

Estreno en Broadway by Rodolfo Usigli

Marguerite Picard

The world premiere of Rodolfo Usigli's *Estreno en Broadway* took place at the Latin American Theatre Today Conference sponsored by the University of Kansas in Lawrence, Kansas from 28 April to 2 May of 1992. An heretofore unpublished manuscript of a one-act play that Usigli had written between 1969-70, *Estreno* was performed as part of one of the morning sessions at this conference by two graduate student actors. Ramón Layera, read his paper "Realidad literaria y virtualidad teatral en *Estreno en Broadway*, obra inédita de Rodolfo Usigli," which served as an introduction to the performance. *Estreno en Broadway* was published in the Fall issue of *Gestos* that same year.

Estreno en Broadway takes place on an empty stage, with intermittent sparkling lights in the background that read BROADWAY. The time period is the twentieth century. The monologue is spoken by a man who appears in a spotlight holding the manuscript of what is supposed to be one of his dramatic works. During his speech, the man thanks the audience for recognizing his talent as a playwright. We hear echoes of his audience as they respond to what appears very much at first to be an acceptance speech for a great award. He discusses the great illusion of triumph on Broadway, the relentless search for a meaningful personal destiny, and the fleeting rewards of autobiographical art. His soliloquy, much like Hamlet's, becomes soul-searching and eventually autobiographical. He describes his hardships, and the need to support himself, as many theatre people in New York City are wont to do, by waiting tables. Suddenly, he is confronted with a mirror image of himself as a waiter. The audience wonders if the man is a waiter who fancies himself a brilliant, unacknowledged but finally successful playwright. The monologue ends, perhaps predictably, with the man asking for directions to Broadway.

In front of a large audience of participants in the conference, Manoj Khettry portrayed the man, and Chris Harper, his mirror image. Technical aid and direction were given by Professors Michael Griffith and Howard Blanning, both of the Department of Theatre at Miami University. Using minimalist pieces, their set consisted of a chair and some props; they recommended that the mood

be set by dimming the lights in the conference room. Khettry and Harper, both graduate students in Spanish in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at Miami University, wore tuxedos, a traditional attire for waiters and theatre-people alike. Marguerite Picard, a graduate student in Theatre at Miami University, chose the costumes, and executed the makeup for the presentation at the conference. Professor Ramón Layera of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at Miami University directed the entire project.

Miami University