

Hugo Carrillo: 1928-1994

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On October 19th after giving one last "mirada profunda" to his surroundings Hugo Carrillo stopped breathing, and with his breath, his voice was also stopped, a great theatrical voice which had spoken through his works from the mid 1950's through the middle of the 90's.

In an article which he wrote in 1973 entitled simply, "A manera de testimonio," Hugo offered his thoughts about what he felt it took to be a good writer: "Debe buscar siempre formas nuevas. Liberarse de los convencionalismos. De los caminos fáciles. Redescubrir los símbolos y los mitos. Reinterpretarlos y revelarnos a los otros para devolverles la esperanza."

Through the almost 40 years of his career as a writer, Hugo never took the "camino fácil;" he stayed true to his own words: "En el momento que aceptamos los riesgos de responder a una vocación—especialmente la del teatro—no tenemos más remedio que soltar amarras y dejarnos llevar por el sueño."

I received word of Hugo's death by phone from my father. Ironically, his call caught me while I was working on a translation of one of Hugo's one-act plays. We had heard of Hugo's illness from his family, and my father had visited Hugo in mid-September. They talked of many things, including Hugo's most recently published play *Las orgías sagradas de Maximón*. Hugo predicted it would never be produced in Guatemala because it was "demasiado fuerte."

That would be a shame, because Hugo was first and foremost a Guatemalan. His characters spoke with the music and the mythology of his country. Or as a critic in Guatemala once said: "Sus personajes se han cruzado con nosotros en la plaza de la Candelaria, en los callejones del Gallito y cualquiera que mira por ventanas conoce el pequeño drama de la Tula." (Paul Maubec-diario *El Gráfico*)

Hugo was perhaps best known internationally for another play which was very "fuerte." *El Señor Presidente*, his adaptation of the Miguel Angel Asturias novel, a play which he felt was dangerous enough at its premiere that he created a fictitious author for his script. Not satisfied with just a pseudonym, he dressed a cousin of mine in costume and make-up so he could release photos of "Franz Metz" meeting with Rubén Morales, the director of the play. His concern seemed

a bit more justified when on opening night in Guatemala, members of the secret police came to the theatre demanding Miguel Angel Asturias' address, which at the time happened to be the National Cemetery.

El Señor Presidente had over 200 performances the season it opened, a record in Guatemalan theatre which still stands, and has been seen in over eight other countries around the world. Hugo and his play gained further notoriety when a very public disagreement with Joseph Papp caused it to be withdrawn from the New York Latin American Festival in 1987.

At age 66 Hugo appears to have slowed very little. When he died he had eight separate works which were either in progress or ready to be published. He is the recipient of many awards, most recently in 1992 the "Monja Blanca de la Asociación de Periodistas de Guatemala" in recognition of his "fecunda trayectoria teatral." He was the founder of the first Compañía Nacional de Teatro in Guatemala, former director of Bellas Artes, recipient of a presidential medal and Profesor Emmeritissimum de la Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala. But más de todo, Hugo was a friend, who always had un abrazo fuerte ready for me no matter how long we had been out of touch.

Hugo's one-act *El ruedo de la mortaja*, which he dedicated to my father and which he wanted so much for me to finish translating, will get produced. The pity is that Hugo will never get to see it.

Hugo Carrillo is survived by his four sisters, his brother, and hundreds of characters from his over two dozen plays including: *La Calle del sexo verde*, *El corazón del espantapájaros*, *La herencia de la Tula*, *El ruedo de la mortaja*, *El Señor Presidente*, *Juegos de cascaritas y cascarones*, *Expreso a Panamá*, *Las orgías sagradas de Maximón*, and *El libro de la sabiduría*.

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