

Beatriz Seibel

Trinidad Guevara

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In 1817 Trinidad Guevara, being nineteen years old, enters the company of the Coliseum Theatre of Buenos Aires and soon becomes a favourite with the public. Born on May 11th, 1798, in the Oriental Zone of the Vice-royalty of the Río de la Plata (what is now the Republic of Uruguay), an actor's daughter, she plays her first role at thirteen years old and at seventeen she is a "first lady" in the theatre of Montevideo. An unmarried mother, she gives birth to her first child, Caroline, when she is eighteen, but does not stop performing. She goes on working even when her second child, a son, Caupolicán, is born three years later.

Trinidad is the most admired actress; she performs in the leading female roles in plays of the independence period and following the tradition, she also plays male roles - young men, such as Paul in *Paul and Virginia*, where she is praised for her performance. In 1821, her acting inspires these verses by the poet Juan Cruz Varela:

*Honey, fire and death
your lip flows,
he who hears and does not love you
has not a heart ...*

However, in June of the same year, Father Castañeda publishes, in his own newspaper, an apocalyptic article against Trinidad, where he calls her a "prostitute woman" and a "gutter of vices and trash". The main accusation is that she came on stage with a medallion portrait of "one of her lovers", a married man, and probably the father of her children. Trinidad answers on a printed leaflet where she mentions the "black vengeance" to which she is submitted in front of an "illustrious population", and hopes that they will consider her "Trinidad Guevara, not as a criminal, but as an unhappy woman". Because of this episode, she does not perform for some nights, but when finally she appears on the stage, she is received with a long, huge applause.

In 1910, Bosch was of the opinion that:

Trinidad could not be replaced! She was a reformer and in her school Cáceres and Casacuberta were taught to

be great. She was the first to understand that actors of genius are not those who recite verses, but those who interpret or create the character. Cáceres was her disciple, with the advantage of having a greater field of action - the number of plays with male rather than female protagonists is greater. Trinidad was the head of that Argentine artistic school from 1821, when she began to surpass all the prominent actors.

It is very interesting to mark out these opinions, because it is the first and only time that a woman is recognised as having the capacity to innovate stage techniques and influence other actors, particularly as female roles were a minority in the plays of the epoch. Her influence was felt by two important first actors - Francisco Cáceres and Juan José Casacuberta, the latter being the great Argentine interpreter whose name was given to one of the stages of the San Martín Municipal Theatre. There is certainly no official theatre which bears the name Trinidad Guevara.

In that same year, 1821, General San Martín, as Protector of Peru, signs the historic declaration where he rules: "Stage art does not result in infamy for those who practice it". Thus he removes the "note of infamy" against the comedians, even if the actresses were, in the words of Peruvian Ricardo Palma, "the dish for the rich, as truffle turkey and rabbit ribs".

Trinidad Guevara continues her career, has other children, makes tours to Córdoba, to Montevideo, and returns. Around 1832, dancing on stage becomes fashionable and she appears dancing waltzes and minuets; she demonstrates her amazon ability when she enters through the stalls on horseback challenging her enemies, in a play by Moreto, and the comment was: "She was so elegant!" By the end of that year she leaves for Chile with other actors, coming back in 1836. She works in Buenos Aires and in Montevideo; she plays in Córdoba in

1849, with a cast including three of her children; she is supposed to have had seven. Then she goes to Chile; in 1853 she is in Mendoza, leading the cast at the 25 de Mayo Theatre.

In 1856 she returns to Buenos Aires and the local chronicle greatly praises Trinidad, "the eminent actress". The Spanish actor Torres offers the Porvenir Theatre for an "extraordinary performance in benefit of the Argentine actress Madame Trinidad Guevara". She is fifty-eight years old and in the programme she gives thanks for "the help in my bad situation" and says that "the dramatic art is so ungrateful that you can do little when nature weakens the body and the physical capacity is no longer at the same level of the actor's intelligence". On the following day the newspapers write that crowns of flowers showered over Trinidad as soon as she stepped on stage and that she received a great applause with open curtains in a dramatic moment, but she is presented as an evocation of the past, the artist "that years ago received the most enthusiastic applause on stage". On Christmas Eve she performs in an all female show in benefit of actresses from the Torres Company, where the women played all the roles in a comedy and a short play; this is repeated two days after, due to public interest. In the following year, she works from time to time with a Spanish company but beyond this there is no more news about her performances.

Twelve years later, she is living with her widowed daughter Laurentina and appears as a "dressmaker" according to the census of 1869; this was a profession often adopted by retired actresses - making theatre costumes. She dies forgotten on July 24th, 1873 at the age of seventy-five, after working on the stage for forty-six years. There is no mention of her death in the newspapers.

Arturo Capdevila writes:

Trinidad Guevara, the living symbol of what has been our theatre, just vanished into

nothingness. It is useless reading through the newspapers. Not a line to be found. Thus the curtain fell on the life of a renowned artist who captivated her contemporaries.

On September 28th, 1995, the Buenos Aires City Council gave the name of Trinidad Guevara to a street in the renovated zone of Madero Port, in memory of her performances in the first half of the last century.

Translated from Spanish by Cristina Lastra

BEATRIZ SEIBEL (Argentina) is a scholar, theatre director and author, specialising in Latin American and Argentinean performance history. Her first book explores and validates the itinerant artists, those in the margins of theatre making. In *De ninfas a capitanas* she researches the women ignored by theatre history, from the time of the rituals up to the wars of independence in Argentina.