

## The Theatre of Juan Ríos Rey

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From the end of the Second World War until 1960 the national theatre of Peru thrived on the production of its three principal dramatists. Two of these, Sebastián Salazar Bondy and Enrique Solari Swayne, are well known to *aficionados* of the Hispanic American theatre. Salazar, whose production includes ten full-length plays and eleven one-act "juguetes," is best remembered for his realistic creations with national and universal implications.<sup>1</sup> Solari Swayne is the author of *Collacocha*, one of the most important dramas of twentieth-century Peru, and two other works which have failed to equal his first in their overall quality and public acclaim. The third dramatist is Juan Ríos Rey,<sup>2</sup> the author of eight major plays between 1946 and 1960, and the only Peruvian dramatist of his time who has successfully produced dramas free of national social and political influences. The vitally stimulating role that Ríos has played in the renewal of the contemporary theatre in Peru has been accentuated by his winning the Premio Nacional de Teatro five times in fifteen years. He has won the award for *Don Quijote* (1946), *La selva* (1950), *Ayar Mankō* (1952), *El mar* (1954), and *Los desesperados* (1960).

Despite his national acclaim, however, Ríos has been unduly overlooked by foreign critics and theatrical companies.<sup>3</sup> This ironic development is partially due to the fact that only two of his works, *Ayar Mankō* and his first version of *Don Quijote*, were published before 1961. In that year the only volume of his drama appeared containing *Don Quijote*, *El fuego*, *El reino sobre las tumbas*, *Los bufones*, *La selva*, and *Los desesperados*. *El mar*, his only other work known to exist, does not appear in this volume. Nonetheless, a manuscript has been secured and a discussion of the drama is included in this study. A second volume of dramas which have never been presented was promised in 1961, yet it has never been published. After so many years of withdrawal from the theatre, it seems unlikely that Ríos will ever release it. This study, then, is intended as an introduction to Ríos' entire dramatic production as it is known

to exist. Its purpose is to focus attention on this author as one of the unrecognized patriarchs of the contemporary Peruvian theatre.

The following is a chronological listing of Ríos' dramas, along with a brief summation and critical evaluation of each entry. This listing, in turn, is followed by concluding remarks based on the analysis of all the plays.

Ríos' first drama, *Don Quijote*,<sup>4</sup> was presented in 1946 and revised in 1957. It is written in blank verse, usually in lines of more than sixteen syllables, and is divided into six *cuadros*. The first five *cuadros* are inspired by random episodes in the original novel and recall the knight's chivalresque folly as he pursues his dream. It is in the final segment that Ríos invests the drama with his originality. Don Quijote, now on his death bed, refuses to give up his dream, even though he is aware now of the mad adventures it has brought him. As he tells Sancho, it is man's dream that distinguishes him from the rock, which is inert and contributes nothing to life. Sancho finally understands his master and hands him his lance, the symbol of the knight's dream. Don Quijote is thus prepared to die, convinced that while his body will return to dust, his dream will live eternally. His last words reiterate Ríos' purpose for writing this play: "¡De mi cadáver puede crecer un mundo! ¡La muerte es bella! / ¡La muerte es pura! ¡La muerte es Vida!" (*Don Quijote*, p. 136). They indicate that for Don Quijote, as all men, it is man's dream that is immortal and death as the absolute end of being does not exist.

Despite the popularity and favorable criticism which *Don Quijote* has received, the work is not sound dramatically. Its principal weakness is an excessive rhetorical dependence on the novel. In addition, this play, like several of Ríos' works, includes frequent poetic interludes which detract from the play's aesthetic and thematic unity. It should be noted, nevertheless, that the major interludes in this drama are clearly marked so that they can be omitted without detriment to the overall dramatic effect of the work. A third weakness is that Ríos' creative talents are often overshadowed by allusion to too many episodes and by the inclusion of too many personages from the original novel.

With regard to the structural basis, the division into six *cuadros* clearly reinforces the episodic nature of the drama. Any division into longer segments would weaken the progression of the play action, and any division into shorter segments would invite chaos and jeopardize the defense of dreams in the final scene. It is apparent that Ríos took care to balance and proportion these segments so that the story development in the first five *cuadros* would parallel the original and so that the sixth would highlight his thematic presentation.

*Don Quijote* contains many of the dramatic elements and themes which appear in Ríos' subsequent production. One noticeable absence is that of an American setting and atmosphere. Yet, *Don Quijote* does contain the central motif of Ríos' total production: man's epic struggle for immortality. The basic irony in his theatre is that the story of man's struggle is usually accompanied by the "dust to dust" theme, or that of the inevitable return to nothingness. In all of his plays written after *Don Quijote*, Ríos' protagonists are ambitious and their deeds are motivated by hate which results in their death. Thus, his works

customarily portray an individual who suffers due to his own actions. The only escape from his world of death is death, often by suicide.

*Don Quijote* cannot, therefore, be considered a representative introduction to Ríos' subsequent creations. This is not to decry its merits. Foremost among these are its structural arrangement, its appeal to a universal Hispanic audience, and Ríos' imaginative portrayal of Don Quijote's refusal to give up his dream in the final moments of life.

*El fuego*,<sup>5</sup> which is written in blank verse and is divided into seven *cuadros*, is Ríos' first drama of American design. In this case he has adapted a classical myth to the Hispanoamerican scene and has wrapped the entire production in an epic mantle. *El fuego* is inspired by Aeschylus' classical version of the myth of Prometheus, who is honored as the founder of civilization.

The drama is set in an Andean republic during the early days of its independence. It tells of a rebel captain and his compatriots who battle to suppress a national military junta which threatens to establish a dictatorship. The leader's most trusted companion in the campaign is the Fugitive, a merciless figure who constantly harangues the rebels with his passionate hatred of the enemy. He contends that economic class differences are the cause of national unrest, and that hate is the most powerful stimulant for motivating the underdog to abolish social inequality. The Captain agrees with respect to economic class barriers, but maintains that social correction should be served by justice tempered by compassion, not hate. By the sixth *cuadro* the enemy has surrounded the rebels, yet the Captain refuses an offer of amnesty because he is determined to win his symbolic battle. Although the rebel losses are heavy, he is undaunted and feels self-sacrifice is the only way his dream of autonomy can be fulfilled. It is evident that martyrdom is the Captain's goal when he refuses to escape with the Fugitive.

The final scene dwells on the change which takes place in the Captain. He has been wounded in the side and chained to a rock in a manner reminiscent of the hero in *Prometheus Bound*. At this point, however, the Captain's Promethean qualities, his compassion and idealism, turn to bitter hatred for the enemy as he witnesses the execution of his followers. The Captain's new-found agony and his execution prompt a blind prophet to end the drama with the prediction that the Captain's dream will be nurtured in the hearts of others willing to shed blood for freedom and justice. The Captain, then, did not die in vain.

The inspirational indebtedness of *El fuego* to the myth of Prometheus should be evident to most audiences. Anyone familiar with the poetic heritage of Peru would also note the obvious influence of César Vallejo on Ríos' verse. In every *cuadro*, except the third and the fifth, the Captain recalls Vallejo's stoic resignation before the agony of his own existence. For example, in the first *cuadro* he reflects: "Ah, fatalidad, Tierra, Destino, ¡aparta de mi este cáliz!" (*Teatro*, p. 174). In the sixth he is anguished to think: "¡Ahora bebo las heces de mi cáliz, / el fondo de lágrimas del indescriptible vino! / Ahora sé todo el sufrimiento que puede anidar en el pecho del hombre." (*Teatro*, p. 260).<sup>6</sup> Despite Vallejo's influence, however, *El fuego* is victim of its author's poetic stagnation.

Ríos simply fails to incorporate the poetic splendor he seems to strive for into his dialogues. They are too flat, overly long, and repetitious. The unfortunate conclusion is that Ríos fails in his attempt to adapt the epic and heroic subject matter of his drama to original lyric prose.

*El fuego* is an episodic work much the same as *Don Quijote* and, in the main, the division into seven *cuadros* is structurally sound. But the thematic significance of at least one *cuadro*, the fifth, is questionable and certainly weak. This segment, which is obviously included for its dramatic tension, depicts how the Fugitive's aplomb saves the Captain from death.

Despite the distinctions made between the major characters, *El fuego* is not a drama of psychological intent. Both of the characters are rather flat because, on a higher level of interpretation, they respectively represent man's instinctive bestiality and his emotional compassion. The Fugitive capitalizes on man's bestial instincts to forward his own beliefs throughout the drama. He ably arouses man's hate and will to kill. The Captain, on the other hand, has distinct difficulties in shaping an emotional compassion in his men. His plans and achievements are constantly thwarted by the Fugitive's efforts to instill hate in every follower. Due to the characters being stereotyped, therefore, the theme of the drama is not expressed, or evidenced, until the final scene when the Captain, too, condemns compassionate justice to herald force and hatred. He dies a martyr, but the change in him remains a negative judgment of non-violent measures in the struggle for national autonomy.

It is hard to see *El fuego* as a valid indication of Ríos' dramatic capability, but it is important because it contains many of the major tendencies and themes which are later refined and which become characteristic of his production. *El fuego*, for instance, seems to have been the inspiration for Ríos' *Los desesperados* (1960). It, too, evidences Ríos' growing desire to forge a truly Hispanoamerican theatre.

*El reino sobre las tumbas*<sup>7</sup> is a brief work in comparison with Ríos' other dramas. Written early in his career, in 1949, it is in blank verse and divided into two *cuadros*. Ríos' source of inspiration for the play is the classical story of the Forest of Nemi and, specifically, James Frazer's rendition of the myth of Diana of Aricia and Virbius, a god of the wood and chase who was worshipped with her. Virbius supposedly originated the custom of giving the priest's office to a runaway slave who, with a tree branch, killed the incumbent and assumed his position.<sup>8</sup>

With only minor innovations in the first *cuadro*, *El reino sobre las tumbas* is a faithful and artistically impressive adaptation of the myth. Ríos' original contribution is the story of Marco, an outlaw who enters the Forest to escape Roman soldiers. He does so aware that no man has ever left the Forest, a kingdom of death ruled by Crotón, Marcos' long lost brother. The second *cuadro* has little to offer those familiar with the myth of Frazer's account. It dramatizes Croton's escape from his agonizing solitude through death at the hands of his brother. By his act, Marcos has sealed his fate. Under the law of Diana, he has forsaken his liberty in order to defend the silent kingdom of the dead.

*El reino sobre las tumbas* is the most forceful expression of Ríos' dramatic

themes and, in this regard, is his most succinct portrayal of an individual who rules over a kingdom of death and whose agonized existence is relieved only when life is terminated. In addition, this work evidences marked improvement with regard to Ríos' frequent confusion of thematic currents resultant from the use of extraneous dramatic and tension-building episodes. In fact, this is one of the author's better productions because it is not a cluttered arrangement of his favorite themes. Nevertheless, the drama is not a model of Ríos' stylistic capabilities because it suffers from his poetic verbosity. This does not mean that there is excessive rhetorical repetition or that its philosophic implications are poorly made. The point is that the main characters' dialogues are needlessly long and involved in several instances. Sometimes they suggest that the author is enjoying poetic exercise and license, having foregone the original intent of his writing.

*Los bufones*<sup>9</sup> was written in 1949 and was never revised as were many of Ríos' dramas. This is a one-act work in blank verse and takes place during the reign of Spain's Philip IV. The time is 1644, one year after the Spanish defeat at Rocroi and the time in which Philip's administrative duties have heavily increased and his wife is dying of a mysterious malady. The play dramatizes the efforts of one of Philip's buffoons to alleviate the King's agony.

Shortly after the curtain rises, Philip dejectedly enters and the buffoons commence their antics intended to amuse him. They fail to distract Philip because his worldly problems have led to a more profound and personal preoccupation. He is suffering the agony of being only a mortal being. Philip's concern with his corporeal mortality has eventually isolated him from society.

Sebastián de Morra is an embittered buffoon who also suffers the agony of personal solitude. His hatred for the world stems from his feeling of social inferiority and his desire to be considered more than a simple buffoon. Despite the vast social differences between him and the King, however, Sebastián understands the cause of Philip's concern. And while he can proffer no lasting solace, Sebastián does remind Philip that each man is a mortal being for whom death is inevitable. He feels that life and its agonies are the figment of another's dream. When the dream is ended, man ceases to exist.

Sebastián also believes that the Queen is dying from the agony of solitude and that only he understands the real cause of her certain death. Thus, he is ironically elated to hear that her last words were for him. It is his proof that she accepted and confided in him as an equal human being. Sebastián no longer feels he is a simple buffoon, and his hate and pessimism are now dissipated. Philip's agony is also terminated by the death of his queen and by Sebastián's peculiar insight into his problem. The King now realizes the futility of yearning for corporeal immortality.

This work should be of special interest to anyone acquainted with *Los bufones*, a canvas by Velázquez. Such a non-literary motivation is refreshing and points to Ríos' broad cultural background and inspiration. The manner in which the author has blended the Spanish inspiration with historical fact and his fictional portrayal of the King is particularly praiseworthy. *Los bufones* is also appealing because there is a natural flow of ideological currents throughout

the drama. There are no digressions or any displacement of the three traditional unities. It is the personal note which predominates, nonetheless, and the characterizations of Philip and Sebastián are outstanding for their spontaneity and for being more natural than artificial or dramatic. For example, the familiar relations which exist between the King and his buffoon are startling at first, but as the games and antics continue, an intimate and congenial rapport is established between the actors and the audience. By the time the games have ended, Sebastián's words and actions do not seem out of place with regard to his social station, and Philip seems an ordinary human being. As a result, the final solution to the King's personal conflict is credible and free of any immediate psychological objections the audience may have had at the beginning of the drama.

The basic themes in this work are those found in most of Ríos' drama: hate, the agony of existence, inevitable death as the only escape, and social inequalities. And, while the friendship between the buffoon and the King is elaborated by the author, these themes are slowly introduced and developed by Sebastián—from the opening moments, in which his hate is manifested, to the closing moments, in which he feels accepted as a man equal to any other. In reality, therefore, the buffoon, and not the King, is responsible for originating the thematic currents of the drama.

*Los bufones* is written in a variety of verse forms, with lines of sixteen or more syllables predominating. This drama, unlike many others by Ríos, does not subject the audience to any unduly long or repetitious poetic passages. Its brevity and Ríos' apparent concern with preserving a natural fluidity complement each other so that there is no noticeable lapse in the dialogue.

Perhaps the most rewarding feature of the play is found in the development of the principal characters' interrelationship. This is true even though the bonds which unite Philip to Sebastián are cleverly hidden until the last moments of the play. In the closing scene there is a sober and significant realization that both characters have profited in a positive manner from Sebastián's hatred and agonized isolation from society. The use of hate as a major motivating factor is usually found in at least one character in each of Ríos' plays. In *Los bufones*, hatred is not championed as a future norm, as in *El fuego*, but is ironically influential in determining the characters' optimistic outlook on life.

Ríos' next drama, *La selva*,<sup>10</sup> was written in 1950 and won the Premio Nacional de Teatro the same year. It was slightly revised in 1960. The final version is in blank verse and in three acts, with the last one divided into two *cuadros*. The classical inspiration for this drama is clearly the story of Jason and the Argonauts. Ríos has adapted Jason's original adventures and love for Medea to a drama of the Spanish Conquest of the New World. He deviates slightly from the original, but not sufficiently to disguise the classical influence.

The basic story concerns a Spanish Captain who is sent to make conquests for the Crown and, failing that, falls in love with the daughter of his Indian captor. To prove her love and to effect the soldiers' escape, the Princess kills a brother and betrays her father. Once in civilization, she murders again to protect the Captain and, when faced with a vengeful mob, kills herself and her children

to avoid further agony. She so dominates the Captain that he, too, joins her with his own suicide.

The drama actually begins eight years after the return to civilization. In order to dramatize past events, Ríos resorts to the use of flashbacks to maintain and relate the two levels of action, that of the past and of the present. These chronologically arranged interludes are introduced by the songs of the dreamer, or *soñador*, and occur throughout the work since almost one half of it takes place in the past. It should be noted that the use of flashbacks in the drama represents a skillful complement to Ríos' departure from the traditional linear plot development. Their distribution and timing facilitate the relation of past events to respective present time action. The potential time problem in this drama is deftly solved by Ríos' handling of the flashbacks. They are an unexpected addition, but are his only deviation from a traditionally oriented dramaturgy.

Among Ríos' drama heretofore discussed, *La selva* is the most complex and artistically refined. His use of a variety of verse meters is particularly praiseworthy. Of special note are the lyric moments in the songs of the dreamer, and the heroic tone of the flashbacks which relate the story of the past expedition. In the former, the verse form is usually short and the song is brief. In the latter, the verse is more narrative and prosaic with longer lines. Only rarely does this work suffer needless elaboration or dramatic lapses in the dialogue.

As is true in *Don Quijote*, and to some extent in *El fuego*, characterization in this drama is not too problematical because Ríos again depends on universal models. The Captain is distinguished from Jason only by his human lust and emotional foibles. The Princess helps deliver the Captain from danger in practically the same manner that her classical model, Medea, delivered Jason. Both women, for example, butchered their brother's body and scattered the pieces for their fathers to find. The Princess is a faithful imitation of Medea until the end of the drama when she kills her sons and herself.

The boys are not of Ríos' creation, either, because they have acknowledged models to be found in the legend of Medea. Both are rather flat characters, and their basic importance is twofold: to substantiate succeeding plot development and the character portrayals of the Princess and the Captain, and to inject a note of social interest in *La selva*. In this latter regard, their arguments early in the first act expose the Conquest's concern with the new mestizo elements in the predominately Spanish and Indian population. The eight year old is critical of his Indian mother, whom he blames for his mestizo heritage, and respects his father as a hero. The feelings of the ten year old are reversed. He more deeply loves his mother and believes his father to be guilty of some mysterious crime which has forced the family to a fugitive existence. In terms of an extended social commentary, the boys' views also may be construed as opposing archetypal reactions when considered in an anthropological and sociohistorical context: that of the conquered (Indian) and that of the conqueror (Spaniard). In this light, Ríos has only incorporated into his drama an issue with which innumerable writers, such as the Inca Garcilaso and the late José María Arguedas, have contended. Regardless of their interpretations, Ríos' social implications in *El*

*fuego* are kept at a low level. More than stamping the work with a genuine social concern, the use of economic and racial class differences, frequent in the author's production, is included to "Americanize" the drama.

There are other themes besides the social one mentioned above. In addition to the theme of "dust to dust," there is the customary dramatization of personal agony based on hatred and followed by death as the final escape. This work is also characteristic of Ríos' works in that it is not an action-packed creation, but one which is ideological in its appeal. In conclusion, *La selva* is Ríos' outstanding composition in practically every respect. It is substantial evidence that its author has been unduly overlooked as one of the three most important dramatists of contemporary Peru.

Most generations in Peru have produced a drama dealing with some aspect of the Inca empire. *Ayar Mancko*<sup>11</sup> is the best contribution of Ríos' generation and, as such, won the 1952 Premio Nacional de Teatro. In his preface to this drama the author asserts that it is not meant to be an historical reconstruction. Nevertheless, the work does have a factual basis. José Hesse Murga, in his introduction to *Teatro peruano contemporáneo*, points out that the drama was inspired by Fernández de Oviedo's *Historia de los Incas*, Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa's *Historia de los Incas*, Garcilaso de la Vega el Inca's *Comentarios reales de los Incas*, Luís Alberto Sánchez' *Historia de América*, and Cristóbal de Molina's *Fábulas y ritos de los Incas*. Ríos' drama is the story of Ayar Manko's struggle to overcome fraternal jealousies and envy before assuming the royal crown of Tampu Toko. This is but one episode, then, in the pre-Columbian history of the Inca empire.

The play begins with a conflict. The King is dying and must choose a successor from among his four sons: Auka, Uchu, Manko, and Achi. Achi is selected, but dies in a landslide before his coronation and the covetous Auka surreptitiously usurps the throne. He is immediately beset by frustrating calamities and growing opposition to his leadership, and retaliates with a reign of terror. By the third act Auka's frustration has turned to agony because the calamities have continued and Manko is the popular favorite to replace him. It is apparent that Auka's ambition and envy, coupled with his hatred of Manko, have become the tools of his own destruction. His reign of terror has created a kingdom of death from which he can find no escape. In the final *cuadro*, Manko takes the crown for himself and Auka, seeing his every ambition broken, throws himself over a precipice to end his agony. Death becomes the only escape from his kingdom of death.

Ríos generally develops one major character in each work to be the embodiment of his dramatic themes. This is true in *Don Quijote*, *Los bufones*, *El fuego*, *El reino sobre las tumbas*, and also in *Ayar Mancko*. Auka is the most fully developed character and dominates the work. There is little to add to the discussion of Ríos' dramatic themes as seen in this character. Auka is the usual agonized ruler of a kingdom of death, and his only escape from his self-wrought agony is death. His frustrated ambition is the principal motivating factor of his hate. He is distinguished from the author's other protagonists only by the unusual emphasis on his envy, which results from his frustrated ambitions. It



should be noticed that Auka's goal is to fulfill his ambition, and that dream, as it is usually included in Ríos' dramas, is absent.

Manko is ostensibly a stereotyped personage, a symbol of the noble, loyal, and just ideal. His actions are more readily predictable than Auka's because he is a "type" of character. Uchu and Wako, the wife of Achi, are also secondary characters, yet their presence lends considerable substance to the dramatic involvement and complications. Their opposition to Auka, for instance, is indispensable in formulating the frustration which characterizes the ruler and leads to his suicide.

While there is nothing novel in the structural arrangement of *Ayar Manko*, it is exemplary of Ríos' artistic sense of balance and his dramatic equilibrium. Each act is a story in itself, for each has a beginning and an end, and each is, at the same time, an integral part of the whole. For example, the two-fold division of Act III is meant, in the first *cuadro*, to reinforce Auka's inability to end his agony during the two years that have passed since Act II. The second contains the denouement and final take-over by the noble Manko.

In his preface to this drama, Ríos also states that he intended the aesthetic to overshadow the realistic appeal, and for the symbol to be more important than the anecdote. In the main, he accomplished what he set out to do, but the aesthetic appeal is marred somewhat by an overemphasis on philosophic digressions and by rhetorical repetition. As in several dramas by Ríos, the dialogues in *Ayar Manko* are not always natural in tone or progression, and they are often overextended. Ríos is apparently aware of his verbosity since those sections to be suppressed for stage presentation are marked by an (x) and, as he suggests, may also be omitted by the reader. This criticism is not to deny that Ríos has few, if any, peers who can equal his lyric capabilities as a dramatist. A good indication of this is the song and ballet which end Act II. This brief interlude is skillfully interpolated and is a well timed relief from the tense moment which precedes. Its omission would rob *Ayar Manko* of its highest lyric moment. More importantly, the ballet scene, which dramatizes the official condemnation of Auka's acts, is a necessary link in the development of the drama.

In sum, *Ayar Manko* is an indispensable addition to Ríos' repertory. The delineation of the secondary characters and the structural merits are the outstanding features of the play. And, even though there are a few dark moments aesthetically, it is a solid and appealing treatment of a tragedy of universal, especially Hispanic, renown.

*El mar*,<sup>13</sup> the seventh drama presented by Ríos, is divided into seven *cuadros*, written in free verse, and had its debut in Lima in 1954. Like *El fuego*, *El reino sobre las tumbas*, and *La selva*, *El mar* reflects Ríos' inspirational indebtedness to the classical antiquities. In the "Explicación necesaria" which prefaces the work, he acknowledges that *El mar* is an adaptation of the *Oresteia* to the coast of Peru. As such, the work begins with an exposé of the love affair that has developed between Egidio and Clara after the supposed death at sea of her husband, Agustín. Clara's children, Elsa and Orlando, oppose their adulterous relationship and do not believe their father is dead.

When Agustín does return, he is murdered in a manner which recalls

the murder of Agamemnon by Clytemnestra. He is ensnared in a net and slaughtered with his own axe by Egidio and Clara. When Elsa discovers his body, she vows that she and Orlando will avenge the crime. She subsequently lures Egidio so that Orlando can stab him to death. In the final *cuadro*, Clara comes in answer to her lover's cries and meets the same fate at the hand of her son. Vengeance does not prove to be a meaningful reward for Elsa and Orlando, however. They realize that they have perpetuated the destruction and hatred they once abhorred, and that death is the only escape from its agony. Their last act is to commit suicide in the sea, the symbol of the life-giving source and, at the same time, their only salvation from life.

The most striking feature of *El mar* is the manner in which it closely parallels the classic legend, the *Oresteia*. Even the names of the characters suggest that Ríos has derived them from the classical figures: Clytemnestra is now Clara, Aegisthus is Egidio, Electra is Elsa, and Orestes is Orlando. Of course, as the preceding synopsis suggests, the similarities between the characters of the legend and the drama are more extensive. For the purpose of this discussion, however, it should be pointed out that Ríos' personages are not fully developed characters. They scarcely go beyond a simple identity with the epic and legendary traits of their models. Ríos' only purpose here is to emphasize those personal characteristics which he can relate to his favorite thematic interests. The story of Clara, for example, affords an easy opportunity to dramatize how remorse is perpetuated by hatred and destruction. Clara is the first to create a kingdom of death and, as with so many of Ríos' characters, death is the only certain escape from her agony. This point is reiterated when Elsa and Orlando murder Clara and Egidio and immediately recognize the consequence of their vengeance. They know that they have only replaced Clara and Egidio as those responsible for maintaining the village under a veil of death. Unlike their legendary models, however, Elsa and Orlando realize there is no escape from their worldly existence and they commit suicide.

*El mar*, then, defends Ríos' attitude that man cannot escape his fatal destiny, and, in this tragedy at least, the author unmistakably relates man's destiny with his immediate surroundings. For this reason, he appropriately employs the type of language and setting which best reinforce the fatalistic and naturalistic aspects of *El mar*. The language, for instance, is a convincing imitation of the vernacular used by the poorer members of Peru's fishing villages. Yet, as Ríos points out in the "Explicación necesaria," this language is not used in support of any regional interests: "Me parecía difícil emplear el idioma de nuestros pescadores sin menoscabo de la dignidad dramática—o a la inversa usar el lenguaje culto sin caer en el artificio literario. Luego de larga reflexión, decidí sacrificar la corrección gramatical en aras de la naturalidad. Pero no está de más aclarar que en ningún momento he buscado el 'color local.' Me he limitado a adaptar, al ritmo de verso suelto, la manera de hablar de nuestro pueblo." By choosing a fishing village for the setting, Ríos visually supports the poverty of his characters as well as the real and symbolic influence of nature on their existence. He also justifies his choice of setting in the "Explicación necesaria": "Hace algunos años me sentí tentado por la idea de trasplantar—humilde y

respetuosamente—"La Orestíada" a la costa del Perú. El árido y grandioso paisaje del litoral ofrece un escenario adecuado para la modernización del viejo mito." The implication, of course, is that the sterile and deserted environs of the Peruvian coast, thus the village, are a natural complement to the stark and lugubrious story of his drama.

Despite the obvious parallels that exist between *El mar* and its classical model, this drama is not a denial of Ríos' artistic originality. Instead, it is additional proof that one of the author's principal merits as a dramatist is his ability to adapt the classics to works of modern design and audience appeal. His use of language and the setting of *El mar*, in combination with characters derived from universal classical models, substantiate Ríos' mastery of the genre.

*Los desesperados*,<sup>14</sup> a three-act drama in prose, was written in 1951 and revised in 1960. The work is Ríos' only drama of twentieth-century design and has no acknowledged classical source. As will be seen, nonetheless, the play is reminiscent of Ríos' second drama, *El fuego*. Both have an American setting and reflect a revolutionary optimism founded in the patriotic sensibilities of their respective protagonists.

Ríos' last work centers on Luciano, a revolutionary terrorist, who believes that only an aggressive attitude can effectively challenge the social injustices to which his nation is subjected. To initiate the rebels' coup d'état, he assigns Daniel to murder a general. The second act portrays the psychological effect the murder has on Daniel. He is ultimately captured and tortured to betray his cause, but the physical suffering gives him reason to consider himself a martyr. The last act again focuses on Luciano and the coup d'état he has instigated. As the play ends, the remaining rebel forces are surrounded and face certain defeat. Yet Luciano, ever true to his rebel cause, refuses to surrender, preferring to meet the enemy alone if necessary.

*Los desesperados* offers little in the way of structural novelty. In fact, the play only reflects Ríos' traditional use of the first act to introduce the players, with the second and third acts containing the usual complication and denouement. It is also true that the drama is typical of Ríos in that the dramatic conflict is of an inner and personal nature, and not dependent on real action to assure its acceptance.

Stylistically, however, this play is a unique experience in the trajectory of Ríos' production. It proves that he is not bound to creating poetic drama. In fact, the change in form here is made so skillfully that it seems as if the author has always composed in prose and is unaware of his poetic capabilities. The expression of Ríos' usual themes in prose also suggests that *Los desesperados* represents a move away from works with heroic and epic overtones and inspired in classical myth and legend.

Another important change in technique is seen in the manner in which the themes are dramatized. Ríos usually portrays an individual whose dream, whatever it is, perpetuates his agonized existence. Hate and death maintain the individual's torment and his dream is to escape his own existence. Death, ironically, is the only escape. *Los desesperados* departs from this tendency since no single character embodies all these thematic implications. It is also note-

worthy that no character has a true dream which he seeks to fulfill. In each case the motivating factor on the personal level is better described as dedication or ambition.

For example, Luciano, the principal character, is not of heroic or epic proportions. He never possesses the Promethean qualities of the once compassionate and idealistic Captain in *El fuego*. From the beginning, Luciano is an uncompromising revolutionary aware that he is no more than a human element in a real world. It would be farfetched to assert that Luciano, as the Captain, is motivated by a dream of martyrdom and that he is vainglorious. He is only an individual totally dedicated to the party's cause. In sum, Luciano is a credible character, not an obvious dramatization of the heroic ideal. An audience would possibly identify with Luciano, but not with the more symbolic Captain.

Daniel, the secondary character of importance in *Los desesperados*, is the author's thematic representation of the tortured individual who suffers the agony of the reign of death and hate. Daniel is reminiscent of Auka in *Ayar Mank'o* because both men's criminal acts isolate them from their surrounding society. Nevertheless, Daniel has no dream or dedication. He seems to be more loyal to the party members than dedicated to any party cause. In a sense, the plight of Daniel, as portrayed in the entire second act, is included to give dramatic and thematic substance to the play. Without his story, only a skeletal framework would remain, and Luciano's role in the first and third acts would be too weak to be significant.

Xavier, another secondary character who appears in the second act, is likewise included to dramatize another of Ríos' customary themes. He is the agonized man who, after being captured with Daniel, severely suffers the effect of hate and destruction. Xavier has neither true loyalty, dedication, nor a dream to help him endure his existence, however, and he commits suicide to terminate his misery.

Ríos' reason for distributing the thematic interpretations and implications among several characters is not clear. One possibility is that by doing so he intended to refine his dramatic technique and lend depth to a greater number of characters. This is partially accomplished, but it also must be noted that no single character is fully developed. Neither Daniel nor Luciano is as fully developed as Auka in *Ayar Mank'o*, the Captain in *El fuego*, or the Captain in *La selva*. One other reason for this thematic distribution may have been the desire to avoid overextended dialogue for any one character, something that is clearly evident in Ríos' earlier works. If these are the reasons, then the thematic distribution among several characters is justifiable and significant.

There are secondary aspects of *Los desesperados* which substantiate its dramatic appeal more than its thematic significance. One is a romance between two of the younger rebels, and another is the almost secret love Luciano has for the mother of Xavier. A third is a slight social concern similar to that in *El fuego*. It is based on the economic and racial class distinctions existing in Latin American society since the Independence Period. This concern is the principal motivating factor in the rebels' revolutionary effort, but its actual dramatization is weak because it stems from social inequality, a condition which the

audience accepts *a priori*. Finally, the social note strengthens the author's effort to "Americanize" the drama.

*Los desesperados* is unique among the dramas by Juan Ríos. Its style and tone of revolutionary optimism clearly distinguish it from his other creations. Neither is it typical insofar as its thematic content and characterizations are concerned. The changes in this drama suggest that Ríos had begun to alter his standard dramatic formula to one which would overcome some of his technical weaknesses, such as rhetorical repetition, poetic stagnation, and the tendency to philosophize. It is the last of his dramas, and, in the opinion of this writer, second only to *La selva*.

It is unfortunate that Juan Ríos has not presented any new plays since 1960. Nonetheless, his production is to be recognized as an important stimulus to the theatrical renaissance in Peru which began a little more than twenty-five years ago. Ríos is an eclectic who blends poetic, heroic, American, and even philosophical elements to produce a drama which surmounts the obstacles of national interests which have restricted so many of his compatriots. His initial creation as a dramatist, *Don Quijote*, for example, has been successful in Spain, and *Ayar Manko* is known in several Hispanic American countries.

Ríos' drama is of a personal nature, yet none of his works is truly psychological. The characters may be modeled after Jason, Prometheus, or Philip IV of Spain, but they are never completely developed. Neither is the characterization of the principal personage appreciably altered in the different plays: he is a transcendental being who embodies Ríos' concern for the agonized individual in a society perpetuated by acts of death and hate. If these acts cease, however, the individual's existence is terminated. Death, then, is the only salvation from worldly existence. As a consequence, all of these characters attempt to fulfill a utopian dream or ambition, and one of the most frequent of these is the establishment of a society devoid of hate and injustice. The ironical basic conflict is that forces of destruction are usually released in the fulfillment of these dreams and ambitions.

There are other elements in Ríos' works frequently woven into the overall dramatic fiber to blend homogeneously with the shades of despair and agony. One is the inevitability of death and the accompanying "dust to dust" theme. Another is reminiscent of the concept that we are all dreamed by a Superior Being and when His dream ends we cease to exist and return to nothingness. Ríos is not an existentialist, nor is he an escapist. But the suggestion of his personal interest in writers of this ilk cannot be overlooked entirely, as evidenced by the frequent pessimistic, agonizing, and fatalistic moments to be found throughout his production. Yet another element found in his works is the dramatization of Hispanoamerican social and ethnic problems. This is accomplished by emphasizing racial and economic class distinctions and problems of the mestizo in society.

Ríos tends to write his drama in long narrative verse with an epic overtone. Occasionally he utilizes shorter lyric forms, and not uncommon is his predilection for combining song and dance. With regard to the latter, he favors the more aesthetically involved movements of ballet rather than those of simple folk

dances. Despite his lyric capabilities, the use of a variety of verse forms, and occasional moments of dramatic relief, however, Ríos has not been able to escape his stylistic repetitiveness and his propensity to poetic stagnation. These are his major dramatic weaknesses and are rooted in his tendency to be verbose.

Ríos' drama always has a strong structural foundation, and its division is meaningful and necessary. In some works, the traditional three acts are the only dividing line in the linear progression. In others, *cuadros* are used alone, or are used to subdivide the action. Regardless of the manner in which the *cuadros* are employed, their effect is to denote the episodic nature of the action. *Don Quijote* is an excellent example of how Ríos uses the brief segment effectively. It should be mentioned, also, that his works are accompanied by complete, and sometimes demanding, set directions. Ríos knows exactly what kind of scenic designs are to complement his composition, and takes pains to formulate a precise description.

The most striking feature of Ríos' production is his extensive reliance on classical sources. Of the eight dramas herein discussed, *El reino sobre las tumbas*, *La selva*, *El fuego*, and *El mar* are directly based on classical myth or legend. And of the remaining four, only *Los desesperados* does not have a specified source of inspiration. While it is naturally difficult to explain or justify an author's inspirational indebtedness, one cannot escape the impression that Ríos well might have turned to new and different sources during his fifteen years as a dramatist. In this way he might have broadened his audience appeal, incorporated considerable originality into his writing, and extended his productivity in a significant fashion. It is also feasible to assert that *Los desesperados* does indeed mark Ríos' break with his standard and poetic formula for composing drama. If he were to return as a dramatist, then, this play might prove to be his first step toward a renewal of his own dramaturgy.

In conclusion, Juan Ríos is a conservative dramatist who has been able to combine successfully the classic and the modern, reality and dream, and hope and despair in works which have been applauded by the Peruvian public for years. It is certain that any new plays he might write will meet an enthusiastic, hopefully enlarged audience which has missed his participation in the national theatre during the past thirteen years. Yet, regardless of his future activity as a playwright, Ríos' existing contributions to Peru's theatre will never be denied.

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## Notes

1. For a discussion of the major dramatic works of Salazar Bondy, see my article, "The Theatre of Sebastián Salazar Bondy," *LATR*, 4/1 (Fall 1970), 59-71.

2. Juan Ríos Rey was born in Lima on September 28, 1914, and received his formal education in that capital. When the Spanish Civil War broke out in 1936, he fought with the Republican forces in the Sierra Guadarrama. He returned to Peru only to be exiled by the government of Marshall Oscar Benavides. After several years in Madrid as a correspondent, Ríos was afforded safe conduct in Peru with the establishment of the dictatorship of General Manuel A. Odría. Ríos organized the First National Convention of Writers and Artists in Lima, and during its convocation read and promoted a controversial motion to outlaw the repressive laws of the dictatorship. For the past several years he has been a literary critic for a daily newspaper in Lima. He is also an important poet. In 1941 he published *Canción de*

*siempre*, a collection of verse which evidences his early interest in classical literature. In 1948 he won the Premio Nacional de Poesía for *Cinco cantos a la agonía*, and in 1953 he repeated this triumph with *Cinco cantos al destino del hombre*.

3. My efforts to uncover studies by non-Peruvians on Ríos' theatre have been futile. Nevertheless, Augusto Tamayo Vargas and Estuardo Núñez, two of Peru's most influential critics, point to Ríos as one of the three major dramatists of post-World War II Peru. Yet Vargas, in his *Literatura peruana*, and Núñez, in his *La literatura peruana en el siglo XX*, unfortunately devote less than two pages each to Ríos' theatre.

4. Juan Ríos, *Don Quijote*, in *Teatro* (Lima, 1961), pp. 11-137. Future reference to this play will be indicated by *Don Quijote* and the respective page numbers within parentheses.

5. *El fuego*, in *Teatro*, pp. 143-281. Future textual reference to this volume will be indicated by *Teatro* and the respective page numbers in parentheses.

6. No single volume of Vallejo's poems seems to influence Ríos more than any other; however, *España, aparta de mí este cáliz* (1940) is certainly suggested by these lines from the drama.

7. *El reino sobre las tumbas*, in *Teatro*, pp. 287-328.

8. Oskar Seyffert, *Dictionary of Classical Antiquities*, ed. Henry Nettleship and James E. Sandys (New York, 1958), p. 183.

9. *Los bufones*, in *Teatro*, pp. 333-378.

10. *La selva*, in *Teatro*, pp. 383-524.

11. *Ayar Manko*, in *Teatro peruano contemporáneo*, ed. Aguilar (Madrid, 1963), pp. 95-182.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

13. This presentation is based on a mimeographed copy of *El mar* prepared by the theatrical group "Compañía Lucía Irurita" in 1954.

14. *Los desesperados*, in *Teatro*, pp. 527-649.