TEC
HIDVL ARTIST PROFILES

THE SCHOOLTEACHER [LA MAESTRA]
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CHARACTERS:

THE TEACHER
JUANA PASAMBÚ
PEDRO PASAMBÚ
SQUINT-EYED TOBIAS
OLD ASUNCIÓN
SERGEANT
PEREGRINO PASAMBÚ

A young woman is seated on a bench downstage. Behind her or to her side, certain scenes will take place. There should be no direct interaction between her and the characters in those scenes. She doesn’t see them, and they don’t see her.

THE TEACHER: I am dead. I was born here, in this town. In the little house made of red clay, with a straw roof. By the road, across from the school. The road is a slow moving river of red clay in winter, and a whirlwind of red dust in summer. When the rains come you lose your sandals in the mud, the mules and horses get their bellies smeared with mud, the saddles and even the faces of the horsemen are spattered with mud. In the months when the sun hangs high and long in the sky, the entire town is covered with red dirt. The sandals go up the road, filled with red dirt, and the hooves and legs of the horses, and the snorting nostrils of the mules and horses, and the manes, and saddles, and the sweaty faces, and hats, all become filled with red dirt. I was born from that mud, and from that red dirt, and now I have returned to it. Here in the small cemetery that watches over the town below, surrounded by daisies, geraniums, lilies, and thick grass. The acrid smell of red mud mingles with the sweet odor of yaraguá grass, and in the afternoon even the smell of the woods drifts overhead, and rushes down upon the town. (A pause.) They brought me here in the evening. (A funeral procession, upstage, with a coffin.) Juana Pasambú, my aunt, came.

JUANA PASAMBÚ: Why didn't you eat?


PEDRO PASAMBÚ: You liked bananas and corn on the cob with salt and butter.

THE TEACHER: I liked bananas and corn on the cob, but I wouldn't eat them. I kept my mouth tightly closed. (A pause.) Squint-eyed Tobias is here: he was the mayor years ago.
SQUINT-EYED TOBIAS: I brought you water from the spring where you drank when you were a little girl; I brought it in a cup made of leaves, and you wouldn't drink it.

THE TEACHER: I didn't want to drink. I kept my lips pressed together. God forgive me, I began to wish the spring would dry up. Why did water continue to gush out of the spring? I wondered, for what reason? (A pause.) Old Asunción was here. The midwife who brought me into the world.

OLD ASUNCIÓN: Oh, woman! Oh, my child! I brought you into this world. Oh, my baby! Why wouldn't you take anything from my hands? Why did you spit out the soup I gave you? My hands that have healed so many, why couldn't they heal your torn flesh? And while the murderers were here.

(The people in the funeral procession look around with terror. The old woman continues her mute wailing while the teacher speaks.)

THE TEACHER: They are afraid. Some time ago fear came to this town and hung suspended over it like a great storm cloud. The air reeks of fear, voices dissolve in the bitter spittle of fear, and the people swallow it. Yesterday the cloud ripped open, and the thunderbolt fell upon us.

The funeral procession disappears. A violent roll of drums is heard in the darkness. When the light comes on again, where the procession was there is now an old farmer, on his knees, his hands tied behind his back. In front of him stands a police sergeant.

SERGEANT (Looking at a list). Your name's Peregrino Pasambú, right? (The old man nods.) Then you're the big chief here. (The old man shakes his head.)

THE TEACHER: Father had been named mayor twice by the government. But he understood so little about politics that he didn't realize the government had changed.

SERGEANT: You got this land because of politics, isn't that right?

THE TEACHER: That wasn't true. My father was one of the founders of the town. And because he was one of the founders he had this house next to the road, with some land. He gave the town its name. He called it "Hope."

SERGEANT: Aren't you gonna talk? Aren't you gonna say anything?

THE TEACHER: My father didn't talk much.

SERGEANT: This land ain't divided light. We're gonna divide it all over again. It's gonna have real owners, with deeds and everything.
THE TEACHER: When my father came here, it was all a jungle.

SERGEANT: The jobs haven't been given out too well, neither. Your daughter's the schoolteacher, ain't she?

THE TEACHER: It wasn't really a job. They seldom paid me my salary. But I liked to be the schoolteacher. My mother was the first teacher the school ever had. She taught me, and when she died I became the teacher.

SERGEANT: Who knows what that dame teaches.

THE TEACHER: I taught reading and writing, and I taught catechism, and love for our country and our flag. When I refused to eat and drink, I thought about the children. It was true that there weren't very many of them, but who was going to teach them? And then I thought: why should they learn the catechism? Why should they learn to love their country and their flag? Country and flag don't mean anything anymore. Maybe it wasn't right, but that's what I thought.

SERGEANT: Why don't you talk? This isn't my doing. I'm not to blame. I'm just following orders. (He shouts) You see this list? All the big chiefs and fat cats of the last government are on it. We got orders to get rid of them all so we can set up the elections.

(The sergeant and the old man disappear.)

THE TEACHER: So that's the way it was. They put him against the mud wall behind the house. The sergeant gave the order, and the soldiers shot. Then the sergeant and the soldiers came into my room and one after the other they raped me. Then I wouldn't eat or drink again, and so I died, little by little. Little by little. Now it will rain soon, and the red dirt will turn to mud. The road will be a slow moving river of red mud and the sandals will come up the road again, and the mud covered feet, and the horses and mules with their bellies full of mud, and even the faces and the hats will go up the road, splattered with mud.

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