

Oscar Liera and Sergio Magaña: In memoriam

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In the first year of the decade of the nineties Mexico lost two major playwrights, one from each of the two "generations" which still produce the majority of the country's theatrical texts. In January of 1990, Oscar Liera died in his native state of Sinaloa; August claimed Sergio Magaña in Mexico City. Each was considered by many to be the foremost representative of his respective generation, Liera of the "nueva dramaturgia," Magaña of the post-Usigli generation.

In addition to writing approximately thirty plays of varied lengths during his lifetime, Oscar Liera (b. 1946) was founder and director of the TATUAS (Taller de Teatro de la Universidad de Sinaloa, 1982) and co-founder of the Grupo Apolo (1972), both of which earned a reputation for excellence. By the time of his death, Oscar had "repented" of having written most of the one-acts he had allowed to be staged or published during the first period of his creativity, claiming that he wished to withdraw his paternity of them. The posthumous anthology *Pez en el agua* reflects his personal selection of nine fairly short plays he still liked immediately prior to his death. Other important works of his are *Las dulces compañías*, staged in Mexico in 1988 by Julio Castillo and then in New York at the Raft Theatre (1989); *El camino rojo de Sabaiba*, based on a story by Inés Arredondo; *El jinete de la divina providencia*, in which he dramatizes the legend of Malverde, a sort of Mexican Robin Hood; and *Chúcara y Mácara*, an anti-clerical piece which received international attention when the actors were assaulted during a performance in 1982 (see Connell).

The Mexican critic Fernando de Ita, whose book on Liera's work is forthcoming, writes:

una de las constantes de su obra es la crítica a las apariencias, sean éstas de orden social, religioso o personal . . . la obra de Liera se puede ver como un esfuerzo constante por desenmascarar los valores convencionales de nuestra vida íntima, de nuestra vida en familia, de nuestra vida en sociedad. (22 de julio, 33)

Another journalist adds that "[u]na de sus preocupaciones fundamentales fue la de hacer un teatro que reflejara claramente el mundo que había vivido"

(Johnson Celorio 7), commenting upon the author's penchant for taking material from life in Sinaloa. Finally, the tragedy which the loss of such a young, not fully realized playwright, represents for Mexico is very aptly expressed, I believe, in another of de Ita's articles on Liera:

Su desdichada muerte deja inconclusa una obra y una tarea que estaban por rendir sus mejores consecuencias. Con ser mucho lo que dio, era más lo que estaba por ofrecernos, de modo que su ausencia de doblemente abominable: perdimos a un hombre de una pieza y a uno de los talentos más ricos y germinales del teatro mexicano. (13 de enero, 29)

Sergio Magaña (b. 1924) was born in Michoacán and raised in Cuernavaca. He lived a good many of his adult years in Oaxaca, however, the state he most frequently claimed as his own. As a young man studying Literature at the National University he came to from part of the well-known group of dramatists who studied theory with Rodolfo Usigli and went on to become the most brilliant generation of Mexican playwrights to date: Emilio Carballido, Luisa Josefina Hernández, Jorge Ibarguengoitia and Héctor Mendoza. Between *Los signos del zodiaco*, the play he wrote and had produced while still a student at the UNAM (1951) and *Los enemigos* (1984), the 1989 production of which won several awards and was chosen to represent Mexico in Guanajuato and in Manizales, he penned several full-length plays which have come to be valued as masterpieces in Mexican theater: *Moctezuma II* (1953), *El pequeño caso de Jorge Lívido* (1958), *Los argonautas* (1967) (later changed to *Cortés y la Malinche*), *Santísima* (1980), and *La última diana* (1987).

Fernando de Ita has called this last play "La Madre Coraje de Sergio Magaña," and *Moctezuma II* "la primera y única tragedia del teatro mexicano" (de Ita, diciembre de 1988, 19). Of *Los argonautas* the poet Carlos Pellicer is said to have remarked: "La obra es espléndida. Yo creo que Magaña es el dramaturgo más talentoso de México" (Morales 3). And upon hearing of the death of his close friend Sergio, Emilio Carballido wrote the following:

El más grande de nuestra generación, lo ha dicho Luisa (Josefina Hernández), lo sabemos todos. Talento, furia vital, sueños magníficos que quedan ahí plasmados . . . lo que vale de uno, lo que queda, lo que transforma la realidad son fantasías y sueños, lo demás son anécdotas, triviales, circunstancias. Sergio andaba atrás de un sueño gigantesco que no se dejaba atrapar totalmente, que se le medio entregaba y huía. Lo persiguió con todo su arrebato, su atropellamiento, con todas sus fuerzas imaginativas y con su cuerpo y con esa amargura de no alcanzarlos plenamente, la que le

devaluaba el éxito y las aclamaciones y los reconocimientos que nunca dejó de recibir. (Espinosa 33)

Though the plays of Magaña and Liera will continue to be staged and read by audiences both in and outside of Mexico, it is with great sadness that the country must accept the end of the creativity of two of its most brilliant playwrights.

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