

## Latin American Theatre Today, Kansas 1997

### George Woodyard

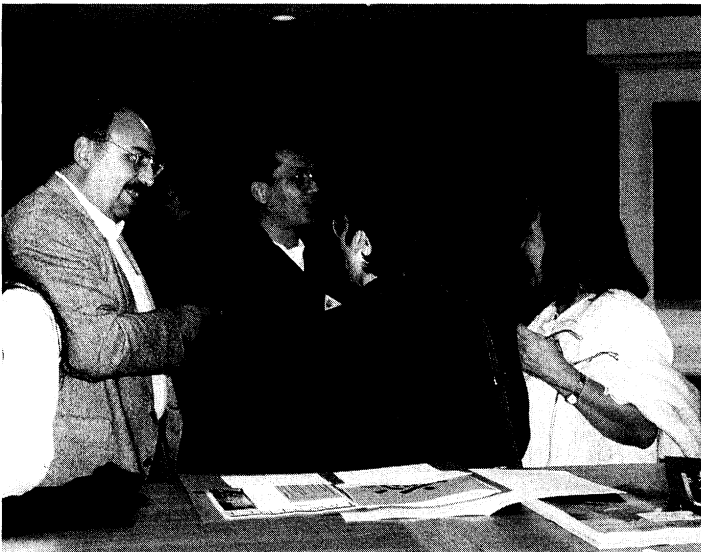
The third conference on Latin American theatre sponsored by the University of Kansas took place in Lawrence April 2 - 6, 1997. The previous events had been held in 1982 and 1992. Sponsored principally by the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, the Department of Theatre and Film and the Center of Latin American Studies, the conference was scheduled to coincide with the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of the *Latin American Theatre Review*. The spring issue of the journal came off the press two days before and was presented officially at the opening ceremony, following initial remarks by John Brushwood, John Gronbeck-Tedesco and George Woodyard.

The conference attracted participants from all over the United States and from several foreign countries, including Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Germany and Denmark. The participants presented over 100 academic papers that reflected their areas of particular interest. The presentations ranged from close textual analysis of canonical plays to a reflective taxonomy of 50 years of Mexican theatre. The quality of the papers was uniformly high and remarkably obedient to the 20-minute time limit. The participants included veterans in the field of Latin American theatre, some of whom had participated in the previous conferences, as well as younger scholars and even a few graduate students.

With an announced focus on Mexican theatre this year, the highlights of the conference were the presentations by four Mexican playwrights: Sabina Berman, Guillermo Schmidhuber, Hugo Salcedo and Miguel Angel Tenorio. In two plenary sessions the four talked about their theatre, their objectives and their perceptions of the state of Mexican theatre. The sessions were lively and involved audience participation as well. In another plenary session two individuals talked about the Hispanic playwright writing in English, and the efforts to reach the majority culture with Hispanic issues. Chilean-born playwright and professor at Arizona State University, Guillermo Reyes, took the platform along with Jorge Huerta, senior scholar in Chicano theatre and professor at the University of California, San Diego, to develop this session.



Susan Jones, Kirsten Nigro and Sabina Berman discuss translating Latin American plays into English.



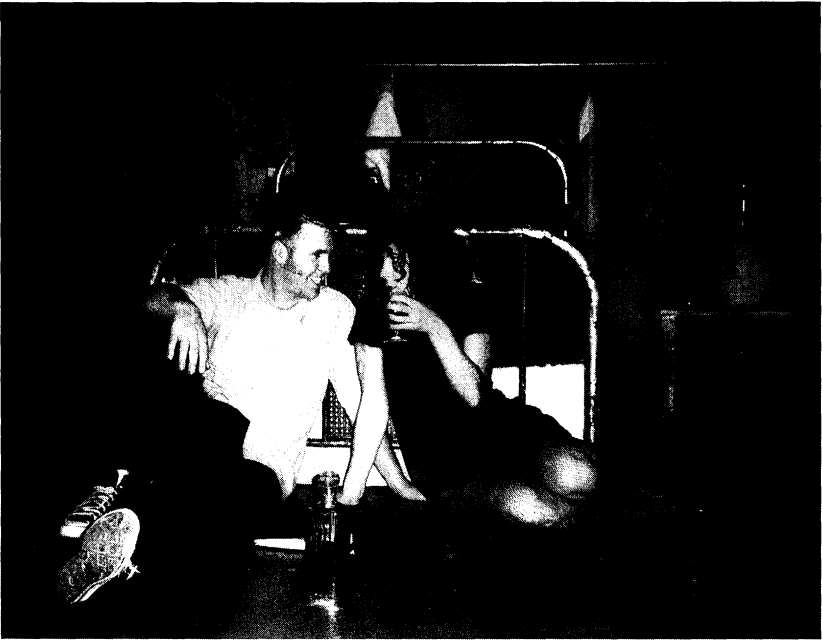
Playwright Guillermo Schmidhuber meets with conference participants.



Contributors to the *LATR* 30 year anniversary issue.



Final night.



*Sudden Death* by Sabina Berman (translation: Kirsten Nigro)



*Obituario* by Guillermo Schmidhuber

A fourth plenary session, organized by Kirsten Nigro of the University of Cincinnati (and at the time visiting professor at Miami University of Ohio), involved six people in discussing the problems and potential for translating Latin American plays into English.

The KU Department of Theatre and Film staged *Between Pancho Villa and a Naked Lady* by Sabina Berman in the Inge Theatre as a companion piece to the conference. Sabina Berman is the most exciting young playwright in Mexico and tremendously successful. Dolores Ringer's brilliant production of this postmodernist play, which explores stereotypical gender roles, incorporates Pancho Villa as the historical macho figure in parodying contemporary society in outrageously humorous scenes that deal with the creative process itself. The play sold out every night of its two-week run. The conference participants were also treated to a superb production of another Berman work, *Sudden Death (Muerte súbita)*, staged by the University of New Mexico Drama Department with Carlos Chavarría directing. In an intense relationship, two men and one woman struggle to find their intellectual, social and sexual identities through a maze with surprising twists and turns.

In addition, the conference sponsored two other plays and two skits. The Cultural Institute of Colima, Mexico, brought a production of *Obituario* (Obituary) by Guillermo Schmidhuber, a recent play that also engages issues of double identity and creative writing. The University of Xalapa, Mexico, brought Hugo Salcedo's *La bufadora*, a poignant play that reunites two individuals with painful memories many years after the death of their son. Further, two student groups, one from Arizona State University and one from Miami University of Ohio, shared scenes from earlier productions. The participation by the authors of the four plays presented provided extraordinary benefits to all the participants, and the conference organizers were extremely grateful to all who made these performances possible through their financial and artistic support.

The logistical details of the conference organization were handled by many dedicated and energetic graduate students in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese. The conference organizers are grateful for support provided by the Office of the Provost, the Office of Graduate Studies and International Programs, the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the staff of the Word Processing Center, and to West Junior High School for offering production space for the other performances.