



Playwrights Roberto Ramos-Perea and Aleyda Morales near Cayey, Puerto Rico. Photo: Vicky Unruh.

II Congreso del Autor Dramático Iberoamericano

Vicky Unruh

From June 23-27, 1997, seven eminent Iberoamerican playwrights, fourteen young Puerto Rican dramatists as well as established island playwrights, and eight theatre scholars and critics gathered in San Juan, Puerto Rico, for the II Congreso del Autor Dramático Iberoamericana under the auspices of the Ateneo Puertorriqueño and the Grupo de Estudios Dramáticos Iberoamericano (GEDI). GEDI is a study group composed of playwrights Fermín Cabal (Spain), Marco Antonio de la Parra (Chile), Mauricio Kartún (Argentina), Roberto Ramos-Perea (Puerto Rico), Eduardo Rovner (Argentina), Rodolfo Santana (Venezuela), and Guillermo Schmidhuber (Mexico). Ramos-Perea is also currently the Executive Director of the Ateneo Puertorriqueño. This event, which was organized by Ramos-Perea and by the Congress's Executive Director Rosabel del Valle of the Ateneo also encompassed the culminating activity of the Taller Superior Dramaturgia de San Juan, a year-long mentoring arrangement between the established playwrights of GEDI and the younger Puerto Rican dramatists-in-formation. In addition to study-group meetings among the GEDI dramatists and open workshops between the playwrights and their mentors, the week-long Congress also included presentations by other Puerto Rican dramatists and theatre scholars and three play performances.

Beginning in 1990, the playwrights of GEDI had met at various international theatre conferences as an informal study group to exchange ideas about theatre and evaluate one another's work-in-progress. They formalized the arrangement in the summer of 1993 with the I Congreso del Autor Dramático Iberoamericano, also held in Puerto Rico by the Ateneo. At that time, the members of GEDI formally initiated two projects they had discussed for some time: 1) to author collectively a non-prescriptive book about theatrical creation for emerging playwrights, and 2) to undertake a mentoring project for aspiring Spanish American dramatists. Through the first of these long-distance workshops, young Venezuelan playwrights were

assigned individual GEDI mentors, and mentors and students discussed the latter's work-in-progress by e-mail, snail-mail, or FAX. This exchange culminated in April 1995 with the face-to-face Taller Superior de Dramaturgia held in conjunction with the IX Festival de Teatro Internacional in Caracas.

In keeping with GEDI's objectives, the San Juan Conference in June marked the culmination of the book project in the presentation of the *Itinerario del autor dramático iberoamericano*, which was just published by the Ateneo and the title of which was inspired by Rodolfo Usigli's *Itinerario del autor dramático* (Mexico 1940). The new book, which addresses aspiring dramatists in Spanish America and will be reviewed in a forthcoming issue of *LATR*, contains individual pieces on the creative process by Cabal, de la Parra, Kartún, Ramos-Perea, Rovner, Santana, and Schmidhuber. It was formally presented at the Congress by Angel F. Elías from the Ateneo's Taller de Dramaturgia, and the authors also commented on the volume. In keeping with the pattern established at the 1995 Caracas gathering, the San Juan Congress also constituted the culmination of a year-long association between young Puerto Rican playwrights and their individual GEDI mentors.

The first three days of the gathering, June 23-25, were devoted to the Taller activities, which were open to the critics as well. At Monday's opening session, each of the young Puerto Rican playwrights presented a personal theatre poetics and recounted the results of the previous year's exchange with the assigned mentor. The new playwrights, most of whom have also worked in several facets of dramatic production including acting, included Carlos Raúl Acevedo, Rosita Archevald, Pedro Juan Avila, Maritza Boria, Miguel Diffot, Angel Elías, Vincent Landrau, Adriana Pantoja, Carmen Zeta Pérez, William Piedra, Ana Pino, Pedro Rodríguez, and Raiza Vidal. The subsequent lively discussion among the presenters, the GEDI mentors, and the critics addressed the process of dramatic creation, the relationship between dramatic writing and a staged performance, and the possible common characteristics of this productive new generation of Puerto Rican dramatists. The following two days, June 24-25, participants met in smaller groups, as each GEDI mentor met with his two or three assigned students, and, while critics observed and at times intervened, discussed specific works-in-progress by the students. Fermín Cabal worked with Angel Elías and Miguel Diffot; Marco Antonio de la Parra with Vincent Landrau, Ana Pino and Pedro Rodríguez; Mauricio Kartun with Carmen Zeta Pérez and Raiza Vida; Eduardo Rovner with Maritza Boria and William Pedra; Rodolfo Santana with Carlos Acevedo and Adriana Pantoja; and Guillermo Schmidhuber with Rosita Archevald and Pedro Juan Avila. Conference organizers transported

participants out to the island for these workshops that, even in the less formal settings of a Cayey rain forest and beautiful Luquillo Beach, were no less intense than the on-site Ateneo proceedings. The van rides to these venues, in fact, provided opportune time for the week's ongoing productive conversation among playwrights, both new and established, and critics.

During the final two days of the Congress, June 26-27, and back in San Juan, Puerto Rican playwrights Carlos Canales, Aleyda Morales (President of Puerto Rico's *Círculo Nacional de Autores Dramáticos*), and José Luis Ramos Escobar spoke on the recent directions of their artistic and philosophical concerns, and critics Grace Dávila López, Carmen Montañez, Ricardo Pérez Quitt (who is also a Mexican playwright), Edgar Quiles, Bonnie Reynolds, Ana María Rodríguez, Laurietz Seda, and Vicky Unruh gave talks on recent developments in Spanish American and Puerto Rican theatre, with particular attention in some cases to the work of several GEDI dramatists present. The events concluded with a synthesizing presentation by Roberto Ramos-Perea on the future directions of Spanish-American theatre and an extended and ardent discussion among all Congress participants about the central artistic, cultural, and political issues implicit in Spanish American drama at the end of the century.

Commentary on the Congress's three play performances wove through this exchange and through the week's numerous conversations. On the opening night of the gathering, Teatro el Cemí of Puerto Rico presented Eduardo Rovner's *Compañía* (1996), produced by Marcos Betancourt and directed and staged by Roberto Ramos-Perea with performances by Provi Sein, Jesús Papillón Garces, and Carmen Zeta Pérez. On June 25, the Taller de Teatro Anatomía of the Instituto Colimense de Cultura in Mexico staged Guillermo Schmidhuber's *Obituario: Mascarada en dos actos*, under the direction of Jaime Velasco and with performances by José Ramón Segurajáuregui and Sergio Navarro. On June 26, Aleyda Morales staged her monologue *Enigma de una mujer*, performed by Ana Pino.

The II Congreso del Autor Dramático Iberoamericano provided all of its participants – dramatists, actors, directors, and critics – with a singular mix of activities and an intensity of focus in creative and critical exchange that often characterizes a smaller gathering. This quality was enhanced by the trips away from San Juan and the relocation of Congress activities in more informal environments. The most unique and impressive feature of the gathering, however, was the sustained pedagogic attention to the creative process, a realm of dramatic activity to which theatre scholars do not often have sustained access. The opportunity to do so in this case provided critics

with a fresh view of theatre-in-the-making, and their participation in the exchanges may have contributed something to the process as well. It will be particularly interesting in the years ahead to assess the impact that the mentoring activities undertaken by GEDI, in its book and in its workshops, may have had on the emerging playwrights to whom these efforts have been addressed.

The University of Kansas



Participants in the II Congreso del Autor Dramático Iberoamericano. From left to right: Marco Antonio de la Parra, Roberto Ramos-Perea, Rodolfo Santana, and Fermín Cabal. Photo: Laurietz Seda.