

New Puerto Rican Dramatist

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Recently, there has appeared a young and promising dramatist on the Puerto Rican stage. With the premieres of *Ese punto de vista* in May, 1982, and *Revolución en el Infierno* in September, 1982, Roberto Ramos-Perea received much deserved critical acclaim. René Marqués' untimely death and Luis Rafael Sánchez's apparent change of course have left a void in the island's serious theatre, making Ramos-Perea's appearance a propitious one.

Ese punto de vista came to the stage as part of a trilogy comprised of three one-act plays, all based on the conflict created when the characters feel themselves oppressed by superior forces whose will is contrary to the characters' own. Noted Puerto Rican drama critic, Ramón Figueroa Chapel, lauds Ramos-Perea for his ear for rapid dialogue, and goes on to say: "posee talento para la concepción económica de la anécdota y muy notable, refleja sentido de lo dramático y teatral. Este es el comienzo. ¡Esperaremos!"¹ The divided stage and the rapid scene changes conveyed by alternately lighting one half of the stage while the other half remains "frozen," reflect the several philosophies which the characters seem to throw back and forth across each scene. The play concerns the doubts of a middle-aged ex-student revolutionary whose superiors order him to betray the present university student revolutionary group, whose ideals were once his own. The play ends in bitter irony as the characters each betray one another just as the word arrives that the "bosses" (untouched by the play's events) have rescinded the order of betrayal.

Revolución en el Infierno, produced as part of the University of Puerto Rico's Theatre Department's "Primer Encuentro de Dramaturgia Universitaria" is about *puertorriqueñidad*, but it neither attempts to define that concept nor to be a political diatribe. Rather it questions previous ideals of *puertorriqueñidad*, calling for a total reassessment of patriotic values. The theme of the play is that of making choices, as exemplified by one of the victims of the Palm Sunday Massacre of March 21, 1937. The author, in his preface to the play, tells us that the characters are real and the names have not been changed. The play is divided into six impressionistic scenes with the massacre itself taking

place in scene three, the very middle of the play. While there is obvious sympathy for the victims, the play does not concentrate on the ideology of the Nationalists who took part in the parade that ended in disaster. Instead, the focus is on the choices that one participant, Ulpiano Perea (the author's uncle) made, his own motives, ideas and personal anguish, and on the reactions of those who survived that event.

In Ramos-Perea's view, as expressed in *Revolución en el Infierno*, the old values of the so-called "Nationalist" struggle for independence become obsolete. Ramos-Perea explains his position in the following manner:

No creo que nuestro teatro puertorriqueño necesite de héroes . . . Lo que sí necesitamos son personajes que con sus conflictos y preguntas nos muestren la cara desnuda del hombre puertorriqueño solo; desnudo frente a su duda y su elección . . . El Teatro de Lucha Nacionalista debe servirse de esta duda para trazar al verdadero héroe, no al mártir, pues éste es sólo un modelo para una estatua de bronce en medio de una plaza; sino las verdaderas preguntas que revalorizarán los podridos simientos sobre los que se sustentan nuestras ansias de liberación y nuestra más profunda entrega a la lucha por la erradicación de los males de dominados.²

Ramos-Perea, then, rather than defining *puertorriqueñidad*, calls upon his audience to make that definition by re-evaluating past history and the motives behind specific choices made in confrontations with that history.

This play, to be published in August 1983 by Editorial Edil, will eventually be part of a trilogy including the finished work, *Revolución en el Purgatorio* (about the corruption of the Puerto Rican penal system), and the projected work *Revolución en el Paraíso*, which will focus on the University of Puerto Rico. *Revolución en el Purgatorio* has been awarded the *Ateneo Puertorriqueño's* highest theatrical award, the Premio René Marqués and is scheduled to appear in August 1983 in the Teatro Sylvia Rexach. Of Ramos-Perea's other plays, two seem very promising for the young playwright's career. Those are: *La mueca de Pandora*, a one-act play about a prostitute whose life is totally controlled and her will broken by her pimp; and, *El lado oscuro de la araña*, also in one act, whose theme is similar to that of *Ese punto de vista*, but which is presented from the point of view of an apolitical woman.

One would hope to see more productions of these works in the future and to hear much more from Ramos-Perea.

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Notes

1. *El Mundo*, 20 de mayo, 1982, p. 5-B.

2. Ramos-Perea, "Teatro de Lucha Nacionalista en Puerto Rico," in *El Teatrero*, Año 2, Número 1, (n.d.), pp. 5-6.