



# Contemporary Theatre in Mayan Mexico: Death-Defying Acts

*Tamara L. Underiner*

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From the dramatization of local legends to the staging of plays by Shakespeare and other canonical playwrights to the exploration of contemporary sociopolitical problems and their effects on women and children, Mayan theatre is a flourishing cultural institution in southern Mexico. Part of a larger movement to define Mayan self-identity and reclaim a Mayan cultural heritage, theatre in Mayan languages has both reflected on and contributed to a growing awareness of Mayans as contemporary cultural and political players in Mexico and on the world's stage.

In this book, Tamara Underiner draws on fieldwork with theatre groups in Chiapas, Tabasco, and Yucatán to observe the Maya peoples in the process of defining themselves through theatrical performance. She looks at the activities of four theatre groups or networks, focusing on their operating strategies and on close analyses of selected dramatic texts. She shows that while each group works under the rubric of Mayan or indigenous theatre, their works are also in constant dialogue, confrontation, and collaboration with the wider, non-Mayan world. Her observations thus reveal not only how theatre is an agent of cultural self-definition and community-building but also how theatre negotiates complex relations among indigenous communities in Mayan Mexico, state governments, and non-Mayan artists and researchers.

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