

THE REDISCOVERY OF JORGE CARRERA ANDRADE

This is a very momentous day at Assumption College as the life and literary works of Jorge Carrera Andrade are celebrated through the good graces of our friend Juan Carlos Grijalva .

I have read and translated Latin American literature for two decades and yet in 1998 the name of Jorge Carrera Andrade was not prominent in the universe of important Latin American writers available in English translation. I did not know who he was.

I then discovered Carrera Andrade in an anthology of European poets published in the 1960s -for he had already lived on and off for decades in Paris as Consul General, Ambassador to France and employed at UNESCO- and I was immediately taken by one poem in this collection:

LIFE OF THE GRASSHOPPER

Always an invalid
he wanders through the field
on green crutches.

Since five o'clock
the stream from a star
has filled the grasshopper's tiny pitcher.

A laborer, he fishes
each day with his antenna
in the rivers of air.

A misanthrope, at night
he hangs the flicker of his chirp
in a house of grass.

Leaf rolled up and alive,
the grasshopper keeps the music
of the world written inside.

The images of Carrera Andrade are so simple and clear even a child can see and understand. His poetry is the result of the poet's intense magical engagement with nature, with the Indians of his native Ecuador, with the landscape of Ecuador itself and other places of the world he has traveled.

I began researching this poet and fell in love with his work but continued to puzzle over the fact he was unknown in English during my own era and not represented in the major anthologies of Latin American poetry.

I translated *Century of the Death of the Rose: Selected Poems* and began a search to contact the family for permission to publish. Since the poet had been dead for thirty years and the family was somewhere in Quito, this seemed an impossible task. At one point, I had a dream in which I climbed the Andes on a donkey in a snow storm searching for the family of this poet! This is how impossible finding the family seemed. I finally contacted the Cultural Attaché at the Embassy in Quito and it turned out he was from Boston! He had worked for *The Boston Globe* and said, "I can help with the family, I think. Let's talk in two weeks." In two weeks we spoke and he said I have found the world's leading authority on the work of Jorge Carrera Andrade. I thought, "This is too easy. He's probably French, a very difficult man and I don't speak the language." But no. No! What the Attaché told me was that the world's leading authority on this writer was Dr. J. Enrique Ojeda of Boston College!

I called Dr. Ojeda and we met for lunch in Wellesley and he invited me to his house and his study was a museum for Carrera Andrade. He had every book, many photographs, manuscripts, his own written works about the poet and many memories. Looking at

the work I had done with the poetry and understanding my sincerity Dr. Ojeda welcomed me into the fraternity of admirers of Jorge Carrera Andrade. More important he has been instructive to me about the poet, the intricacies of modernism and Latin American literature and the more personal details of literary life. But Dr. Ojeda is also the hero of Jorge Carrera Andrade, for he is the one who has devoted thirty years of his career to this one poet. He has published critical studies, arranged for other works to be in print and lectured and championed this one writer. And this is an essential fact.

It is important to understand the world of art is filled with accidents of history, of political feuds that relegate one artist to the dusty book shelf in the library and another to the top of the mountain, of schools of art appearing and disappearing, the tastes of public consumption always changing. For instance, two days ago *The New York Times* reported that a painting by Mexican painter Rufino Tamayo, "Tres Personajes," worth \$1 million dollars, was found in the trash by a woman walking down the street; part of a lost composition by Johann Sebastian Bach was found in Japan nearly eight decades after it went missing; there was the recent discovery of an unpublished Robert Frost poem.

What happens today at Assumption College is part of the rediscovery of Jorge Carrera Andrade, one of the most famous Latin American poets in the United States in the 1940s, more famous than even Pablo Neruda. While in America, Carrera Andrade helped edit the first substantial anthology of modern Latin American poets published in English by New Directions; he wrote an essay on Latin American poetry for *Poetry* magazine of Chicago; his own book, *Secret Country*, was published in 1945 and was reviewed in *The Chicago Tribune*, *The New Yorker*, *The Yale Review*. His admirers included Archibald MacLeish, Carl Sandberg, Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams.

Since the publication of my own translation of the selected poems of Jorge Carrera Andrade, Dr. Ojeda and I have spoken about Carrera Andrade at The Americas Society in New York City,

SUNY Stony Brook and The Library of Congress. Reviews of the book have appeared in *The Harvard Review* and even in *Dawn*, the largest English language newspaper in Pakistan, a country that values the best of western poetry. The BBC Radio in the UK recently broadcast in English and Spanish poetry by Jorge Carrera Andrade from my book. And today Assumption College helps to celebrate the continuing rediscovery of Carrera Andrade, for which I am very thankful.

Steven Ford Brown

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