

The Expression

by José Francés

A few minutes before the curtain went up, the theater manager knocked on the door of Pablo Heredia's dressing room.

"Heredia, may I come in?" he asked.

"Come in, Luis."

Heredia, the star actor, turned his gaze away from the looking glass and faced the manager.

"What's the matter, Luis? Why so gloomy? Small audience again?"

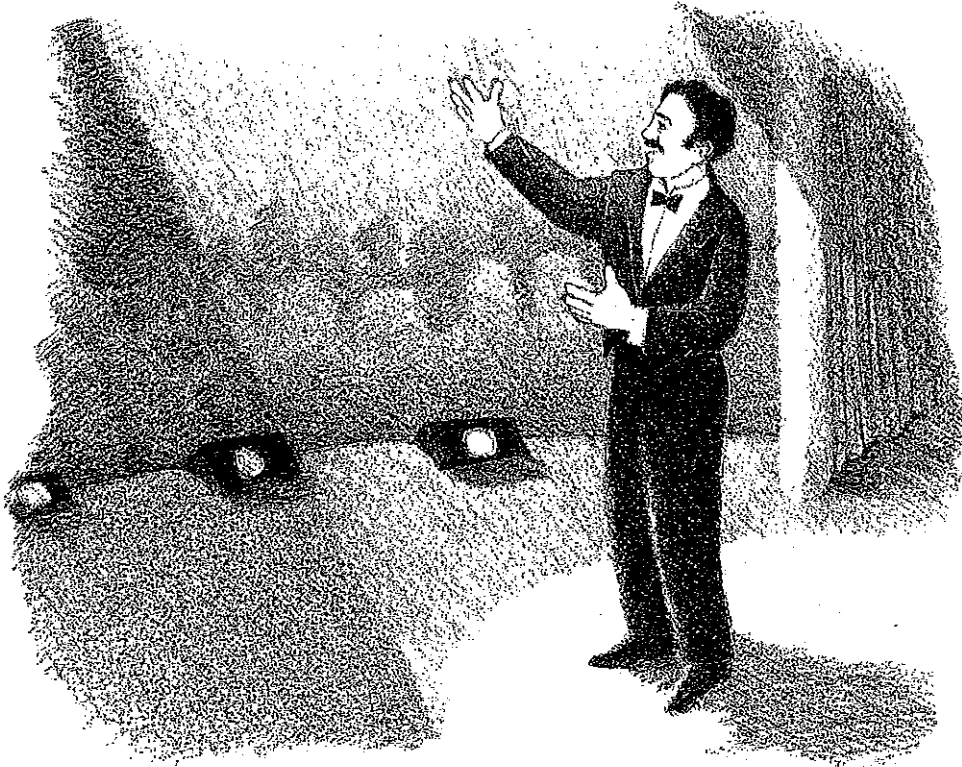
"Yes," Luis said, frowning. "So small that we cannot go on like this. We *must* put on the other play, *The Criminals*. We must do it at once! Or there will be no money for salaries next month." He dropped heavily into an armchair near the dressing table, sighing loudly as he did.

Heredia did not answer. He turned his attention to the looking glass and continued to put on his makeup.

There was a long silence. Neither man wanted to speak first. Each was afraid he might say the wrong thing.

The manager had great faith in *The Criminals*. It was a rough and powerful work about crime. Three months ago he had eagerly suggested it to Heredia. With the great actor in the main role, the manager was convinced it would be a big hit.

At that time, Heredia **enthusiastically** accepted the play. He agreed it would be his greatest triumph yet. But during practices, Heredia had trouble with the final scene. In it the character he plays receives a knife wound and lies dying, from loss of blood, at the feet of a woman.



In those rehearsals Heredia played the scene with a certain expression on his face. But it was an expression which was not moving enough, not quite—*right*. The theater manager said that he was not concerned. He was sure that when the play opened to the public, Heredia's face would perfectly **display** the expression that the moment required. Yes, everyone was convinced of this. The actors and all the members of the company said so.

At first, Heredia was proud of their confidence. But after a while he began to feel a sense of fear, of *dread*, about that final scene. What should the expression on his face be like? It must show rage and pain and love and shame at his defeat—and show them all at once! What should the eyes be like? Should his face grow pale? How should the voice sound? And should his hands tremble? Should they claw the air? Or should he **clench** his fists?

These were difficult questions, questions to which he could find no answer. Day after day Heredia stood in front of the looking glass, practicing. But still he was not satisfied. He could not get the expression right. He

thought about it all day. It kept him awake at night.

On and on the practices went, as Heredia put off the opening date. All the actors knew their parts by heart. Still Heredia delayed and postponed the opening.

Now, in the dressing room, Luis, the manager, rose from the armchair. "Heredia," he said in a sharp voice, "we cannot continue this way! We must put on *The Criminals* at once. We must set a date. There is no other way!"

Heredia did not answer at first. But then, unhappily, he agreed. "All right," he said, uneasily. "Let's say two weeks from today. We'll make that the opening night."

"Two weeks!" exclaimed Luis. "No, Heredia, certainly not. Today is Monday. The play must go on Friday. That will give us four full houses for sure—opening night on Friday, Saturday evening, and two shows on Sunday. Three days are enough to prepare. You arrange for the final rehearsals. I'll tell the newspapers and the photographers. Then I'll order posters and tickets from the printers. Do you agree?"

Heredia did not answer.

"Heredia, do you agree?"

"Very well," Heredia replied slowly. "I agree."

About two o'clock in the morning, Heredia left the theater alone. The night was damp and misty, and the chill in the air made him turn up his coat.

He walked about aimlessly, eager to be alone, to think. He was concerned, worried—and a bit frightened. He had made an important decision, one which would permit salaries to be paid. And yet—that final scene. How should his face express that terrible moment? What should his eyes be like? Should he grow pale?

He walked along deaf to everything around him. He did not even feel the steady drizzle. All he knew was that opening night was just three days away.

Gradually he left the wide main avenues and entered the poorer sections; streets of crime and poverty, with lamps that shone yellow.

Suddenly he stopped and looked around him. He had lost his way. He was at the far end of a narrow street. To the left, the darkness of vacant land. To the right, unfriendly buildings with narrow doorways.

Not a voice. No sound of footsteps. He started walking back quickly, telling himself he was not afraid. For a moment the awful silence chilled his heart.

Where could he be? He turned a corner and stopped to look down the street. He did not recognize it and continued, more lost than ever, walking down street after street. All were unfamiliar. He grew more and more anxious. His mouth grew dry, and his temples throbbed.

By chance he found himself outside an inn. He opened the door. Heavy, evil-smelling air struck him in the face. He looked in. The room was small and dirty. There were three tables **occupied** and one empty. Behind the counter a fat man was reading a paper.

His entry created much surprise. When he sat down and unbuttoned his fur coat, there were whispers. At one table a man and a woman spoke in low tones. At a table in the corner, two men watched him closely.

He ordered something to drink. Then he realized how foolish he had been to enter there, to take off his gloves and let them see the jewels on his hands. But there was nothing he could do about that now. So, as he had done at other times of danger, he acted boldly. He stared straight at the two men in the corner. They avoided his gaze, looking away.

Slowly the actor's fears turned to curiosity. Either of those two men, he thought, could serve as the model for his character in *The Criminals*. They were poorly dressed and might have spent time in jail. But after a brief time, the two men, seeing that they were watched, exchanged a few whispered words, then left.

Time passed. Heredia got up, paid, and went out into the street. The cold and mist awaited him as before. He looked up and down, wondering which direction to take.

Well, it didn't matter. He would come out somewhere. The street was silent and deserted. His steps echoed on the pavement.

Long and narrow streets. Short and narrow streets. Suddenly, a wide avenue with trees, and black factory buildings at the end. He stopped and looked in vain for the lights of a cab.

He heard footsteps behind him. He turned and thought he saw two men in the mist. Could they be . . . ?



Heredia continued walking. Suddenly two arms seized him from behind. Someone gave him a push, and he fell forward.

Then a blow to the chest, a sharp, cold pain in his side, and he passed out.

When he opened his eyes, they were putting him on a bed in the hospital. He felt a terrible throbbing in his side. His throat was dry, his chest was pounding, his forehead damp. And he felt tired, very tired.

Vaguely he remembered seeing a knife thrust at him, perhaps death . . .

He also remembered the other thing—the expression. And suddenly, as if insane, he sat up in bed shouting. “Here! Here!” he yelled wildly. “A mirror! Quickly, bring me a mirror! I want to see my face!”

SELECTING DETAILS FROM THE STORY. Each of the following sentences helps you understand the story. Complete each sentence below by putting an x in the box next to the correct answer.

- The theater manager was convinced that the play, *The Criminals*, would
 - a. close in a few weeks.
 - b. be fairly successful.
 - c. be a big hit.
- Heredia kept putting off the opening of the play because
 - a. the manager refused to increase his salary.
 - b. he was having trouble with the final scene.
 - c. he didn't think the other actors were ready.
- At the inn, Heredia acted foolishly when he
 - a. let the people there see the jewels on his hands.
 - b. stared boldly at two men sitting in the corner.
 - c. ordered something to eat.
- When he was at the hospital, Heredia demanded that
 - a. his attackers be found immediately.
 - b. his wounds be treated without delay.
 - c. he be given a mirror at once.

	× 5 =	
NUMBER CORRECT		YOUR SCORE

HANDLING STORY ELEMENTS. Each of the following questions reviews your understanding of story elements. Put an x in the box next to the correct answer to each question.

- What happened last in the *plot* of "The Expression"?
 - a. Heredia entered the inn and sat down at a table.
 - b. Heredia felt a sharp, cold pain in his side.
 - c. Luis demanded that the play open on Friday.
- Which sentence best *characterizes* Heredia?
 - a. He was a poor actor who did not take his work seriously.
 - b. He was a great actor who was nervous about a difficult scene.
 - c. He was selfish and did not care if the other actors got paid.
- "I want to see my face!" This line of *dialogue* was spoken by
 - a. Heredia.
 - b. Luis.
 - c. one of the attackers.
- Which sentence best tells the *theme* of the story?
 - a. It is not wise to travel in a strange neighborhood late at night.
 - b. The life of an actor is harder than most people realize.
 - c. A dangerous experience provides the answer to an actor's problem.

	× 5 =	
NUMBER CORRECT		YOUR SCORE

OBSERVING NEW VOCABULARY WORDS. Answer the following vocabulary questions by putting an *x* in the box next to the correct answer. The vocabulary words are printed in **boldface** in the story. If you wish, look back at the words before you answer the questions.

- At first Heredia enthusiastically agreed to play the part, for he thought it would be his greatest triumph yet. The word *enthusiastically* means
 - a. eagerly.
 - b. sadly.
 - c. slowly.
- Everyone was sure that Heredia's face would display the expression that was needed. As used here, the word *display* means
 - a. remove or take off.
 - b. put on or show.
 - c. forget or fail to remember.
- At the inn three tables were occupied and one was empty. What is the meaning of the word *occupied*?
 - a. broken
 - b. solid
 - c. filled
- Heredia wondered: Should his hands tremble, or should he clench his fists? The word *clench* means
 - a. close tightly together.
 - b. wreck or destroy.
 - c. push firmly or shove.

<input style="width: 40px; height: 20px;" type="text"/>	× 5 =	<input style="width: 40px; height: 20px;" type="text"/>
NUMBER CORRECT		YOUR SCORE

COMPLETING A CLOZE PASSAGE. Complete the following paragraph by filling in each blank with one of the words listed in the box below. Each of the words appears in the story. Since there are five words and four blanks, one word in the group will not be used.

William Shakespeare once wrote,

“All the world's a stage, and all the _____ and women merely players.” Perhaps Shakespeare meant that life is like a _____. When we are born, the _____ rises. We act our parts upon the stage. Then all too soon the _____ curtain falls and we are gone. The play is over.

salaries	curtain
play	
final	men

<input style="width: 40px; height: 20px;" type="text"/>	× 5 =	<input style="width: 40px; height: 20px;" type="text"/>
NUMBER CORRECT		YOUR SCORE

KNOWING HOW TO READ CRITICALLY. Each of the following questions will help you to think critically about the selection. Put an x in the box next to the correct answer.

- At the end of the story, why was Heredia eager to look at his face?
 - a. He wanted to see if he had been cut.
 - b. He was concerned about his good looks.
 - c. He wanted to study his expression.
- Heredia was probably attacked by
 - a. someone who happened to notice him on the street.
 - b. some actors who followed him out of the theater.
 - c. the two men who saw him at the inn.
- Which statement is true?
 - a. Luis did not have confidence in Heredia's acting ability.
 - b. Heredia was very pleased that the play was to open in three days.
 - c. When Heredia left the theater, he was still concerned about the opening of the play.
- Clues in the story suggest that Heredia was attacked because he
 - a. was thought to have money and valuables.
 - b. had made many enemies over the years.
 - c. insulted someone at the inn.

$\times 5 =$
 NUMBER CORRECT YOUR SCORE

Questions for Writing and Discussion

- Compare the attack on Heredia with the final scene of *The Criminals*. In what ways are they similar?
- Think about your answer to the question above. Then explain how Heredia planned to turn the attack on him into a learning experience.
- It is obvious why this story is called "The Expression." Think of another interesting and fitting title.

Use the boxes below to total your scores for the exercises. Then write your score on pages 150 and 151.

<input type="text"/>	+	S ELECTING DETAILS FROM THE STORY
<input type="text"/>	+	H HANDLING STORY ELEMENTS
<input type="text"/>	+	O BSERVING NEW VOCABULARY WORDS
<input type="text"/>	+	C OMPLETING A CLOZE PASSAGE
<input type="text"/>	+	K NOWING HOW TO READ CRITICALLY
<input type="text"/>	▼	Score Total: Story 4