

# The Joining of Historical Pageantry and the Spanish Fantasy Past: The Meeting of Señora Josefa Yorba and Lucretia del Valle

By Chelsea K. Vaughn

When Lucretia del Valle took on the role of Señora Josefa Yorba in *The Mission Play* in late 1912, she brought to the role what one reviewer described as “the atmosphere of the people who first settled in California.”<sup>1</sup> Though the reviewer credited del Valle’s past accomplishments on the Southern California stage for some of her success in portraying the Señora, del Valle’s particular ability to perform a character from California’s Spanish colonial days rested in her own family’s connections to the settlement of New Spain and the subsequent romanticization of this period in Helen Hunt Jackson’s 1884 novel *Ramona*.<sup>2</sup>

These factors created an air of authenticity around del Valle’s rendering of the Señora, while her decision to wear family heirlooms—something she had done previously in other roles—created a connection to the area’s past that promoters of the play exploited in an effort to emphasize the show’s attention to historic accuracy. Clad in a silk dress and flowered scarf with roses and a large comb decorating her dark hair, del Valle appeared every bit the Spanish lady to audience members embracing the romanticized notion of the area’s past popular at the time, and which was celebrated from San Diego to Santa Barbara.<sup>3</sup> Her appearance in the play amid scenery representing the then ruined arches of Mission San Juan Capistrano completed an image later immortalized by painter Guy Rose in his 1915 work “The Leading Lady.”<sup>4</sup>

While del Valle did not originate the role—two other actresses had portrayed the Señora before her—she appeared as Yorba more than 800 times, including on an ill-fated national tour, and came to embody the part for local audiences

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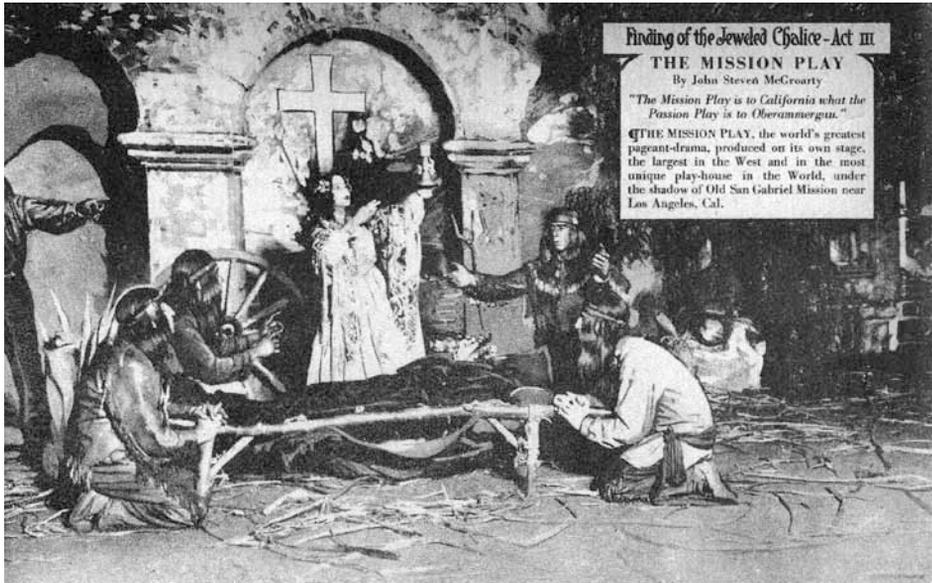
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more than any other performer.<sup>5</sup> The popular association between the actress and her role was so ingrained in the minds of Angelinos for a time that newspaper descriptions of del Valle's activities written decades after she left the role continued to mention her turn as Josefa Yorba.<sup>6</sup> Her success within the role depended upon a meeting of two popular trends—the Spanish past promoted by Charles Lummis and others and historical pageantry—that took a form particular to Southern California. These movements simultaneously celebrated California history under first Spanish then Mexican rule while seeing an importance in these eras' decline and the subsequent acquisition of California by the United States. Beyond her participation in *The Mission Play*, del Valle personified these competing impulses of looking backward while moving forward. Despite her early fame as Señora Yorba, del Valle embraced her connection to the romanticization of the area's past only to a point, choosing instead a life of political involvement dedicated, among other things, to the plight of women worldwide. This paper examines the role that made Lucretia del Valle famous and her life beyond the confines of the Mission Play itself. It also demonstrates the collective nostalgia for California's Spanish past through the life of Father Serra as well as through three well-remembered Spanish families—Yorba, del Valle, and Domínguez.<sup>7</sup>

### **“The Colored Sweep of Franciscan History”**

When Lucretia del Valle joined the cast of *The Mission Play*, the show was already on its way to becoming a local institution. The popularity the show enjoyed during its initial ten-week run in the spring of 1912, led to its more than doubling its run the following season to twenty-three weeks with two shows daily Monday through Saturday and a Sunday matinee.<sup>8</sup> The show would continue to grow in popularity into the 1920s before its eventual wane and demise in the early 1930s. Still the show enjoyed occasional revivals into the 1940s and 1950s. Written by area journalist and poet John Steven McGroarty at the behest of Mission Inn owner Frank Miller, the creation of the play itself took on mythical proportions.<sup>9</sup> As well documented by William Deverell in *Whitewashed Adobe*, the idea for *The Mission Play* supposedly followed Miller's viewing of the Oberammergau Passion Play in Germany and his assertion that such a show might similarly serve the Southland reproducing its past upon the local stage.<sup>10</sup> The ease of this inspiration, however, ignores both the recreating of California's Spanish colonial and Mexican pasts to the service of incoming Anglos—a project of which Miller was very much a part—and the larger national trend of historical pageantry to which *The Mission Play* belongs.

The “Spanish fantasy past,” a phrase first coined by journalist Carey



The postcard reads: "Finding of the Jeweled Chalice, Act III, THE MISSION PLAY By John Steven McGroarty. 'The Mission Play is to California what the Passion Play is to Oberammergau.' THE MISSION PLAY, the world's greatest pageant-drama, produced on its own stage, the largest in the West and in the most unique play-house in the World, under the shadow of Old San Gabriel Mission near Los Angeles, Cal." Author's collection.

McWilliams, describes the trend in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries during which the Anglo population of California romanticized the state's Spanish colonial and Mexican periods. Proponents of this fantasy past imagined a regional history populated by lovely señoritas and regular fiestas.<sup>11</sup> Beyond an idealization of these periods of California, this rendering of area history also served the purpose of justifying the U.S. takeover of California in the minds of area residents, first by championing the Spanish colonists as early purveyors of European civilization in the region, while understanding the Mexican period as one of decadence and degradation. Within this configuration of history, Father Junípero Serra, with his role in establishing the Alta California Franciscan missions, became a revered West Coast founding father. This idea found expression within promotional materials for *The Mission Play* describing Serra as "patriotic."<sup>12</sup> Though presumably referencing his allegiance to Spain, this description also resonated with Californians eager to tie the history of the Golden State to a larger national narrative. Simultaneous to this celebration of the Franciscan mission system, employments of the Spanish fantasy past vilified Mexican California as a period marked by laziness and an underuse of California's rich resources—a justification used repeatedly against Native Americans in the United States' westward movement across the continent. This stereotyped



Postcard, "Señora Yorba's Lamentation," Act 3, *Mission Play*, San Gabriel, California. Author's collection.

understanding of the Mexican period worked so that even events that seemed to celebrate the culture, such as the early-twentieth century phenomenon of Anglo sponsored fiestas, reinforced an idea of Mexican Californians devoting greater time to parties than working the lush lands of California.<sup>13</sup>

This dual narrative that championed Spanish settlers while denigrating the subsequent Mexican residents (without seeing a continuation between the two) appeared readily in *The Mission Play*. Taking as its theme "the colored sweep of Franciscan history from the early days of 1769, when Don Gaspar de Portolá founded his little garrison of Catalonian soldiers and padres on the shore of False Bay, San Diego, until the later invasion of the 'Gringo' in 1847," McGroarty's *Mission Play* contained this sweep of history within a prologue and three acts.<sup>14</sup> Described within a later program as a "prelude in pantomime" planned by "a master mind," the prologue recreated pre-contact California and the "inevitable approach of the white man—spelling [the Native Californian's] doom and extinction."<sup>15</sup>

Act I opens onto San Diego Bay in 1769 and chronicles the difficulties of establishing the first Franciscan mission in Alta California, a scene in which Father Serra's dedication perseveres over everyone else's readiness to abandon the mission. Act II skips ahead to 1784 and the already established Mission San Carlos in Carmel. Here the major action centers around a dispute between Father Serra and fellow historical figure Captain Fernando de Rivera, the Comandante (Governor) of California, over the marriage of the fictional "half-blood Indian Girl" Anita—a conflict in which Serra and the mission system prevail. The final act

occurs over sixty years later in 1847 in the ruins of Mission San Juan Capistrano. The character Señora Yorba appears within this scene lamenting the passing of the Spanish colonial period and marveling at the continued faith of those Indians converted to Catholicism by the Franciscan Missions.<sup>16</sup>

Though ostensibly documenting the “Gringo” takeover of the state, the ruining of the mission within the play occurred during the Mexican period of California history, thereby promoting the aspect of the Spanish fantasy past that vilifies Mexican rule of the Golden State. *The Mission Play* originally included a different ending that indicted the United States in the decline of Spanish California along with contributing to the poor fate of Native Californians. Here, a Señora Domínguez instead of Señora Yorba encounters a group of Mission Indians hoping to bury their deceased Franciscan leader within the ruins of Mission San Juan Capistrano.<sup>17</sup> Confronted by an “Americano” who is then in ownership of the property and planning to remove the mission ruins, gunfire ensues from the Native American characters and from which a stray shot kills the Señora. The Americano, out of long held feelings of love for Señora Domínguez, vows to protect the mission and the legacy of Spanish California.<sup>18</sup>

Though this ending supported efforts by area boosters to preserve the missions, it perhaps ran contrary to how the Domínguez family hoped for their ancestry to be portrayed upon the stage. McGroarty utilized historical events in the writing of the play, yet he often altered them in significant ways. The major conflict in Act II, for example, was based upon Captain Rivera’s demanding to take custody of an Indian who had rebelled against the Franciscans rather than centering upon a young woman that Rivera wanted as his bride. In creating the original Act III, McGroarty was possibly inspired by the 1846 American occupation of the rancho belonging to Manuel Domínguez, but the transformation of this event into one in which Señora Domínguez attracted the affections of an Americano before being violently shot may have been unpopular with her descendants who were still able to remember the actual person.<sup>19</sup>

By the time del Valle came into the role at the start of the second season the character had been changed to Señora Josefa Yorba and the play ended on a significantly different note. While the Señora (now Yorba) still meets a group of Native Americans hoping to bury their deceased padre on the grounds of Mission San Juan Capistrano, the action unfurled differently from there. The Americano notably disappears from the scene with the drama coming instead from Yorba’s discovery of a golden chalice that the Mission Indians had hoped to bury along with the Franciscan. Upon finding the chalice Yorba declares, “Oh, spirit of Father Junípero look down from the star-spangled pavements of heaven on the glory of your work. Your dusky neophytes whom you loved so well have kept the faith.”

Promising to take the chalice to Mission Santa Barbara to prevent its falling to grave robbers, Yorba continues, "Farewell, San Juan, I shall never look upon your broken walls again," before turning her attention to those now in possession of the state. To Ubaldo, the caretaker at Mission San Juan Capistrano, she states:

Surely when the Americanos are building their great cities and their tireless hands are making California the wonder of the world, so also will they think, sometime of these holy places where the padres toiled and builded too—so well. Though we shall not see it, Ubaldo—neither you nor I—maybe, in God's good time, the Mission bells will ring again their old sweet music...Maybe so, Ubaldo—maybe so. Oh! The Missions restored—and again a cross on every hill on the green road to Monterey!<sup>20</sup>

Putting her faith into the "Americanos" and their ability to recognize the significance of the Spanish mission system amid their rapid embrace of area progress, Yorba offers her final goodbyes to an entire culture now relegated to the past—a common treatment of Native American cultures with the U.S. conquest of the West. Here she states, "Farewell, my countrymen, brown priests and all. Farewell, San Juan—farewell, farewell."<sup>21</sup> This scene offers an idea common within constructions of the Spanish fantasy past, the idea that the Anglo rather than the Mexican residents of California were the rightful inheritors of the area's Spanish legacy, and that this legacy persisted in the form of ruined buildings rather than through actual living persons.

The use of the historical person Señora Josefa Yorba within *The Mission Play* also held significance within the idea of the Spanish fantasy past—as would Señora Domínguez—through her clear connections to the Spanish colonial rather than Mexican era of California history. Though born in Sonora, Mexico in 1767, Josefa Grijalva Yorba traced her lineage back to Spain through her father Juan Pablo Grijalva. As a soldier stationed in New Spain, Grijalva moved his family to Alta California as members of the Anza Expedition in 1776 that placed a Spanish presence in San Francisco.<sup>22</sup> Grijalva played a significant role in establishing San Francisco, serving as a high-ranking officer at the presidio. Josefa Grijalva's marriage in 1782 to José Antonio Yorba further cemented her importance in the founding of Spanish California. José Antonio had served as one of Lt. Pedro Fages' Catalonian Volunteers in the venture to establish Mission San Diego in 1769, recreated in the first act of *The Mission Play* in settling San Diego.<sup>23</sup> From there Yorba served as a soldier throughout Alta California before claiming a land grant in 1810 in the region of modern day Orange County and becoming one of



Lucretia del Valle's family descended from early Spanish settlers in California, causing some people to view her as a "modern Ramona," referring to the title character of Helen Hunt Jackson's popular bestseller. Courtesy of David "Bodie" Bailey Family Archives.

the prominent landholders in Southern California at that time.<sup>24</sup>

Important to her appearance as a character within *The Mission Play*, Señora Josefa Yorba died in 1830, seventeen years before the setting of Act III in which she prominently appears.<sup>25</sup> Whereas Señora Domínguez may have actually appeared on the grounds of Mission San Juan Capistrano in 1847, some thirty-plus years before her death, Josefa Yorba could only be there as a specter. This allowed McGroarty to take certain liberties in creating the character of Señora Yorba to suit his needs as a storyteller separate from the actual historic person of Josefa Yorba.

As will be discussed in the following section, McGroarty's employment of artistic license followed patterns established by historic pageantry—a performance type popular in the early twentieth century throughout the United States and Britain.

**“California—the Land of the Outdoor Drama! In a Few Years this Fulfillment will be Seen!”**

Though not technically a pageant—its staging within a theatre rather than outdoors being the most obvious variation from the form—*The Mission Play* borrowed heavily from this performance type and, according to one writer who enthusiastically touted California as an important site for outdoor drama, conformed to the conventions of historical pageantry “in spirit.”<sup>26</sup> When del Valle and others portrayed Señora Yorba within *The Mission Play*, then, they did so as part of a longer tradition of historical pageantry that began in Great Britain in the late nineteenth century. As an outgrowth of British arts and crafts groups' interest in Medieval and Renaissance revivalism, these early productions referenced historical revels and allegorical masques.<sup>27</sup> Coming from these practices, historical pageantry had its origins in the perceived conflict between industrialization and pre-industrial ways. This duality continued as this performative type moved west. Historian David Glassberg discusses the phenomenon of historical pageantry, in his work *American Historical Pageantry*, as it appeared in the early twentieth century in the eastern United States. Here, Glassberg argues, historical pageantry frequently served the purposes of Progressive-era reformers. Show producers attempted to provide “wholesome” entertainment that could provide solutions to such societal ills as the perceived isolation caused by increased urbanization and industrialization through the liberal use of allegory and pantomime. These productions further sought to address inter-ethnic conflict by honoring past traditions while emphasizing progress through a shared national identity.<sup>28</sup> When historical pageantry finally appeared on the West Coast, in the 1910s and 20s, pageant makers continued to draw upon the traditions established in Britain and the eastern United States while adjusting the form to adopt a regional specificity.

To proponents of historical pageantry, the climate of California seemed ideally suited for holding these outdoor productions year-round. That productions could be produced throughout the year rather than being confined to the period of late spring through early fall that limited pageantry elsewhere caused one journalist to excitedly proclaim “California—the land of the outdoor drama! In a few years this fulfillment will be seen!”<sup>29</sup> This prediction, made in the late 1920s, appreciated the constant sunshine of the Golden State but failed to foresee the Great Depression that temporarily halted widespread civic celebrations and generally ended the



*Lucretia del Valle was twenty years old when she took on the role of Señora Josefa Yorba who, had she lived in 1830, would have been sixty-three years old. Courtesy of David "Bodie" Bailey Family Archives.*

practice of historical pageantry. Significantly, pageant promoters made similar claims about Seattle, Washington, declaring that "Seattle has established a reputation as 'The Pageant City'."<sup>30</sup> For a city whose weather did not lend itself to the staging of all-year outdoor dramas to assert itself as an important site for such productions signaled the prevalence and popularity of historical pageantry throughout the West in the early twentieth century.

Within this burgeoning form, *The Mission Play* was the first among a number of productions in Southern California that similarly romanticized the Spanish colonial and Mexican periods of California history before assigning them comfortably to the past. Other important works of this genre include Garnet Holme's interpretation of *Ramona*, based upon Jackson's novel, first staged in Hemet, California, in 1923 and still in production today, and another work also by Holme, *The Mission Pageant of San Juan Capistrano*, which ran in 1924 and 1925 on the mission grounds of the same name.

Within shows that took Spanish colonial California as its subject matter, the meeting of tradition and progress prevalent in historical pageantry in the East and Midwest was met by an additional concern about proper entitlement to



*Lucretia del Valle signed her portrait, "To little Ida Bailey, May her life be one rose path without a thorn, Lucretia del Valle." Ida Bailey played the role of a Spanish dancer in the 1912 production and continued to act in the play until 1917. Courtesy of David "Bodie" Bailey Family Archives.*

land. *The Mission Play*, the *Ramona Pageant*, and the *Mission Pageant of San Juan Capistrano* all communicated a mythologized notion of area history—as discussed above through an engagement of the so-called Spanish fantasy past—while expressing contemporary tensions between Mexican and Anglo residents of

Southern California. McGroarty wrote *The Mission Play* amid unease over the rapid increase of foreign-born Mexicans in the American Southwest—a population that roughly doubled between 1900 and 1910. Further, the height of the show's popularity—from its premier in 1912 and into the early 1920s—approximately coincided with the Mexican Revolution that pushed numerous Mexican citizens north, and nearly doubled the population again between 1910 and 1920. By the premieres of both the *Ramona Pageant* and the *Mission Pageant of San Juan Capistrano* in the early 1920s, these inter-ethnic tensions had contributed to the appearance of the second Ku Klux Klan in the Southland. While the popularity of these shows, with their narratives celebrating U.S. victory over Mexico in the region, anticipated the Great Repatriation that removed an estimated 350,000-600,000 U.S. and foreign-born persons to Mexico between 1931 and 1934.<sup>31</sup>

As an expression of the anxieties created through these demographic realities, *The Mission Play* ends with Señora Yorba relinquishing control of California to the incoming Anglos before she and other Californios disappear from the region. Similarly, the *Ramona Pageant* ends with all the Californio characters moving south across the new national border into Mexico—a noted change from the source material in which only the title character and her second husband leave California. Within the *Mission Pageant of San Juan Capistrano* all the major characters stay in Southern California, but the storyline introduced an American soldier into the region in the early nineteenth century who fends off the 1818 attack of Argentine privateer Hippolyte de Bouchard before marrying a señorita named Margarita. This last detail reflected an idea prevalent later in the nineteenth century of colonizing the American Southwest through marriages between U.S. men—gringos—and Mexican women. Besides such obvious appeals to Anglo audiences' desires to see Southern California as a space devoid of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans, both McGroarty and Holme utilized the narrative tool of allegory to address these tensions.

Historical pageantry, as it appeared first in Great Britain and later in the United States, relied upon easily understandable allegory and familiar tropes to communicate to audience members a particular rendering of area history. These efforts further attempted to influence how viewers understood their place within this history. In the American Southwest such shows often contended with a population makeup that contradicted Anglo expectations and desires for the region and in which the allegory employed within a particular production depicted a regional ideal. *The Mission Play* was rich with such allegory. McGroarty employed this narrative device as a means of explaining the rise and fall of the Spanish Empire in the Southland that simultaneously reiterated Anglo, rather than Mexican, ownership of California.

Throughout Acts I and II, McGroarty positioned the character of Father Junípero Serra as a representation of Colonial Spain. In the first act, Serra demonstrates the promise of civilization brought by the Spanish colonial project to California, while in the following section he symbolized the continued strength of the Spanish Empire despite increasing challenges to this venture. Extending McGroarty's use of allegory in the second act, the character of Anita served as a stand-in for the contested territory of California and Captain Rivera as the threat of secularization of the missions—an event that occurred with Mexican independence from Spain and which proponents of the Spanish fantasy past understood as the beginning of colonial California's demise, leading inevitably to the U.S. conquest of the area. This construction of Mexico's negative influence upon the region found an expression within the final Act, as the character of Anita (still representing California) appears old and degraded. Read within the context of early twentieth-century conflicts, the storyline of *The Mission Play* also served to remind audience members of the supposed failure of Mexican rule to maintain the civilizing mission of the Franciscans—a legacy transferred instead to Anglo residents of the area through the preservation of mission ruins.

Importantly within *The Mission Play*, the character of Serra continued to have a commanding presence in Act II even as an old man, yet by Act III he has passed on, leaving Señora Yorba to take his place. Interpreted as an allegory for the Spanish colonial process in California, Serra's strength and determination early in the show demonstrated the assumed importance of New Spain—that it brought European ideals of civilization to the western United States prior to the actual American interest in the area—while in the second act this same strength was appreciated but understood as eventually falling to secular interests. It is here that the character of Josefa Yorba emerges in the ruins of the mission system representing the previous position of New Spain. The shift in personification of the Spanish Colonial Period from masculine to feminine between Acts II and III demonstrated for audiences the weakening of Spain and the allowance of Mexican rule. Similar characterizations appear in both the novel and dramatization of *Ramona* as well as in the *Mission Pageant of San Juan Capistrano*. Within *Ramona* this character appears in the fictional Señora Moreno, who some fans of *Ramona* interpreted as an unfavorable portrayal of Lucretia del Valle's grandmother Isabel del Valle, while for the *Mission Pageant of San Juan Capistrano* Holme resurrected an actual person Apolinaria Lorenzana—a Mexican born woman with close ties to the Franciscan missions.<sup>32</sup> Yet, while Moreno and Lorenzana were portrayed as old women within their respective shows, Yorba, as performed by del Valle and her predecessors, was a young woman. Del Valle was only twenty years old when she began her run as Señora Yorba—a fact that her stage makeup



*Lucretia del Valle at her dressing table. In 1916, she declined a salary and paid her own expenses in order to prevent the financial failure of a national tour of *The Mission Play*. This photo may be from "*The Landslide*," performed at the Lyceum in October and November 1912. Courtesy of David "Bodie" Bailey Family Archives.*

attempted to emphasize rather than conceal. Playing a woman seventeen years deceased as though she were alive and in her early twenties, demonstrated the liberties McGroarty undertook in his dramatization of the local past. At the same time, for audience members familiar with the history being portrayed, Señora Yorba's presence in the ruins of Mission San Juan Capistrano in 1847 was that of a ghost—an analogy that could similarly be made for the Spanish Empire in California in the mid-nineteenth century. Though its presence could still be felt, it no longer had a vital existence.

The farewell speech delivered by Yorba in the closing scene of *The Mission Play* reiterated the ethereal nature of New Spain's continued presence in California, with the Señora as an allegorical representation of the Spanish Empire, departing, never to return. Yorba's gracious farewell further allowed a space for the United States to enter and to flourish, something that the original ending did not do.

There, the Señora's violent end signified the United States' obligation to preserving Spanish Colonial California out of a sense of guilt from the country's forceful entry into the region—a much less pleasant interpretation for area audiences to encounter and one that ran counter to most iterations of the Spanish fantasy past and employments of historical pageantry. Rather, the second ending written by McGroarty which allowed the Señora to live, if in a temporal form, exemplified a feature common to both romanticizations of Spanish California and the historical dramas popular at the time; a celebration of past traditions that assisted rather than contradicted ideas of progress and modernization. Del Valle's public persona cultivated a similar dichotomy that positioned her as simultaneously representing California's past and working toward a more equalitarian future, a subject I explore in the following section.

### **“Sparkling and Vivacious Modern American Girl that She is”**

In writing on del Valle's interpretation of Señora Josefa Yorba, journalists seemingly could not help but comment on her perceived appropriateness in the role, at times even conflating del Valle with the character that she played. One article went so far as to claim del Valle “arrived among us a century behind her time,” that she belonged in the pastoral days associated with Spanish California. “But,” the author added quickly, del Valle's temporal displacement occurred “for a reason,” that she might, through the character of Señora Yorba, provide “a living link between the past and the present.”<sup>33</sup> To this author del Valle so thoroughly embodied Señora Yorba that it went beyond that of an actress playing a part, rather del Valle became a living representative of a bygone era. This assessment of del Valle depended upon the particular blending of the Spanish fantasy past and the conventions of historical pageantry found within *The Mission Play* and similar productions. The qualities associated with persons from New Spain and later Mexican California were understood as an issue of genetic heritage. While Anglos might embrace this lifestyle and recreate its customs, only a person with del Valle's lineage could be seen to truly embody it. At the same time that del Valle's portrayal of Yorba convinced onlookers of her proper existence in another era, her family connection to Spanish California lent authority to her turn at the role and to *The Mission Play* generally through the employment of objects from the del Valle family home.

Promotional materials emphasizing del Valle's family and the use within *The Mission Play* of items belonging to them reflected both the traditions associated with historical pageantry and a regional sense of ethnic identity. A common practice within such performances had descendants of significant historical persons portraying their ancestors, often utilizing family heirlooms upon the

*The Meeting of Josefa Yorba and Lucretia del Valle*



*Lucretia del Valle portrayed herself both as a modern American woman and a representative of the faded Spanish Empire. Her morning horseback rides, along with her family ancestry, caused Los Angeles Times reporters to view her as a member of the Californio elite. Courtesy of David "Bodie" Bailey Family Archives.*

stage for an added sense of authenticity. Del Valle could substitute for a member of the Yorba family through a local understanding of ethnicity that privileged those of Spanish ancestry. Though not a direct descendant of Señora Yorba, del Valle's family lineage mirrored that of the Yorbas in its easy linking to Spain, while holding an additional appeal to promoters of *The Mission Play* through her family's connection to a foundational text of the Spanish fantasy past, Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona*.

Ostensibly written as an indictment against the United States' treatment of California Indians, Jackson's novel instead became a sort of guidebook to the romanticized rendering of California pursued by tourists and exploited by boosters of the Golden State. In creating *Ramona*, Jackson pulled from her own experiences travelling through California, including her stay at the del Valle family home, Rancho Camulos. At the opening of the novel, the title character Ramona lives under the guardianship of Señora Moreno on a property architecturally similar to that of Rancho Camulos in both its main house and its out buildings. Fans of *Ramona* seized upon this connection, transforming Rancho Camulos into a tourist destination.<sup>34</sup> If the family felt burdened by this association or angered by the popular correlation between Jackson's Señora Moreno—noted for her poor treatment of Ramona in the novel—and family matriarch Ysabel del Valle as some writers suggest, they also embraced Anglo interest in California's Spanish colonial past, hosting fiestas and investing in ventures such as *The Mission Play*.<sup>35</sup>

For her part, del Valle provided reporters hoping to bill her a "modern Ramona," with stories of witnessing sheep shearing (a scene reminiscent of one in *Ramona*) during her childhood spent at Camulos and posed for pictures that blurred the distinction between del Valle and the character that she portrayed. Promotional photos taken of del Valle at Rancho Camulos early in her turn as Josefa Yorba exemplify this point. Dressed in the costume of the Señora—including petticoated skirts, an over-sized fringed shawl, and flowers framing her face—del Valle posed in amidst the scenic Camulos gardens and graveyard made famous in the pages of *Ramona*. These images collapse del Valle, her portrayal of Yorba, and the fictional Ramona into one. The accompanying text reiterated this confusion. While it mentioned del Valle's association with *The Mission Play* (and the property's connection to *Ramona*) it, along with the feature's title, "At the Hacienda of Her Ancestors," implied that del Valle posed for the images as herself rather than as her character. A mention of the use of objects originally from the Rancho within *The Mission Play* completed the blurring of lines between historic place and fictional story.<sup>36</sup> Del Valle's participation in cultivating such images made her an active participant in placing herself within the "past" portion of the Spanish fantasy idea.

At the same time, del Valle maintained a public image that defied her relegation to a previous period of California history. Throughout her tenure as Señora Yorba, del Valle maintained an active presence in Los Angeles through both her work in women's clubs and her frequent mention in society pages that contradicted the idea of del Valle as a person existing in another era. The same writer that placed her a century behind her time also stressed del Valle's apparent modernity and her thoroughly American pedigree, noting that, "on her mother's side [she] is a descendant from those original Americans who came over on the Mayflower."<sup>37</sup>

By the author's estimation, del Valle contained the perfect mix of Spanish and Anglo-Saxon, of faded empire and burgeoning civilization. As with the goals of historical pageantry—and as the character Josefa Yorba called upon her audience to do—del Valle simultaneously embodied a celebration of past traditions and the ideas of progress championed in the early twentieth century.

A newspaper caption beneath a photo of del Valle dressed and posed similar to "The Leading Lady" by Guy Rose summarized these competing portrayals by declaring, "Lucretia del Valle, bright genius of Mission Play, who seems to be living in two incarnations a century apart. Sparkling and vivacious modern American girl that she is, she finds her second self in quaint character of pageant drama."<sup>38</sup> This text acknowledged that, while del Valle seemingly embodied the part of Señora Yorba, she also cultivated a persona of herself as separate from the character she portrayed in *The Mission Play*.

To argue that del Valle only partially embraced the public perception of her as a señorita from another era does not mean that she did not herself express interest and pride in her family legacy or contribute to the generation of a romanticized interpretation of area history beyond her participation in *The Mission Play*. Indeed, del Valle participated in efforts to restore the missions through events such as Candle Day in 1916 which helped raise funds toward the restoration of Mission San Gabriel.<sup>39</sup> Further, when what was supposed to be a two-year national tour of *The Mission Play* met with financial ruin and a lack of audience beyond the Golden State, del Valle famously declined a salary and paid her own expenses in an effort to keep the production salient, demonstrating her interest in the project beyond that of a hired actress. Even considering her financial interest in the play—that she along with other members of her family had invested in the work—del Valle's decision to forgo an immediate income and to actually go into debt for the project showed her dedication to McGroarty's vision.

Further, the choice to appear as the character of Señora Yorba within the painting by Guy Rose—a decision presumably reached between the artist and the model—demonstrated the importance to del Valle of the connection between the character she played within *The Mission Play* and her own family history. That del Valle could explore this connection through a cause and a play popular among the Los Angeles elite of the period created a space in which her interest in both the area's future and its past did not contradict one another or her position within Angelino society.

Del Valle's portrayal of Señora Josefa Yorba ended with her marriage in 1917 to Harry F. Grady, a professor of Political Economy at Columbia University in New York where del Valle was enrolled as a student. Besides attending classes, del Valle had co-founded a New York based group working toward women's



*Lucretia del Valle played an active social role in early Los Angeles. She appears here (center, smiling with a feathered hat) flanked by John Steven McGroarty, poet laureate of California and author of *The Mission Play* (left) and railroad magnate Henry E. Huntington (right). Fellow actress Ida Bailey stands at left. Courtesy of David "Bodie" Bailey Family Archives.*

suffrage in the state. Comprised of other recent transplants to New York, the group challenged the state's failure to extend the vote to women based upon the various members' loss of the franchise upon their move from a state that granted them suffrage (such as California) to New York.<sup>40</sup> This followed similar work she had done in her home state of California. Del Valle maintained her activism under the title Mrs. Grady (while finishing her studies at Columbia) though she ceased her residency in Southern California, instead becoming an honored guest of various women's clubs upon her frequent visits to the region.

As Harry Grady moved from professor at Columbia, to professor at the University of California, to U.S. Ambassador abroad, del Valle accompanied him, often acquiring prominent positions of her own. Del Valle served as a California delegate during the Democratic National conventions in 1932 and 1936 and maintained a significant role in the party throughout her life. She additionally worked toward the establishment of the United Nations, creating and heading the United Nations forum.<sup>41</sup> Traveling with her husband to Iran during his ambassadorship in the country in the late 1940s and early 1950s, del Valle joined the women's suffrage movement there. The Iran that the Gradys moved into as ambassador and wife was one in the midst of tumult and transition. Long the patsy of Britain, Iran in the late 1940s was among many nations participating in anti-colonial movements and attempting a move toward self-rule. Henry

Grady notably supported Iranian nationalism—a stance ultimately opposed by the United States and Great Britain and which led to the first coup undertaken by the CIA.<sup>42</sup> Within this context, del Valle pushed for women's rights against opposition in the United States and Iran that argued she was asking for too much by supporting those who included women's rights as important to establishing Iran as a country free from imperial demands.

In describing this seeming transition between señorita stationed at Rancho Camulos and political activist concerned with the status of women internationally, Wallace Smith, an acquaintance of del Valle, wrote after her death in 1972 that she had “all but divorced herself from her Latin heritage.”<sup>43</sup> Yet the period in which Smith understood del Valle as embracing a “Latin heritage”—her early life through her marriage in 1917—corresponded with a celebration of California's Spanish colonial past alongside rapid development of the region, and in which the contradiction between these two ideas of area history disappeared. Consequently, del Valle's embodiment of what became known as the Spanish fantasy past was also marked by ideas of progress and nation building by the United States. This construction of past and present positioned del Valle well within both the Spanish fantasy past and the popular form of historical pageantry—the first as a woman with a lineage tied both to Spain and to the novel *Ramona* who celebrated this past in high style among other prominent Angelinos, the latter as a meeting point for the ideas of tradition and progress and how one might serve the other. The character portrayed by del Valle further served these dual ends as both a representation of the once powerful Spanish Empire and as one speaking of California's future. There is no apparent contradiction between these two ideas as Yorba described them, rather the problem that arises is about who has access to this future and who does not—a distinction made upon racial-ethnic lines in the Southern California of the early twentieth century.<sup>44</sup> Del Valle did not confine herself to either of these constructions—as one either of the past or looking ahead—but instead, at least publicly, existed comfortably in both.

## NOTES

1. “Religion Note of Drama,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 19, 1912. The two families—Yorba and del Valle—had both descended from pioneers of Spanish California. José Antonio Yorba arrived in 1769 as a corporal in the Catalanian Volunteers who accompanied Father Junípero Serra. His heirs received grants of Santiago de Santa Ana and Lomas de Santiago in Orange County; Antonio del Valle arrived in 1819 from Mexico as administrator of Mission San Fernando Rey de España. His son Ignacio del Valle was granted Rancho Camulos in the Santa Clara River Valley.

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2. Jackson's novel, originally meant to call attention to the plight of the former mission Indians, instead was transformed into a pageant celebrating California's romantic Spanish past (see pages 15 and 16 herein).
3. Promoted by San Diego's 1915 Panama-California Exposition in Balboa Park and carried on in parades and pageants throughout Southern California as a result of the writings of Charles Lummis and others at the time, the actual history of California during the Spanish and Mexican periods was little known at the time.
4. This remarkable life size 70-inch by 60-inch portrait of Lucretia del Valle as Josefa Yorba has been recently acquired by the San Diego History Center through the generous donation of well-known collector William Foxley. The painting won a gold medal at the 1915-1916 Exposition in Balboa Park and now occupies a place of honor in the museum's gallery. The artist, Guy Rose, a well-recognized American Impressionist painter, was born March 3, 1867, in San Gabriel, California. His father, Leonard Rose, was a prominent California senator. The town of Rosemead bears the family name. (See cover photo)
5. Wallace Smith, "The Last of the Señoritas," *The Californians* (March/April 1986): 41. According to Kevin Starr, *The Mission Play* was seen by "an estimated 2.5 million people between 1912 and 1929" providing "Southern California with a usable past, a revered founding time, at once escapist and assuring, linking a parvenu society with the rich ecclesiastical cultures of Mediterranean Europe." Kevin Starr, *Inventing the Dream* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 88.
6. See for example, "U.S. Ambassador's Wife Leads Touchy Iran Voting Movement," *Los Angeles Times*, September 5, 1950.
7. Señora Domínguez was descended from a family equally as important as the Yorbas and del Valles. They were grantees of Rancho San Pedro. See page 9 herein.
8. "The Mission Play by John McGroarty" (Los Angeles: Grafton Publishing Company, 1914). Starr comments that McGroarty, a Presbyterian, "fell so much under the spell of Franciscan California that he converted to Catholicism—which is a paradox because the mission myth was an essentially Protestant creation for an essentially Protestant Southern California." Starr, *Inventing the Dream*, 88-89.
9. Frank Miller, a power in the Republican establishment of Riverside, was one of the greatest of the Spanish California boosters. President Theodore Roosevelt stayed at his Mission Inn accompanied by fellow Harvard student Charles Lummis as early as 1903.
10. William Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of Its Mexican Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 209-210.
11. McWilliams first coined the phrase "fantasy heritage" during the 1940s as a criticism of such literature as Jackson's *Ramona* and the writings of Charles Lummis (*Land of Sunshine* and *Out West*) and other boosters who refused to deal with the unpleasant parts of racial discrimination, poor treatment of Indians, and other ills of the Spanish period. For an extended discussion of the Spanish fantasy past and its multiple permutations throughout California see Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe* and Phoebe S. Kropp, *California Vieja: Culture and Memory in a Modern American Place*. McWilliams was particularly concerned about the treatment of Mexicans and Mexican Americans in Los Angeles during World War II.
12. "The Mission Play by John McGroarty" (1914), unpagued.
13. Days of the Verdugos (Glendale); Old Spanish Days (Santa Barbara); Days of the Dons (various); Rose Parade performers and floats (Pasadena).
14. "The Mission Play: Second Season" (Los Angeles: Grafton Publishing Company, 1914), unpagued. The soldiers were actually in San Diego Bay. False Bay is today's Mission Bay.
15. "The Program of the Mission Play" (c. 1920), 12.
16. "The Mission Play," (1914), unpagued.

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17. There were six surviving daughters of Manuel Domínguez, nieces of Juan José Domínguez, grantee of Rancho San Pedro. These plus others could have been the Sra. Domínguez of *The Mission Play*.
18. Julian Johnson, "Early Padres Reborn to Life of Missions" (April 30, 1912).
19. *California Pioneer Register and Index, 1542-1848*, 123.
20. "Program of The Mission Play" (c. 1920), 25.
21. *Ibid.*, 26.
22. See Herbert E. Bolton, *Anza's California Expeditions* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1930).
23. *Pioneer Register and Index*, 390.
24. Much of this land became a part of the Irvine Ranch of Orange County.
25. Mildred Yorba McArthur, "A Brief History of the Yorba Family," (1960).
26. "California Creates Age of Outdoor Drama" *Los Angeles Times*, October 14, 1928.
27. David Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry: The Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 43.
28. *Ibid.*, 71.
29. "California Creates Age of Outdoor Drama."
30. Edmond S. Meany, "Americanus": *Produced in the University of Washington Stadium, Seattle, July 23-28, 1923* (Seattle: Press of the Pioneer Printing Co., 1923): unpagged.
31. Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe*, 26-27.
32. Apolinario Lorenzana was quite well known in San Diego as the woman who brought a number of orphans from Mexico City to populate the Villa de Branciforte. She worked with the mission Indians and later received a grant of Rancho de los Coches in the El Cajon Valley area.
33. "Blithe Lady Vision-Maker," *Los Angeles Times*, September 26, 1915.
34. Dydia DeLyser discusses the connection between the novel *Ramona*, Rancho Camulos, and the ensuing tourism in her book *Ramona Memories: Tourism and the Shaping of Southern California* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), chapter 3.
35. Wallace Smith, "The Last of the Señoritas," *The Californians* (March/April 1986): 40 and DeLyser, *Ramona Memories*, 82.
36. "At the Hacienda of Her Ancestors," *Los Angeles Times*, February 18, 1913.
37. "Blithe Lady Vision-Maker."
38. *Ibid.*
39. "Help Restore Mission by Aiding Candle Day," *Los Angeles Times*, July 26, 1916.
40. "Lucretia del Valle is New York City Bride," *Los Angeles Times*, October 19, 1917.
41. Smith, "The Last of the Señoritas," 39.
42. Stephen Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror* (New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2008), 215.
43. Smith, "The Last of the Señoritas," 42.
44. Señora Yorba, at the end of *The Mission Play* laments that "'the dream is done . . . gone to return no more. The dear and lovely dream that was so bright and fair.' What lives is the Cross and the Faith. The missions have gone, but God's Mission remains." And in the same way, descendants of the Yorba family, as well as those of the del Valle and Domínguez families, live on in present-day Southern California. Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe*, 222.



Postcard, "Baptism of the First Gentile," Act 1, Mission Play, San Gabriel, California. Author's collection.



Postcard, "Sighting Portola's Return," Act 1, Mission Play, San Gabriel, California. Author's collection.

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Postcard, "Excommunication of Comandante Rivera by Father Junipero Serra," Act 2, Mission Play, San Gabriel, California. Author's collection.



Postcard, "Finding the Jeweled Chalice," Act 3, Mission Play, San Gabriel, California. Author's collection.