yo soy boriqua! Puro sangre.** I gots the blood of some kick-ass cannibals in these veins. (displays forearm) See that? That's **Indio**, baby. **El Carib**. Quinn fucks with me, I'ma

stick him in a pot and make chicken soup.

REPORTER
You wanna fight Pete Quinn?

VINAL
You want me to fuck him instead? Sure! Mantequilla don't deserve no rematch! Gimme the fight. I'll show the world. I'll tell you this. I better not bump into him in no men's room, 'cause my **papi** told me don't stand for no **patitos**.

REPORTER
(writing in his notepad) **Potatoes?**

VINAL
You want the truth, you come to me. Straight up no chaser.

REPORTER
You use me, I use you.

VINAL
Come back tomorrow for some more. Okay?

REPORTER
(exiting) Okay.

VINAL/REPORTER
Loser.

Jack enters.

VINAL
No autographs.

JACK
I don't want your chicken scratch!

VINAL
Then beat it, old man!

JACK
They call me Three Finger Jack --

VINAL
You got all five fingers, you old bastard --

JACK
Course I do! I'm tough but I ain't stupid!

VINAL
Listen Tough Guy. I ain't got time --

JACK
Neither do I. So how do you know?

VINAL
Know what?

JACK
You don't, do ya? Don't know a got-damn thing.

VINAL
You gone punchy?

JACK
You ain't good enough to shine Pete's shoes. I bet you' the freaky deaky one. (walks away)

VINAL
What'd you call me --

Vinal spins him around. Jack turns fists raised. Vinal cracks up laughing.

VINAL
You guys from El Lay are crazy!

JACK
You got any idea what you done to that boy?

VINAL
You mean that **mariconcito**?

JACK
How the hell would you know?

VINAL
It's obvious, man. you can see it a mile away.

JACK
I don't see nothing.

VINAL
You prob'ly ain't go a hard-on in ten years. What's it matter anyway?

JACK

You don't SAY that, not in this line of business.
You KNOW that. You tryna destroy him?
Somebody put you up to it? Why, you damn fool,
why?

VINAL

Look, you in the ring with a dude, you get to know
him all kinda ways. Like if he eats garlic, or goes
heavy on the greasy kid stuff, or if he don't wash
under the arms so good. You get to know these
things. You was a fighter, you know this. Gimme a
little credit here.

JACK

What, he had a hard-on, what?

VINAL

You come to a stinky gym like this for a reason.
It's always something. Some assholes they just like
to fight. Other guys they got to prove something.
The little ones they got a complex. Big ones they
got a complex too. Some of these clowns like to
beat on other guys to impress the chicks, like it'll
make their dick bigger or something. Then there's
the other kind. They here 'cause they like the smell
of men. They like to share sweat. They like the
form, man. The way a dude looks when he throws a
blow, his muscles all strained and sweaty, his ass
all tight bearing down on the blow, his mouth all
stopped up with a piece of rubber, and only a pair of
soaking wet trunks between his johnson and yours.
They like it. And they like to catch a whupping for
liking it. That's just the way it is. I'm surprised,
man. I thought you knew the business, oldtimer.

JACK

You don't got a shred of evidence.

VINAL

What do you want? Pictures? Come on! I'd fuck
him! I'd fuck you.

JACK

You 'sick.

VINAL

I tell it like it is. If some dude wants to go down on
me, bring him on! I'll fuck anything! But ain't
nobody fucking me, I draw the line, baby! (JACK
pushes him) Hey, what's that for? (JACK pushes
him again) Look old man -- (again) I'm warning

you --!

JACK

Of course I know what goes on. Been going on
since the beginning of time. So what. You gotta go
wreck a man's life?

VINAL

It worked, didn't it?

JACK

I oughta kick your ass.

VINAL

You go for the other guy's weakness, right? Am I
right? He got a cut eye, you gonna hit him in the
elbow? Come on! You jam your glove in there, you
rip the fucker open. Tell me I'm wrong.
(silence) When I fought Decima, that piece of trash
called my **mamita** some dirty-ass names. I got mad.
I din't fight so good. Okay, he found my weakness.
I can live with that. I love my **mami**. But I vowed
to God I'd get him back one way or the other.
That's how I turned the fight around. All it takes is
a single word. Hey, one look at him and I knew that
macho crap would make him go crazy. Guy like that
is stupid enough to think we really care where he
sticks his two-incher. He ain't so great as everybody
thinks. So, a little word, I got his mind messed up.
And then I kicked his ass! I shoulda got that
decision too! I wuz robbed, baby! I wuz robbed!
(beat) But the guy to worry about is Decima, not
Quinn. Quinn is what he is. But I'll bet Decima is
a little confused.

JACK

You got it all figured out.

VINAL

I'm a student of the game.

JACK

This ain't what the game's about.

VINAL

Nothing's about anything.

JACK

Take it back. Get the TV people. Tell them what
you told me.

VINAL

Fuck that.

JACK

It ain't too late!

VINAL

Come off it, old man. Only need to say that kinda
shit once. It sticks. Like glue. Like a cheap suit.
Hey man. It's business. You talk to me when I'm
champ, maybe I'll throw a few bucks your way....If
you bend over. (blows JACK a kiss) So long,
maricon.
(exits)

JACK

I shoulda KICKED his ass!

DRUMS. Extreme light change. Alacran joins Jack.
Stripped to their undershirts, they assume fighting
poses.

ALACRAN

Le diera partido en la madre!

The Referee moves in and out, as if working a fight.
CROWD NOISE punctuates their stories. They
speak to us in a place outside time.

JACK

Back in my prime, be like taking candy from a
baby! Hell, I'da been
champ if they'da let me!

ALACRAN

Yo tambien! Chingao!

JACK

But they wouldn't fight us.

ALACRAN

Pinches white boys.

JACK

Dempsey wouldn't fight colored!

ALACRAN

Woulda kicked his ass!

JACK

Woul'da knocked the flies offa that cheating lug!
Only reason he hit so hard was he had a roll of
nickels in his glove -- see, white folk are like that.

ALACRAN

Colored too. And I got the scars to prove it. **Esto?**
(his hand) **Un** sparring session con un negrito de
Detroit name of Ray Robinson. He come out here
para pelear con Baby Arizmendi. He wanna spar **con**
Mejicanos. So they get me, dollar a day. They call
him The Dancing Man. Well that's all he did,
dance! **Pero** I watching him, I watching him alla
time. I cut off the ring, he dance right to me, I catch
him on the ropes and -- POW! -- **la izquierda, y --**
WOP! -- **un derechazo como relampago!** Now he
dancing all right, pero like he drunk or something.
End of the round, nigger in a suit come up to me
gimme ten bucks and tell me to get out.

REFEREE

Punch and get out!

ALACRAN

Ray Robinson? I coulda taken that **pinche como-se-**
llama any day of the week. Din't even know my
hand was broke.

JACK

This?

(runs a finger across his nose) This one I got first
time I fought at the Hollywood Stadium. Richie
Lemos. I was hot outa Cleveland, they sent me out
here to whup me some Messicans. Only Messicans I
ever seen was doing stoop labor out fronta the white
folks' house. At the weigh-in the greaser he
outweighs me eight pounds. Shoulda backed out
right there, but I was a damn-fool youngblood, I
said "Bring him on" --

BELL. Referee finishes 10-count on him.

REFEREE

Yer out!

JACK

He kicked my ass.

REFEREE

I'm doing a fight down in San Diego 'bout fifteen
years back. Joe Louis on the Bum of the Month
tour. All white fellas and he's knocking 'em out

right and left. Lemme tell ya, that was one powerful
colored man, made people nervous. So just before
the fight, this old geezer comes up. One eye is off
and he's a weird-looking sonofabitch. Baggy plaid
pants and a red tie, and his hair greased on the sides
and shaped like devil horns, and he's making like
this -- (extends pinkies and forefingers) And he's
screaming Cockadoodle doo! Cockadoodle doo!

ALACRAN

Lo estaba embrojando.

JACK

Making some whammy.

REFEREE

He was putting the whammy on Ol' Cotton Eye
Joe. And Joe didn't much like
it neither. See, fighters is like kids. They believe in
all that bunk. Especially them black and latin types.
Somebody figured the old bastard might get under
Joe's skin, spook 'im, you know, give the Bum a
chance to send Joe back to the cotton fields.

ALACRAN

Hey, you get any edge you can.

JACK

But it cuts both ways.

REFEREE

So King Joe comes out and puts the Bum to sleep
in no time flat. Didn't want to be in that ring any
longer than he had to. Walked right outa that arena,
didn't even take a shower. Left town before you
could say Jack Robinson. Whammies and
cockadoodle doos. Maybe that's why they call 'em
spooks. That's the fights for ya.

JACK

We was jinxed. But it'a be different for Pete --

ALACRAN

It'a be different for Mantequilla --

JACK

They gonna RESPECT us!

ALACRAN

They gonna give us what we deserve!

JACK

(confronts the audience) You hear me? RESPECT.
You are gonna respect us.

ALACRAN

O le diera dado en la madre! a la chingada!

REFEREE

Come on! Pick it up! What the hell you think this
is?

JACK/ALACRAN

It's a fight.

Light change. DRUMS give way to mariachi music.
Alacran joins Mantequilla in a seedy Mexican bar.
Renderings of boxers from yesteryear on the walls.

ALACRAN

Te gusta? Purty good, no? (looks around)

Boxeadores Mejicanos, Cubanos -- Latinos -- los
mejores del mundo. They got you over there.

Looking good. I useta have my pitcher here too,

alla -- Campeon nacional de Mexico. I was
Number Two in the world for a whole year.

Hombre, I useta get free drinks alla time. **Cabrones.**

Can you believe it? I come in here, they painted it
over. Put up some little **mayate**, little black guy
comemierda --

MANTEQUILLA

Sugar Ray Robinson?

ALACRAN

Yeah, that's the guy. (toasts) **Arriba,**
abajo...cualquiera. Here's to the real champ.

MANTEQUILLA

Oye, viejo. Tell me what you got to tell me.

ALACRAN

Pero I got so much. **Informacion.** I got **tacticas.** I
know how to beat Quinn.

MANTEQUILLA

I know how.

ALACRAN

Pues si! You're the better man. The moves are
sweet, and that right hand of yours is just like a
machete. Two years ago you'da cut him down like
a buncha sugar cane.

MANTEQUILLA
(bristling) Two years ago?

ALACRAN
Hey, it happens to everybody.

MANTEQUILLA
I gonna be champ again --!

ALACRAN
Sure!

MANTEQUILLA
I gonna get him! Dyou hear me? I gonna dead him -
-

ALACRAN
Sure you will. But different. You gonna get him with tactics. (drinks) I been watching him. I know how to break him down. You got to find the angles. You got to make him think. Start by going downstairs.

MANTEQUILLA
It no work last time.

ALACRAN
(indicating the groin area) I'm talking low. **Le tienes que romper las bolas. Los putos huevos.**

MANTEQUILLA
I no fight dirty!

ALACRAN
Not dirty! **Tactics. Tu sabes? TEATRO.**
(silence) 'Cause Pedro Quinn he don't know nothing about **teatro**. That boy don't got no sense of humor. He can be taken. No sense of humor.

MANTEQUILLA
Then how come he smile at me?

ALACRAN
Huh?

MANTEQUILLA
He laughing at me! How come he laughing at me?!!!

ALACRAN
Laughing? He just looking at you like you'

something good to eat. He prob'ly got the hots for you. Can't wait to clinch you! That's as close as he gets to you know what! That's what I'm telling you! Don't fight this guy straight on. Play with him. Make him think one thing -- (leaps in suddenly with a punch) Then do the other. BOOM. **El Martillo. El Suzie Q. El Campeon.** (drinks) **Teatro.** (both are quiet, awkward) Hey, **es que**, I'm your **compadre**. I'm doing this as a friend. I'm doing this for **La Raza**. In my day, Quinn, he'd be dead. You get to be my age, you know what's right and what's wrong. Nobody got to tell you. You just know. I mean, the little shit can't even speak Spanish! Don't even speak his own language! Too many **cabrones** like that running around these days, breaking all the traditions. No respect! Don't know who the hell they are. That's what's wrong. He ain't pure.

MANTEQUILLA
Pure nothing is pure.

ALACRAN
The way we feel about you, that's pure. That's real. That's how come you got to win for us. We love you, son. We love you to death.

He embraces Mantequilla too hard and for too long. When there is no response of affection, he pulls away.

ALACRAN
Hey. **Cabron** like me sticks around the gym as long as me, he must have some kinda reason, no? He must be good for something. Not like I'm some kinda stiff, some kinda **pinche** has-been.... They forget...I was Number Two in the World for a whole year -- (breaks off, suddenly like little boy) But it ain't like I'm asking for nothing....

Mantequilla rises, about to exit. Looks at Alacran awhile.

MANTEQUILLA
Oye. You come. You work my corner.

ALACRAN
You mean it? (MANTEQUILLA nods, exits)
Teatro.

DRUMS. Garnet and Pedro together, alone.

GARNET
Useta be like that. Like you. Getting smacked around. Fighting all the time, fighting myself. I had to fight to find the music. I had to fight. That's why you gotta stay focused, man. That's why you gotta keep your head. That's why you gotta be who you are --

PEDRO
You ever had a dog?

GARNET
Say what?

PEDRO
Have you ever had a dog?

GARNET
Been bit too many times.

PEDRO
Had a bull terrier.

GARNET
Got bit by one of those. Muthafuckas don't let go.

PEDRO
That's what they're trained to do. Fighting dogs don't let go. But you don't have to fight 'em. Mine was a good boy. Useta sleep together. I ain't ashamed. He was my friend. So when he got old, I wanted to be there for him. I just wanted to be there. So this one time he sorta arched his back like he was stretching and real slow he just sorta fell over. I was shouting "Come back! Come back boy!" but he wasn't breathing. His lips were blue. I never seen a dog turn blue. And all I could do was hold him and tell him to come back....And he did. (silence) After that, the both of us kinda lived closer. So that, when he finally did... die...I cried, sure. But it wasn't outa fear. It was just for missing...that closeness. That -- (can't find the word) Whatever that thing is. (silence) Since then, I never really been that close to anybody. I never let myself. I never had the chance. Till now.

Pedro touches Garnet. After a moment, Garnet moves away.

GARNET
Why'd he come back?

PEDRO
He came 'cause I called him. I guess what I wanna know is -- Can you get that close? Is it all right? I feel it -- that stretching -- I feel it coming on. Coming closer every day. And I don't have anybody. Nobody to call me back. (beat) What I wanna know is, if I should ever come to that -- that thing, that place --who's gonna be there for me? Who's gonna call me?

A moment, then:

GARNET
Pey-dro. (like calling a dog) Here, Peydro. (moves close) Here, Pedro.

PEDRO
Will you?

GARNET
Will you?

Tenderly they come together, hold each other close. Slowly they kiss. At first it's brotherly, sweet. But more and more each man's desire takes over. Both are scared, both are hungry. Garnet takes off Pedro's shirt, then his own. They slowly go to their knees. Up to this point, it's very romantic. Then, Pedro steps up the activity. Almost like rough trade, both men start to grab and clutch. It's confusing, part turn-on, part actual fight. It starts with a bite by Pedro, which causes Garnet to cry out in pain and pull away, which leads to Pedro hitting Garnet, pure reflex. A trickle of blood comes from Garnet's split lip.

PEDRO
I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

GARNET
(wiping the blood with his hand) That's all you know. You poor dense muthafucka. You're just like your dog. But you're not a dog. time to sleep in your own bed.

PEDRO
What?

GARNET
Get outa here.

A dog barks. DRUMS. The gym. Mantequilla trains slavishly, savagely. Alacran urges him on with a new cocky attitude. Reporter interviews Vinal. DRUMS drown out the words, but we can see him speak with his hands -- colorful, nasty. Then Pedro enters. Hitting the mitts with Jack.

JACK
Jab, jab, jab -- Here I come -- That's it! -- Now add the hook! --
To the body -- Yeah! -- Now finish him off --!!!

BELL rings. Jack pulls off the mitts, but Pedro keeps punching the air hard as he can, sweat pouring off him.

JACK
Hey. Enough already. (no response) Quit it now. What you tryna do, kill yourself? (no response) Jesus, Kid --! (throws his arms around him) What the hell you doing?!!! (slaps him) WAKE UP!!!

PEDRO
I'M AWAKE!!!

JACK
Good! Shit. (winded) What you working so hard? Ain't gonna have no fight left in ya! Now sit your ass and down and don't get up till I tell you, or you wanna see me mad? What the hell is wrong with you --?

PEDRO
I can't tell y--

JACK
Did I tell you to speak? Now you listen. You the Man. You don't got to prove nothing to nobody. Least of all me. 'Cause I think you're beautiful. Hell, I think you're the tail of the dog. So don't be showing off to me. Save yer strength.

PEDRO
Jack, I --

JACK
Nuh! You save it. And *use* it. You a fighter! All you need to do is eat, and sleep, and dream good dreams. That's all you need.

PEDRO
I need to sweat this outa me.

JACK
This is life and death we're talking! (throws him a towel) Grab a shower. And cool yer damn heels. (stops him) I am here for you.

PEDRO
Are you?

JACK
'Course I am. Dammit, you won the title for fighting, not fucking! Long as you defend your title like a man, -- (breaks off) Sorry, son. I'm sorry.

PEDRO
Now I see. You are what you were before. Just everybody knows. (nearly crying)I thought the belt was supposed to protect me.

JACK
Naw. See it's you got to protect the belt. (beat) What? You don't want it no more? Hell I'm half-dead and I still want that fucking belt. Shit, Kid. You' the champ! We'd give our lives to be you. To be you. Don't that make you feel nothing? (PEDRO exits) What the fuck this world coming to?

Sarita enters. Jack jumps up startled.

JACK
What can I do for ya?

SARITA
I'm looking for Petey. (no response) Petey. Pete Quinn.

JACK
You mean the champ?

SARITA
Petey to me.

JACK
(laughs) He'll be right back. (looks her over) Don't

get too many women 'round here, 'cept of course the lady boxers. I seen a lady knock a fella down, not once but twice, right there in that ring.

SARITA
What? Supposed to let the guy win? (throws a blow) Spare me.

JACK
Say, you all right.

SARITA
I'm washed in the blood. My dad boxed.

JACK
Would I know him? (she shakes her head no) We boxers hang tight.

SARITA
Richie Lemos. (JACK involuntarily rubs his nose) You knew him?

JACK
Only by reputation. Only by reputation.

SARITA
Dad liked dogs. Petey raised 'em. Dad showed Petey how to box.

JACK
(snaps fingers) I knew I'd seen that style of his!

SARITA
Yep. He was a banger and a comer.

JACK
Like you. The thing your dad had is what the Spanish fighters call **mackismo**.

SARITA
Machismo.

JACK
Yeah, that too.

Pedro enters.

SARITA
Hey.

PEDRO
Hey.

JACK
Hey! Well all right. I'll leave ya with the fine lady. (to SARITA) Come around again, I'll tell ya a coupla stories about your dad. (exits, to himself) Hot dog! I knew that boy flew straight! Thank you, Jesus.

PEDRO
How's your dad?

SARITA
Sick.

PEDRO
Sorry.

SARITA
Don't be, it's just tequila. The dog?

PEDRO
Buried him.

SARITA
Boy, that dog was a sex fiend. Remember, he used to --

PEDRO
You remember that?

SARITA
Prop up one leg and whack off with the other! Who could forget a thing like that? That was hot stuff! Who taught him that, I wonder?

PEDRO
He's the one taught me.

SARITA
Yeah, right. Remember that fight? That big black shepherd with the scars? Your boy was so dumb he tried to mount that killer dog! Jeez. All that blood spurting out of your boy's head, but his tail was wagging! I guess he didn't feel it. Crazy.... So is it true? You know....Queer? 'Cause I mean I been scouring my brain for clues, and it's not like you wore high heels or carried a purse or --(PEDRO motions for her to stop) So I'm nervous. But you wouldn't go out with me. And I wasn't that bad then, was I?

PEDRO
I don't go out with people.

SARITA
You oughta try it sometime.

PEDRO
I hurt people.

SARITA
Love hurts people. Sometimes I feel just like your dog, trying to make love, and just getting bit. Just getting cut off. And like some stupid dog in heat coming back for me. Trying to feel that close, that --

PEDRO
That feeling -- that thing? It can't last.

SARITA
That's why you gotta grab it while you can.

Pedro leans in and kisses her. She kisses back. It gets passionate fast. Then each pulls away.

SARITA
No.

PEDRO
I can't.

SARITA
Whoa.

PEDRO
Sorry.

SARITA
Quit being sorry!

PEDRO
Well it's weird!

SARITA
Yeah, so?

PEDRO
So I want --(stops)

SARITA

What? (he struggles) What do you want? Spit it out!

Amazingly, with a freedom he has not shown before, Pedro does a Jackie Wilsonesque dance move.

SARITA

What was that?!!!

PEDRO

I dunno!!!

SARITA

I'd like to see you do that in the ring!

PEDRO

I wish I could.

SARITA

Your dog. When he killed that dog, he jumped straight in the air. I'll never forget that. Straight in the air. I better go find my man.

PEDRO

Me too.

Off her double-take, GUT BUCKET ROCK N ROLL. Green Room. Club door opens. Garnet smokes. Stained cummerbund, tie undone, hard-working man in show business. Pedro appears, out of breath, trying to smile.

PEDRO

Hey. Been looking all over. (icy pause) Got your gig back. I thought you weren't gonna impers --

GARNET

Hey, we all impersonate. (snaps fingers) And I'm pretty good at it too.

PEDRO

I'm sorry. I'm really sorry for what I done. But I'm back. I'll make it up to ya. And I wanna --

GARNET

Don't do that. Don't get close.

PEDRO

I'm not gonna hurt you.

GARNET

I'm not afraid of you or any man. I just don't wanna get bit.

PEDRO

I'm sorry --

GARNET

I'm about sick of hearing you say you're sorry. Sorry for what? For your dreams? Please. You ain't the first or the last to dream about another man. For what you done to me? I've been through worse. Be sorry for what you done to yourself. And what about you? You came to me, with your sorry-ass dog story. And was there for you. I was there. But you wouldn't go there. No, you'd rather take a royal ass-kicking. Let the Cuban kill you for your sins. For your dreams. Being sorry. As if that'll wash you clean. Make you the man. Got no clue, Kid. Not a clue in the world. (beat) You know what I see what I watch a fight? I watch the men. Holding on as much as hitting. And I see them in their corners getting massaged and Vaselined and whispered in their ear. I see the closeness. And I see the fear. The fear of what you can and cannot touch. No wonder they go out and try to kill each other. And then I see you. And then I really see. No wonder they cut you off. No wonder they want you dead. If you're their champ, then what the hell does that make them? (PEDRO about to touch him) What are you gonna do, hit me?

PEDRO

Come to the fight.

GARNET

That's all you know. Grabbing and clutching and punching and kicking ass. That's love. Or the closest you've ever been.

PEDRO

It is love.

GARNET

It ain't l--

PEDRO

It's my love.

GARNET

Well it ain't mine. Look. Forget me. Forget all this. Get down to business. Don't be looking to nobody. And watch yerself in them clinches. That's what I forgot to do.

PEDRO

Come to the fight. Please.

GARNET

(MUSIC vamps from within) That's my set.

PEDRO

Come to the fight!

GARNET

Nope. You ain't gonna bite me twice. (adopts his performance attitude) Be who you are, man. Who you are. (INTRO MUSIC)

PEDRO

Come back.

GARNET

Gotta go.

Pedro reaches out, but Garnet brushes past him. A moment later he hits the stage singing a James Brown song to live accompaniment. Then he sees Pedro. Stops singing, drops the attitude, exits mid-song. DRUMS. The arena. An uneasy animal hum from the packed crowd. Ringside, hallways, dressing rooms.

TV REPORTER

It's Decima versus Quinn, and the Garden is packed to the rafters! Good evening fans, and welcome --

VINAL

Oye nena! Come on baby! **Dame** candy!

SARITA

Please.

VINAL

Wilfred Vinal, hundred sixty pounds of love. **Veng**a **a verme**.

SARITA

Listen, Wilfred, you're a walking catastrophe.

VINAL
I could go blind dreaming of you.

DRUMS. She rushes past him down the hall.
Alacran, dressed as Mantequilla's cornerman, stops her.

SARITA
Let me see him.

ALACRAN
See him after, **chula**.

SARITA
I wanna see him now.

ALACRAN
Para que?

SARITA
None of your goddamn business.

ALACRAN
It is my business.

SARITA
Hijo de la chingada!

ALACRAN
Nice mouth you got there. If you were my girl --

SARITA
I'm not your girl. Please. I need to see him.

ALACRAN
He told me to tell you. He'll see you after the fight.

SARITA
That's a lie!

ALACRAN
Sometimes, **chula**, a man's gotta get down to business.

DRUMS.

TV REPORTER
There's a circus atmosphere due to the Vinal allegations, not to mention a certain amount of bad blood between the two --

ALACRAN
(in the dressing room) **Que onda, chulo?**

MANTEQUILLA
Where my girl?

ALACRAN
How should I know? Prob'ly out with some other guy. (MANTEQUILLA angers) Who the hell knows?

MANTEQUILLA
She no come?

ALACRAN
She no come.

MANTEQUILLA
You sure?

ALACRAN
My business to be sure.

JACK
(in the other dressing room) Hey Champ. You okay? (PEDRO looks sick) Butterflies. Be all right once you're in there.

PEDRO
Not butterflies.

VINAL
Oye mami, you come back for me.

SARITA
Cabron! (takes a swing at him)

VINAL
That's what I call a dream match. You and me baby!

SARITA
Goddamn this whole **chingadera!**

VINAL
Munga munga, baby!

DRUMS.

MANTEQUILLA
You sure she no come?

ALACRAN
How many times I gotta tell you --?

MANTEQUILLA
She always come. (tears of rage) She always come.

ALACRAN
Not always.

Mantequilla swats the air viciously. He's a lethal weapon.

JACK
Go throw some water on your face boy. Try to take a piss.

ALACRAN
Andale! Vamanos!

JACK
If you gotta throw up, do it now. When you come back, we gonna kick some ass!

DRUMS. The urinal. Pedro spits up. Then Vinal enters.

PEDRO
Exit's down the hall.

VINAL
Who's going? I got business.

PEDRO
Me too.

VINAL
(looks him over) Not exactly god-like.

PEDRO
Get away from me.

VINAL
So you guys gonna fight or fuck? Betcha Mantequilla's getting some right now. That little bitch of his sucking on his candy. Don't worry. She'll take the edge off. Better he gets fucked. If he don't he's liable to kill your ass. So he's taken care of. So. How about you?

PEDRO
What?

VINAL
'Cause hey, I came to see a fight. I can watch guys fuck anytime I want down by the docks -- (PEDRO tries to exit, VINAL blocks the way) Buy hey. Here's everybody getting fucked but you. Poor little Piccolo Pete. So I said to myself, why not come down and see the Man himself? Find out what he needs. God knows he needs some, and he sure as hell don't know how to get any on his own. So here I am. (VINAL kneels)

PEDRO
Hey.

VINAL
Come on. Take me. (kisses PEDRO's belly) Go on. Take me.

PEDRO
What do you mean?

VINAL
What do you think? (loosens PEDRO's trunks)

PEDRO
What are you doing?

VINAL
(kisses) Letting you know. Who you are.

PEDRO
What?

VINAL
Who you are, man. Who you are.

PEDRO
What do you mean?!!!

They grab and wrestle.

VINAL
Oh you like to clinch!! Almost like the real thing -- (yanks him close) Except it ain't.

PEDRO
Goddamn Rican bastard puto **MARICON!!!!**

VINAL
I know who you are!!!

PEDRO
I'll fucking kill you!!!

VINAL
Everybody knows who you are!!!

PEDRO
I'll fucking kill you!!!

Jack enters.

VINAL
Now even you know who you are.

JACK
Get the fuck outa here. (to PEDRO) Time to go. They exit. DRUMS loud and furious.

VINAL
(checks himself in the mirror) Put the blade to the heat.

DRUMS. The ring like a pit. The fighters enter to cheers and jeers. Microphone drops from the rafters.

ANNOUNCER
Ladies and Gentlemen -- Fifteen Rounds for the Undisputed Championship of the World --

Sarita and Vinal separated by a single empty seat.

SARITA
Amorcito!!!! (MANTEQUILLA doesn't see her)

VINAL
Hey baby. You're sitting next to the next champion of the world, soon as these two fuck each other to death --

SARITA
It'll never happen.

VINAL
Don't jinx me, baby --

SARITA
(stares right through him) Never.

BUZZER indicates ten-second warning. DRUMS. Mantequilla goes to one knee, genuflects. BELL rings. Round One. They touch gloves. The fight begins. We see the action as a series of snapshots, an accelerated fight punctuated by DRUMS. Punches land both ways.

JACK
(from his corner) That's it!

ALACRAN
(from his corner) **Como martillo!**

JACK
That's my boy --!

ALACRAN
Watch it now, watch it --!

VINAL
Wasn't nothing.

Pedro lands hard. Mantequilla clinches. Pedro doesn't take the fight to him. BELL rings.

VINAL
What the fuck was that?

JACK
(as PEDRO returns to his corner) Why you let him off the hook?

ALACRAN
(as MANTEQUILLA returns to his corner) Why you let him hit you like that?

VINAL
I could take both these guys on their best night.

ALACRAN
You need to do more!

JACK
Give me more!

BUZZER.

REFEREE
Round Four!

BELL rings. They fight. Pedro out of rhythm.
Mantequilla scores well. Pedro gets hit flush on the chin.

ALACRAN
En el higado! El higado!

Mantequilla staggers Pedro.

ALACRAN
Que chulo!

JACK
Aw hell! (BELL rings. Jack meets Pedro with a wet sponge, while Alacran applies Vaseline to Mantequilla's face.)

MANTEQUILLA
Dyou see that?

ALACRAN
What?

MANTEQUILLA
He smiling at me!

ALACRAN
Another round like that, he ain't gonna have any teeth left to smile. Looking beautiful. **Como chocolate** --!

JACK
You okay? You okay?

SARITA
(screaming towards MANTEQUILLA) Baby, you look beautiful!!!!

BUZZER.

REFEREE
Round Seven!

BELL rings. Mantequilla flurries, then toys with Pedro, dancing and making him miss badly.

JACK
Hit him!

ALACRAN
Muevete!

VINAL
What is this, a first date?

ALACRAN
Muevete!

JACK
Hit him!

Mantequilla lands a five-punch combination. Pedro doesn't fight back. BELL rings.

JACK
What are you doing?

ALACRAN
Play with him!

JACK
What are you doing?

REFEREE
Watch the heads!

JACK
Tell the other guy!!

ALACRAN
One thing -- then do the other!

JACK
You think this is a game?

ALACRAN
Play with him!

JACK
This is a fucking dogfight!

REFEREE
Watch the heads!

ALACRAN
Vete a la chingada, idiota!

REFEREE
Just watch the heads!

JACK
You hear me? You hear me?

BUZZER.

REFEREE
Seconds out!

JACK
My God, Kid! You got it right there in the palm of your hand!

REFEREE
Round Eleven!

JACK
Chance of a lifetime --!

BELL rings.

JACK
All our lives! We been waiting all our lives! (The men fight viciously like dogs. Both are staggered. Again and again, they summon up their best. As the BELL rings, each man lands potentially his best shot. Neither goes down. Round over, Pedro grins, smiles all the way back to his corner.)

MANTEQUILLA
He smiling at me!!!

ALACRAN
Matelo!!!

JACK
Kill the muthafucka!!!
SARITA
Just hold on!

VINAL
FAGS!!!

REFEREE
(hears VINAL) May be a fag, but he got a helluva left hook!

BUZZER.

MANTEQUILLA

I go dead him.

REFEREE

Last Round. Touch gloves.

BELL rings. Pedro offers his glove. Mantequilla punches him instead, then slams home the Suzie Q. Pedro staggers, badly hurt against the ropes. Mantequilla hammers him mercilessly. Pedro won't go down. Mantequilla, exhausted now, stops. Both are weak, spent. Alacran screams to get Mantequilla's attention.

ALACRAN

TEATRO!!!! (Mantequilla leans in and kisses Pedro full on the lips.)

FREEZE. Then Mantequilla lands the Suzie Q with everything he has. Pedro goes down. Slow motion as DRUMS beat out Pedro's heartbeat. He's on his knees, unable to focus. Mantequilla in the neutral corner, exhausted. Crowd on its feet, cheers wildly, full of bloodlust. Pedro looks around. Then he sees Garnet in a perfect suit and pompadour, standing beside the empty seat. Pedro rises. Mantequilla's hand is hurt. Still he goes in for the kill. Hits Pedro once, twice. Then misses the third as Pedro slips the blow, and suddenly in regular speed, connects with a monster shot to the jaw. Now in vicious REAL TIME, Pedro punches Mantequilla over and over. Mantequilla is tangled on the ropes, unable to go down. Pedro hits him again and again. Finally the Referee steps in. Mantequilla hangs lifeless. Pedro in ring center, like a pit bull, bathed in sweat, rejoices and jumps in the air. Flashbulbs FREEZE this moment in time. Crowd noise explodes. Then all sounds stop. Pedro, now able to focus, sees Mantequilla falling slowly to the canvas, half-smiling, dying. Pedro goes to him like a lover, takes him in his arms.

PEDRO

Come back.

Garnet begins to sing, something hard and strong like James Brown's "THIS IS A MAN'S WORLD." Pedro kisses Mantequilla. The dog barks like crazy.

END OF PLAY

Blades, Tears, Music & Laughter

Interview, Fall 1996 with William Nericcio

Nericcio: Blade to the Heat has been knocking around in your head for quite some time now. It began as a play called The Tears Will Tell It All and I wondered if you couldn't say a little something about where the play has come, how old the play is and about its evolution from The Tears Will Tell It All to Blade to the Heat.

Mayer: Well, it has been a while. It's been about five years altogether, although it's probably been my whole life. (laughs) I'll tell you, probably the truest answer is that the play really started when we were cleaning out one of my mother's closets and this Jackie Wilson '45 record fell on the floor and I said, "What's that?" And she said, "Oh, that's the music your father courted me to." I said, "Oh wow." So I put it on and fell in love with Jackie Wilson and that sort of started everything going. That and watching my father watch the fights...and my grandfather as well. Between those things I started to get a sense of rhythm and blues and boxing. Poor me, but that became my big obsession. And I think about 1991 I was here in Los Angeles and was raking the leaves and I had a sort of thought come to me about boxing and sexuality and if there would happen to have ever been a gay boxer. I figured there must have been. I had even heard a little bit about a fighter... and so I began to think about it and I called a friend, actually I called the man who is now directing the play, Ron Link, and I said, "What would you think about a play about a gay boxer?" He said, "I don't know, why don't you write it." And he sort of hung up. I think I interrupted a poker game or something. And so I said, "Oh, o.k." And I went back to raking the leaves and then I put the rake away and I started writing. And five days later, I had the play. And to be brutally honest, one thing that also helped with the play was the death of my great dog Balder. He died about three days into the writing of it. And after people see the play, they'll know that my dog is in the play because I honored him throughout. He was very much on my mind and was very much in the play. In those days and weeks before and during the writing of the work, Balder was between death and life and that was something I knew very well at that moment, something I wrote about. Anyway, so that was *The Tears Will Tell It All*, the name of a Jackie Wilson song. And I had some good luck with that--we had a couple of readings at the Mark Taper in the New York Festival and Gordon Davidson even did announce it once as a possible name stage play back in 1992. It didn't happen then. And that was really the life of *The*

Tears Will Tell It All. I had a reading also at the Manhattan Theater Club, and then George Wolfe picked it up at the Public Theater and he told me to change the name so then it became *Blade to the Heat*. My girlfriend tells me that they really are two different plays and I sort of agree with her. In a lot of ways there is something about the titles has something to do with the feel of the plays. Something about *The Tears Will Tell It All*... I don't know. *Blade to the Heat* I think is a bit of a harder-edged play. I've actually been spending most of my re-writes now trying to bring some of the poetry and the emotion and the intimacy back into *Blade to the Heat*, to put *The Tears Will Tell It All* back into *Blade to the Heat*.

Nericcio: Can you tell me where the title Blade to the Heat comes from or what it refers to, specifically?

Mayer: Yeah..."blade to the heat," Bob Dylan aficionados will recognize it as a line from Dylan's song "Joker Man." "Put the priests in the pockets, put the blade to the heat, take the motherless children off the street and bless them at the feet of a harlot." I just like that. I mean I don't think Bob invented that phrase. I think he picked it up. I think it's a Blackism, a common street phrase. And I started to use it because when I had a paper to do or some deadline to meet, I would say, "Oh man, I've got to put the blade to the heat." "I've got to get busy," is what I meant. I just kind of liked it. And when George Wolf told me to change the title or he wouldn't do my play, which is what he said, it came up and you know, it sort of sounds like a movie title, more melodramatic. But the good thing about the title is that I think it is thematic... because in metallurgy when you put a blade or some kind of knife or hard edge to the heat or the fire, you test the m-e-t-t-l-e of the m-e-t-a-l and judging from its amalgam, judging from how many parts iron to whatever, it will either break or it will get stronger. And for some obvious reasons, I thought in the world of cultural fusion that I'm writing about, in a world where Latin people live, where there's a man named Pedro Quinn who is a mixed-blooded person and where Latino and black people are trying to make it in this country in the 50's, I thought that they're living a trial by fire where they're constantly being put under the fire themselves. And either they'll break or they'll get stronger. And, uh, it's probably easier to break.

Nericcio: This play of yours...it has characters who are Puertorriqueño, Cubano...you have a Mexican-American with an Irish surname, a Mexican-American woman who hates the word Chicano, you have an African-American character, etc. For an entertainment audience raised on stereotypes like Speedy Gonzales and Juan Valdez, you've given them quite a lot to figure out in this play--people for who

Latinos are one stock type. Tell me about this. In other words, tell me about Latinos and the American theater, how it is the playwright works with all the types or I would imagine against type?

Mayer: Good question. How to approach this... Well the unfunny answer is just that I want to write about those people in this country who haven't had plays written about them. And I'm sorry to say, there have not been enough plays about black and Latino people in previous generations. Thank goodness for the wonderful plays of Luis Valdez and August Wilson and others--José Rivera writing about his father and this is great. But I think there are whole groups of people who have yet to see themselves on stage. I think there's something exciting about celebrating the lives of people who are now dead, or some that have survived--like my grandfather and my mother, celebrating lives that would otherwise be forgotten. That's the unfunny side. The funny thing is I think that watching TV and reading comics and everything, the Latino character one expect to run into is going to be part-cutchee-cutchee girl and part-this and part-that, you know, part-Charo and part...

Nericcio: ...oily, swarthy rake...

Mayer: yea...Carmen Miranda and Emiliano Zapata rolled into one, I don't know. I don't know what the parts are. You know better than I with that archeology project on Speedy Gonzales and Rita Hayworth. So I was interested in actually breaking it down a little bit more. Also as a Latino man, I happen to know that there is a great deal of...well, definition, to be nice, but a great deal of bias from Latinos on Latinos, I don't know how to say that...

Nericcio: No, you say it well, in the play it's quite clear there's this sort of nation-specific animosity...

Mayer: Oh, really?

Nericcio: Yeah

Mayer: Yeah, patriotic kind of bullshit...

Nericcio: ...between the Puertorriqueños and the Mexicanos, and the Mexicanos and the Cubanos. From the point of view of someone who studies the appearance of Latino characters, in all kinds of American entertainment vehicles, literature, television and theater, one thing that strikes me about Blade to the Heat is that your spectator is forced to come to terms with the fact that you can't just generalize about 'Latinos' or Latinos. These people are all different: Vinal is specific. He is not Cubano, he is not Mexicano. He is where he is from. And the same

for the rest of the characters: Pedro Quinn, with that wonderful last name...

Mayer: (laughs)

Nericcio: ...you know, just makes it that much more difficult for us to place these types, to place these characters.

Mayer: That's the way I like it. I like the element of surprise. Particularly when it has to do with people of color. I like our audiences to have to listen to every word. And to be surprised at their actions. I learned about the schisms among Latin people through boxing and I actually took part in it actively. Because you watch the fights long enough and you see the greatest fights are often between the Mexican champion and the Puerto Rican champion... the promoters have known this forever. You match the best white guy against the best black guy, the best Mexican against the best Black-American. In the old days, which is in the play, it was the best Irishman against the best Italian, whatever would improve the gate. And that's something essential in boxing, that is, the national side of it, the patriotic side. There are your champions and that's why you love them.

Nericcio: Funny thing about the sport of Boxing, it seems the perfect allegorical playground within which to explore the minds of men. From a playwright's point of view, tell me what the ring allows you to do on the stage.

Mayer: What the ring allows on the stage?

Nericcio: Well, it seems to lend itself to all kinds of epic or quasi-allegorical readings...

Mayer: It's a strong metaphor. And, you know, Brecht said that boxing is the best theater. Or he said something like that (laughs), I probably missed something... but he was right. Thank goodness Ron Link, my excellent director and I, we both can't help but think in boxing metaphors. I mean, before this play was even in existence, we were like that. So as men, for some reason we see our lives as a contest. And not only are we fighting our opponents or many opponents, but we're fighting ourselves and we're trying to hit and not get hit.

Nericcio: Right.

Mayer: ...and to be beautiful and to be in sync. That's easier said than done. Usually only half of the time in your career that you really are as good as you can be. So, yeah, it's a great metaphor for love and life and I hope I do justice to it.

Nericcio: Here's a good jump cut question. Still having to do with the ring, tell me about the difference between the production in New York and the production in Los Angeles.

Mayer: (excited) Oh well, this is the thing I wanted to say. You know, it's really great because in the history of the American theater and particularly recently, but always, you would take a play and you'd start in some regional place and work on your play and then you'd take it to New York and that would be your big moment. Well, (laughs) just because of whatever reason, I've done it the opposite way. Because I started in New York and luckily and very happily, I had a wonderful production with George Wolfe at the Public Theater and that was great. But now I'm taking it to L.A. and in a sense, L.A. is my, dare I say this, L.A. is my Broadway because my heart is here. I love L.A., as Randy Newman would say, I really do. And this means a lot more to me in a lot of ways. New York and the Public was business and great fun. But this is really a homecoming. (laughs) It's good for me in a way.

Nericcio: Let me ask you this then, are you a Los Angeles writer, a Chicano writer, a Latino writer? How do you think of yourself? Or are you just a plain old hack at the typewriter?

Mayer: I'm more often hack than not. (laughs). But I dabble, I dabble in all of the above. I have ten plays, and I'm glad to say that I think all of the readable plays I've ever written are different. Even if they have the same themes, they're very, very different in style and they're about different kinds of characters and often in different time periods. I just don't want to write the same plays over and over again. I know it'll happen. But I'm going to do my best to be eclectic and broad thinking. That's attractive to me. Without lying. I'm trying to be truthful and write from what I know but I'm going to try to stretch those parameters as far as I can.

Nericcio: Buzz Magazine recently named you as one of the...How did they put it?

Mayer: One of the hundred coolest...

Nericcio: (laughs) Yes, one of the hundred coolest. And part of this recent rise in your celebrity quotient has to do with your rights to Blade To The Heat being bought by a kind of important or, at least, well known person...

Mayer: Yeah, I would say it's a seminal person of our generation...

Nericcio: I think she would like that. Seminal. A seminal woman. Yes.

Mayer: A seminal woman. Definitely.

Nericcio: Tell us about it.

Mayer: Well, Madonna came to see the play in New York and apparently saw it several times and liked it enough to buy it for a movie, to buy the option and to hire me to write the screenplay for a movie that, hopefully, she will direct. And we'll see what happens, for there's been many 'a slip twixt the cup and the lip.' It could really never happen. There's a million stories in this city about that. But I can say that in my dealings with Madonna, she's been fantastic. She's a wonderful, wonderful collaborator, very knowledgeable and she really knows the subjects, really knows boxing, really knows the Latin culture. And obviously knows something about sexuality too. So if we ever do make this film, I think she's the man for the job, the right man for the job. I really do.

Nericcio: So Madonna's interest in the play led to some good "Buzz"...

Mayer: ...yeah, I do think that had a little something to do with my getting on the list, and I appear their alongside some really cool people, like Nick Van Exel of the Lakers, that gorgeous bus-poet Marisela Norte, and Tim Roth the actor. I'm happy to be there. I hope they're coming on opening night. We've invited the so-called 100 coolest. You're 101. (laughs)

Nericcio: More like number 793, my digs are in San Diego, and I just don't rate on that list--I don't know what would happen if a professor of English got placed on a Coolest list--I might have to change professions. But let's leave LA, as you did in your formative writing years: though your heart is in Los Angeles and you're a writer of the Southland, you did most, if not all, of your higher education on the East Coast and in England. Can you tell us a little about where you learned to write?

Mayer: I was born in Hollywood and I feel myself more and more like I'm glad to be back. Because yes, I've been away for a long time. I lived in New York, I was in England, but I've been back now seven years and I really feel this to be my home. I went to Cornell in upstate New York and I went to Oxford with the college of Worcester, and then I did my Master's at Columbia University, so I'm totally over-educated. (laughing) But can you believe it, I tend to write about people who don't have a college education. But thank goodness I got to work in these places. I think that one thing that has held me in good stead is my great love

for English and American literature. And that would include anything from Shakespeare to Nabokov and I guess even beyond that to...who do I like now?

Nericcio: Tennessee Williams?

Mayer: That's it, Tennessee Williams is good. I'm a Eugene O'Neil man myself. But I have an incredible love for the classic American theater, that's in part to my mentor at Columbia, Howard Klein who really taught me to study the continuum of writers so that I don't have to invent the wheel every time. And I derive great strength from the plays of William Saroyan and Luis Valdez and basically am drawn to those tallest trees in our American theatrical forest. Also, I have to give credit to my mentor at Cornell, John Stallworthy who I think will be a Poet Laureate, who really deserves to be Poet Laureate in England...Stallworthy, the great poet of love. So yes, and that's of course where I met Carlos Fuentes, who's a friend, and his teaching assistant Bill Nericcio...

Nericcio: (laughs)Yes I was your teacher there, your T.A., I guess I should take credit for all the good things that have happened to you--of course, truth be told, we drank more than we waxed eloquent in those days of fire and ice...

Mayer: ...True, true...

Nericcio: Moving on, I want to hear you say something about the soul of Blade To The Heat; the play can be read as an exposé on homo-erotic desire set in that pre-eminent essential site of male essence, the boxing ring. I wonder if you might talk a little about homo-erotic, hetero-erotic desire in the boxing ring.

Mayer: Desire in the ring is how I would say it, because it's not simply homo-erotic. The thing about it is that the ring is of course the place where men of power reside, but sexuality is somewhat taboo when you talk about the ring, and that's men or women. You know old-timers will talk about how you're supposed to stay 'clean,' how you're not supposed to have sex before you fight. It's supposed to make you meaner. (laughs) And I think there's something to that. But beyond that, sex is said to dissipate your energy and your focus, which I think is probably true. And it's simply that: a taboo--something you wouldn't do in a gym. Of course, everything's been done everywhere--man/woman, man/man. When you begin to talk about men, and men in a place like a boxing gym amongst other fighters, then it really is beyond taboo, it's a really strong taboo, something really frightening. If you were to turn the sound down on the next boxing broadcast and just look at it as a sort of a piece of

ballet, you would see the two men, half-clothed, leaning and clutching and grabbing as much as punching. And you would see, in their corners, older men with their bodies draped over the younger fighters, massaging or whispering into their ears. And if you were a Martian, looking at this picture, you would not see it as perhaps we've been conditioned to see it. I mean it really is very much about love. I'm not talking about prurient stuff. I mean it's about intimate connections, an intimate connection that is physical as well as emotional...

Nericcio: Intimate connection, but focused upon destruction...

Mayer: Well that too, yeah that too. Because, of course, it is one man against another and *the* perfect victory is a knock out. Not death, but maybe a little death. I saw a fight recently and got sad afterwards and told Ron Link, you watch a great fight, you watch any fight, but particularly a great fight, you see that both men die a little bit in there. I'm not talking about years of their life or anything, but I'm talking about the kind of sacrifice they have to make in order to go the distance and entertain us as they do, they have to take terrible blows, they have to go beyond endurance. And this takes its toll. And that's one reason that I really do honor it and as much as I love boxing, it kind of hurts sometimes to watch.

Nericcio: Two last questions: the epigraph to your play is from Robert Hayden: "Only the music. And he swings oh swings; beyond complete immortal now." This reminded me of something I just ran across in my reading. Recently I've been studying Julio Cortázar's Hopscotch, (Rayuela) published in 1963 in Latin America and Spain, and in the United States in 1966. One of the things that's remarkable about the novel is the way that Cortázar orders the novel, or, better put, disorders the novel, using the music of Thelonious Monk as a kind of map or model--this allows all kinds of literary improvisation. Cortázar wants to use the tactics of jazz geniuses like Monk and John Coltrane and apply them to his fiction. I wonder if you could say something a little more about music in your work: I know you opened our conversation with a confession about your mother's Jackie Wilson '45. Tell us a little more about music and Blade To The Heat--I know it was the heart of the New York production.

Mayer: Yeah, it will be again. We're lucky. We have one of the best men in L.A. music, Maceo Hernandez with East LA Tyco, is helping us with the play with live accompaniment. The play is full of not just rhythm and blues but sounds of the mambo, New York Palladium kind of Mambo Kings play songs of love rhythms. And there's something about boxing that

lends itself to music, the way the bodies move on stage, and the rhythms and the punches, the squeak of the feet on the mat and their exhalations. It is a kind of music, especially when there are two men, again, in synch. It's a really beautiful thing. It's not by accident that I set the play in 1959, which I think was, again, to use the word from earlier, a kind of *seminal* American year. I think a lot happened in '59. Not just in this country--that was the year that Castro took command in Cuba. Music in this country was at a particularly high level, just before the censors came in and Pat Boonized and Fabian-ized the music scene. So people like Jackie Wilson and James Brown were really kind of free and really gave some great performances. The Hayden epigraph is actually from a poem about Billie Holiday, who if I'm correct died in 1959 and there's something of the time in that, there's sort of the quality of somewhere between blues and the beatnik period. The experimentation of the beat generation with their fascination with death is central to all this--the fact that death is a very attractive thing amongst the beats: that's why they wore alot of black and why they would experiment with peyote and why people like Ginsberg would write gigantic poems like *Kaddish*...and Kerouac. It's a period in which music, literature, poetry and sports...where there was a kind of darkness, a kind of very attractive darkness to the world. You know people thing about the fifties and say they were boring, that it was the heyday of the Beaver Clever generation and that may be true, for some unlucky few, but there were areas like San Francisco and Los Angeles and New York in the village where there was incredible experimentation in artistry and self-expression that I'm interested in.

Nericcio: Anything else about the music? Outside of local DJ's and musician friends, you probably have the most eclectic collection of tunes of anyone I know.

Mayer: I have a new line in the play that sort of speaks to that; it's very new. It says, "I had to be a fighter in order to find the music." I had to be a fighter in order to find the music: that's the line. In the end, I think for me, I had to listen to music in order to find the writing.

Playwright Oliver Mayer: A Profile

Interview, Fall 2000 by Raymond Saucedo

Playwright Oliver Mayer has a lot on his mind. A native of Los Angeles, the Cornell and Oxford graduate

was visiting San Diego for the sold-out, one-week only showing of his play, *The Road To Los Angeles*. He sat down with me to discuss theater, identity, sex, and his new project, *Blade to the Heat*, which is currently in the works in preparation for the big screen. Madonna (yes, the Madonna), bought the rights to the story about a 1950's nobody-turned-championship boxer forced to confront his own sexuality after a dethroned champion accuses him of being gay.

Saucedo: You once said that some playwrights are afraid of or just don't write about the beauty and danger that is life today. What do you mean by that?

Mayer: Some playwrights, in particular some of the famous and successful ones, are writing in a very reductive style that they are famous for and then they have to see the world through that prison, that style. That is unfair to the world, which is more interesting than those styles. I do have a style, but that style based on trying to get as much of a breadth of difference of population of characters as possible--to have a wide-angle, panoramic view of as many people as I could find, and then take it through history. I don't always write in the now. I write often plays that are set in the (19)40s and 1890s. The only reason to see a play that is set in say the 1890s is if it is about now, if we can see something about us that we can recognize, how history repeats itself, how we are replanting the seeds of whatever problem we want to talk about--slavery, racism, etc.

Do you think that categorizing art is similar to applying a canon to literature? Do you see any right or wrong in that?

I don't mind people who do categorize and evaluate art; it probably has to be done. But I think the artist is better off not knowing those evaluations--its better it takes place in academia. Artists need to be free of checking over their backs to see if they're leading the race, or if they're behind. Contemporary artists, and I am guilty of this myself, tend to be rivals in contention with one another. As an artist, I should be in contention with myself--that's the real contest. I think that is the problem with such artists as Mamet and Wilson, who are canonized, and they believe it, so that now, they figure that 'I'm so great, I'm going to continue to do the same things I've been doing.' It gets old; they stop; and in a certain way, they're dead. I don't want to die so soon; I've got a lot of work to do. I'm sure it'll probably happen to me one day, but I want to have gotten at least another 5 or 10 plays out.

What do you try to accomplish with your plays?

My first goal is to offer the theater to as possibility for

more people to enjoy it now. The theater belongs to us and is not a museum. It should be alive and represent live people. I think Shakespeare is so good because he is so contemporary. Shakespeare's London was not unlike this very campus: lots of violence, lots of sex, lots of death. I believe that is the world we live in today. We are all worthy subjects, and if I write lovingly and deeply about life today, then perhaps people in the future will see my work as a window to what it is like to live life today.

You said once that some playwrights are afraid of writing about the beauty and danger that is life today. What do you mean?

Some playwrights, in particular some of the famous and successful ones, are writing in a very reductive style that they are famous for and then they have to see the world through that prison, that style. I do have a style, but that style based on trying to get as much of a breadth of difference of population of characters as possible--to have a wide-angle, panoramic view of as many people as I could find. The problem with such artists as David Mamet, who are canonized, is that they believe it, so that now, they figure that 'I'm so great, I'm going to continue to do the same things I've been doing.' It gets old; they stop; and in a certain way, they're dead. I don't want to die so soon; I've got a lot of work to do.

Let's talk about that identity thing. Your mother is Mexican, and your father is, as you call him, an 'American mutt.' Did you struggle with your own identity growing up?

I didn't even realize there was a struggle until I was 11 years old. In junior high, I had to fill out one of those forms where you had to check Black/White/Latino/Whatever, and I didn't know what to do. I hadn't checked my box, and we were in Physical Education, so we were standing in line out on the field. Standing in front of me was this black guy whom everyone was afraid of because he was so much bigger and stronger. Well, he checked the white box because one of his parents was white. Everyone started laughing, and he wasn't scary anymore. I don't even know why, but I picked Latino--I made the choice. I could have picked 'White'--my name is Mayer. But something about the experience him shamed and confused made me embrace the 'darker' side. People don't ask me so much about my ethnicity anymore. When I was younger, in my twenties, some of the Chicano activists in L.A. were not as warm as others. But I've done my time. It doesn't even matter if someone calls me a Latino writer or just a writer--but they do have to deal with my body of work.

So how does being bi-cultural effect you today? Does it inform your work?

It influences me all the time. I have some political soap-boxes that I get on. Here I am making fun of Wilson and Mamet for having a singular style, and yet I've got my own. Like one thing you can always count on with a play of mine and that is there's going to be a lot of people of color in it. That's something that I can give to the world. The people that do this play thank me because many of them would never be on a play on this stage because they can't get roles. There aren't roles for them. That's seems to be something I hear over and over again, and it seems wrong to me. I happen to think they should all play in the Shx and Ibsen plays, but apparently, they can't get the roles. But they can get the roles in a play by me that calls for mixed-blooded people, black people, Latin people. So, I've got to give them some work because they deserve the opportunity. I'm not saying they're better than anybody else, but they are at least as good. So that's one of my political themes that I do think of all the time. It may not even be my strongest thing; maybe I should just write and forget about it. But I think that it's something that I can do that will change the world in a good way, even incrementally. I think about bicultural phenomenon everyday. That's one reason I live in L.A. It's very, very exciting to live in California, because more and more it means you have to be bilingual, you have to eat comida as well as American food.

Yesterday, you wore a shirt with one of the words from your play, 'Califaztlan.' Atlan is the legendary origin of the ancient Aztecs. By merging the word with 'California,' are you saying that maybe Aztlan is somewhere in California?

Yes, I think it is. Symbolically and possibly literally. Perhaps so many of us who have Latin blood in our veins come here, being the second largest place for Mexicans, Guatemalans, and Salvadorans, outside of the capital cities in these places. So many people toil and put their blood and their spirit into this world of southern California. Why shouldn't our resting place, our paradise, our heaven, our dream world rest here? I think it ought to. Aztec peoples passed through here a long time ago also. Maybe there are some very deep ties. Maybe there is a reason we all come here besides the weather and the jobs, maybe this is where we should be.

Is that your word? Did you coin 'Califaztlan.'

I've heard it once before, but never again. It's a good idea to stick California and Aztlan together. I've found another one for all the people from Huahaca who come to work in California--they call it 'Huahacalifornia.'

What prompted you to write a play about a young

Latino struggling with his own sexual identity?

The thought came to me and scared me. I was at an age, in my twenties, when it was scarier than it is now. I thought about the identity of a male boxer. I wondered if in my experience and my knowledge if I've ever seen a gay boxer before. I thought 'No, there couldn't be.' Then I thought, 'Of course, there must be.' I didn't know who. I wasn't out to out anybody. But I was thinking about what kind of life a man must have--not very unlike that of a marine. I was scared for the person, whomever that might be. Talk about danger. Then I thought if that guy's a really good fighter, then that's one thing they can't take away from him. I love boxing. There's a famous line--I don't even know who said it. Somebody said that a fighter was a 'fag.' Then somebody else responds, 'Well, he may be a fag, but he's got a helluva left hook.' I sort of thought about that, and if he's good, then he is a champion. Gay or straight, that's something they can't take away from him. In the end, what do we know about anybody? Unless we go to bed with them, how do we know? We don't know. Then again, we happen to know people that identify as straight who are, in fact, gay. I personally believe that it's our choice to do what we feel like doing. It's about warmth and flesh and blood. Today, we have the freedom to be with whom we want. In this play, I realized it would be hot and scary if this person didn't have those kind of freedoms. So I thought it had to be pre-Stonewall. That was really important. If it was post-Stonewall, he might have had the sense that he was freer because of he'd know that there were other people like him. I wanted him to be alone. I wanted to jack it up to make it as scary as I felt when I first thought of it. Then I had to write at that pitch--it's a very intense play. There's lot of sex and violence, but not just gay sex. I think with most straight men, they're constantly thinking about gay people. It's a contest thing. Comparing and contrasting. This guy who loses to the gay guy, his macho identity is shaken to its very roots. He can't even get it up with his girlfriend. Everyone laughs at him. So now he has to kill this guy--beat him to a pulp. I think that's real. You have to watch a Latin guy if he feels like his machismo has been interfered with. It's extremely dangerous. You're talking about life and death at this point. After the blood has been cleaned, he realizes how stupid he was. Playwrights just have to watch what people do, and the stupid, crazy things they do are really worth putting on stage sometimes.

What is main characters' name?

Pedro Quinn. Again, there's that mixed blood thing going on.

If you had the choice, which actor would you chose to

play Pedro?

Oh, good question. At this point, I'd like Freddie Prinze, Jr. to play it he's a heartthrob, very young. Id like to see him make the brave choice to do it, like Wil Smith did with Six Degrees of Separation, because in Hollywood, you have to be very brave to play anything other than your typical hunk. Whoever it will be, he should be in his early twenties. The point about him is that he hasn't had experience in life. His experience is in the rink. He's put his entire life into winning that title. He hasn't had a girlfriend, hasn't had a boyfriend. He hasn't lived--he's a virgin to all this, he's innocent. Then, he's disavowed of innocence in the course of the play, being beaten up for it. Really, the ring is the safest place he could be....

"It begins with the growling of wild beasts and ends with a boxing match as brutal as you are likely to see on a stage. In between, the lights throb, the bloodthirsty crowds roar and two drummers, as if possessed, beat a mad tattoo on the congas. Flashbulbs rip holes in the darkness, already fouled by clouds of smoke. Even the scene changes are explosive."

-- New York Times

"Oliver Mayer uses the bare aggression of boxing, the clarity and inevitability of the battle, to examine broader issues about the time in which we live, issues about what defines a man and the price men pay for the rigid delineations of a macho culture... Oliver Mayer is out to reclaim the ring as heroic dramatic territory."

-- Los Angeles Times

"BLADE TO THE HEAT... packs a helluva wallop... With Mayer, the metaphor of boxing is used to explore the ethnic and cultural worlds of the boxers... And Mayer doesn't stop his probing until he's into the very minds of the combatants... It's searing and soaring theater."

-- The Hollywood Reporter