

### **In Memoriam Abelardo Estorino (1925-2013)**

Renowned Cuban playwright Abelardo Estorino died on November 22, 2013, in his Havana home at the age of 88. Recipient of the 1992 Premio Nacional de Literatura and the 2002 Premio Nacional de Teatro, Estorino wrote 25 original plays, including *Hay un muerto en la calle* (1954), *El robo del cochino* (1961), *La casa vieja* (1964), *La dolorosa historia del amor secreto de don José Jacinto Milanés* (1973), *Morir del cuento* (1983), *Las penas saben nadar* (1989), *Parece blanca* (1994), and *Medea sueña Corinto* (2008). His work has been staged in more than a dozen countries throughout the Americas and Europe. In addition to his recognition as a playwright, Estorino won numerous awards as a director with the long-influential Cuban theatre company Teatro Estudio.

Estorino's defining personal attribute may well be his humility. An exceedingly kind and generous man, Estorino was reticent to acknowledge his accomplishments and eager to promote the merits of others. The first time we met, he took every opportunity to shift the conversation away from his own work in favor of proudly showing off paintings by his long-time partner Raúl Martínez, whose memoir *Yo, Publio* (2008) Estorino shepherded to print, lauding his favored actress Adria Santana, with whom he shared a close personal and artistic bond, and reminiscing about his famed mentor Virgilio Piñera, whose chair Estorino kept and shared with guests. Ever eager to support the Cuban performing arts community and younger generations of *teatristas*, Estorino was a fixture in Havana's cultural audiences, faithfully attending the theatre until just weeks before his passing.

Following a stint as a dentist in the late '50s, the launch of Estorino's theatrical career coincided closely with the 1959 Revolution, and his work embodies—perhaps as well as any Cuban writer's—the spirit of positioning itself “within the Revolution” through socio-political engagement motivated by love for his *patria* and a desire for the realization of its egalitarian ideals.

In the 1960s, *El robo del cochino* and *La casa vieja* dramatized intergenerational family conflicts in a Cuba that was coming to terms with the sea change underway. *La dolorosa historia...*, a hallmark piece, experimentally redeploys the nineteenth-century poet-protagonist's delusions as an artistic strategy in negotiating Cuban cultural politics during the so-called Quinquenio Gris of the '70s, arguably the most repressive period for freedom of expression since the start of the Revolution. *Parece blanca's* dislocated parody of the Cecilia Valdés story calls attention to the sexual commodification of *mulatas* in the early '90s, when post-Soviet economic reforms exacerbated racial inequalities while promoting international tourism to the island.

Estorino's final completed work, *Ecos y murmullos en Comala* (2012), pays tribute to Juan Rulfo's phantasmagoric *Pedro Páramo*, a novel whose influence haunts the whole of Estorino's theatrical production. From his early realist works and plays for children in the 1960s, through his later excursions into realms of the undead, Estorino's *oeuvre* explores Cuban collective identity and cultural history with poetic nuance and playful fascination. The 2012 edition of his *Teatro completo* and a forthcoming book on his work by Vivian Martínez Tabares complement many existing publications in ensuring Estorino's deserved place in Cuban theatre and literature. We mourn the loss of our friend. We celebrate his memory and his legacy. *Hasta siempre, Estorino.*

*David Lisenby*  
*University at Albany, SUNY*