

ARTISTS AND POLITICS IN MEXICO

Siqueiros and Paz

DAVID ALFARO SIQUEIROS: AN INTERVIEW WITH A FOUNDER IN THE MEXICAN MURALIST MOVEMENT. (Voices of Latin American Series 34849. The Center for Cassette Studies, North Hollywood, Calif. 38 minutes.)

FOCUS ON OCTAVIO PAZ: THE GREAT MEXICAN POET TALKS ABOUT HIS LIFE AND WORK. (Modern Literary Voices Series 12595. The Center for Cassette Studies, North Hollywood, Calif. 28 minutes.)

The Center for Cassette Studies in Hollywood is one of several companies producing audio cassettes of value to the Latin Americanist. The two cassettes discussed here are both interviews with distinguished Mexican artists, each of whom, using his own medium, has been very much involved in social and political commentary.

On tape, the late David Alfaro Siqueiros is an engaging conversationalist, with a pleasant, rich voice, though sometimes difficult to understand because of his less than perfect English and the occasional interruptions of his interviewer. The tape uses an interview format; unfortunately for the listener, the North American interviewer (who seems to be a student of art) is not identified by the editors. The Center for Cassette Studies needs to make background comments on the time, place, and context of the interview and should, at the very least, suggest the names and backgrounds of all the participants. A cassette without such information, much like a book without an author or publication date, loses considerable value for the listener.

Like Siqueiros's autobiography, which would be a useful supplement to this tape, the interview ranges across a half century of his activities in art, war, and politics. The tape is particularly useful because its wide-ranging array of topics would interest historians, political scientists, and artists. For the artist, the philosophical question of theme versus style is the central one in the interview. This is logical for a man who has "put his art at the service of his politics." Further, the interviewer introduces the listener to Siqueiros by making a brief comparison of his works with those of Tamayo, a theme which he and Siqueiros continue later in the interview. Whether the student is an art major or someone generally interested in Latin America, the use of any major book on Mexican muralists would provide a helpful visual source for discussing the theme or content of several of Siqueiros's works, for following the artist's comments on the limitations of mural art, and for allowing the student to see for himself the differences from Tamayo and Diego Rivera. (The editors suggest several such works on the cassette case.)

Students of history and politics should be particularly interested in Siquei-

ros's discussion of Tamayo's "Homage to the Race," and his analysis of Cuauhtemoc as the "first hero" and "symbol of revolution" to the Mexicans. The interviewer elicits some short but frank comments from the artist on revolution and capitalism. For example, he suggests that the "American revolution is a wonderful thing" as a symbol to other countries, including Mexico. While he does not explain his ideas fully, he appears to distinguish between American capitalism and the broader society of capitalism in general.

In terms of style, the interview tends to be relaxed and conversational, and the listener soon finds himself a participant in the dialogue. The only weaknesses in the interviewer's style are an occasional lack of transition from one topic to another and his rough Spanish, which might grate on a linguist's ear.

In contrast, the recording of a dialogue between Octavio Paz and the late Mexicanist Howard F. Cline takes place in the atmosphere of a formal public interview during one of Paz's trips to the United States. As an interviewer, Cline is more polite, less relaxed than Siqueiros's questioner, and the pace of his conversation is somewhat slow. Paz, like Siqueiros, has a lively style of talking, records well, and his command of English is much better; such style is important to this medium, since it is a key to attracting and maintaining a listening audience.

Cline, like our previous interviewer, introduces Paz to the audience and follows this with some questions about his background. Paz's experiences are in some way similar to the earlier travel experiences of José Vasconcelos in the United States. Vasconcelos's autobiographical volume, *A Mexican Ulysses*, is in part a reflection of what it is to be a Mexican, just as Paz's work, *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, is a result of his travel experiences in the United States and is focused almost entirely on that question. Because he leaves the subject too quickly, Cline loses the opportunity to center a large part of his discussion on this stimulating and controversial work, and therefore a chance to interject his own substantial knowledge into the conversation. This is unfortunate, since Paz, like Siqueiros, has been a frank social critic of his culture.

Although Cline is a historian, not a literary critic, the main focus of the interview is on Paz's role as a poet and what it means to write poetry. There is a fascinating discussion of the latter subject as Paz discusses how he writes a poem, and reads a short poem in Spanish on the Mexican landscape. Literary students would be interested in his lengthy explanation of the relation of lyric to content in poetry and the problem of translating poetry from one language to another. Unfortunately for the Latin Americanist, the entire interview tends to focus on universal questions of poetry rather than on Paz as a Mexican poet or his poetry as a means of understanding his culture or that of Latin America. The only section of primary interest to the Latin Americanist is the discussion of his *Anthology of Mexican Poetry* at the end of the cassette, in which he analyzes briefly the contributions of the Mexican Revolution to poetry. He notes that after the Revolution, Mexicans discovered their past and began to open their "eyes and souls" to modern life.

The Paz cassette would be of use to an advanced Latin American literature or poetry seminar, but not to introductory courses on Mexico or Latin America.

On the other hand, the Siqueiros cassette would be extremely useful for all academic levels. Creative use of the cassette with reading assignments in illustrated art books or in conjunction with slides would be conducive to lively discussion in a Latin American civilization course.

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