

Marqués's *La muerte no entrará en palacio* and Dionysianism

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The protagonist don José, long-time governor of an island largely dependent on a foreign power, has grown rigid and dictatorial, forsaking his original goal of emancipation for the people. An attempt to overthrow him, inspired by the exiled revolutionary don Rodrigo, fails. The ruler's friend Teresias, José's wife Isabel, their daughter Casandra, and others exhort him in the interest of freedom not to sign a treaty with the northern power which would perpetuate its dominance of their country. The play ends with the governor's death by the hand of his daughter.

La muerte is a *livre a clé* portraying twentieth-century politics in Puerto Rico. José, idealistic in youth but now domineering, is a substitute for Luis Muñoz Marín, the country's governor from 1948 to 1964, and the treaty to be signed by José suggests the 1952 agreement between the United States and Puerto Rico which established the present Commonwealth status. The revolutionary Rodrigo parallels Pedro Albizu Campos, a Nationalist leader in the '30s who was imprisoned in the United States for subversive efforts to achieve independence from the influence exerted by Washington since 1898. Nationalist opposition to the status quo intensified in the '50s, the decade in which *La muerte* was written and published (1957). Marqués's belief that his small agricultural country should not reach beyond its traditions by pursuing the pattern of industrialization found in the United States is well known, and the play reflects this conviction while also depicting José's tragedy in the context of Greek religion and drama. Eleanor Martin notes such Greek references as the Theban Teresias, the prophet Casandra, and the Chorus, as well as mythological material in other Marquesian plays (*René Marqués*, 91, 75, 134).

The ensuing mytho-psychological study proposes that José's hubris results from a mental imbalance caused by rejection of his affective side and his concomitant exaltation of reason as the sole factor in determining opinions or actions. Affectivity is the humanizing factor experienced in love, faith, freedom, and nature which unites people in a bond of equality, and the play's mythological background emphasizes this through the figure of Dionysus, perhaps antiquity's profoundest expression of feeling.

The mythological content of *La muerte* also raises today's spatio-temporal problem of Puerto Rico to the universal plane, as it did in plays concerned with Athenian problems of the fifth century BC. Dionysus is the god in whose honor tragedians like Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides offered their plays in the spring theatre ritual called the Greater Dionysia, and Marqués continues this religious origin of drama by espousing Dionysianism as the indispensable curb on reason's drift to the extreme of rationalism. Dionysus is that deeply interior world where "the dark must speak to the light, the instinctual to the rational" (Hughes, 113); he is "freedom and ecstatic joy" with much that is "lovely, good, and freeing" (Hamilton 57). Dionysus personifies "the secret inexhaustible life shown by the new birth of plant and beast in the spring . . ." (Murray xvii-xviii). In his season the latent egotism of individualism abates and "the individual forgets himself completely"; "all that separated man from man, gave way to an overwhelming sense of unity which led back into the heart of nature" (Nietzsche 22, 50).

La muerte's accent on the opposites of reason and feeling will reveal the Dionysian absence in José, and as if to reinforce at once the point that opposite tensions must be integrated for wholeness, the long, dreamlike, philosophical opening describes, in antithetical terms, a mythical representative of equilibrium: Teresias, a Dionysian advocate. He is old and blind but with a complexion of almost youthful freshness and eyes like those of children discovering new worlds beyond them. His voice can be darkly grave or jovially lovable (Marqués I. i, 313).

Like the androgynous Dionysus, his prophet Teresias had been man and woman (Jung and Kerényi 68; Ovid 89). This fusion of sexual opposites, also evident on the spiritual level in the bond between Isabel and him, underscores Dionysus's rapport with women, such as the maenads who personify life, instinct, and feeling. Most Dionysians were women for whom "beauty, sweetness, and charm must combine their rays into the sun of motherliness that warms and nurtures the most delicate life for all eternity," but a Dionysian woman was also a faithful wife as attested to by the permanent and loving marriage between Ariadne and Dionysus (Otto 178, 187). Isabel, friend and

ally of Teresias in trying to restrain her husband's hubris, exemplifies these Dionysian values:

Su verdadero papel es de esposa y madre y a él se dedica en cuerpo y alma. No entiende la política como ciencia. De un modo peculiarmente femenino la intuye, es decir, también ante el pueblo y sus necesidades reacciona como madre o esposa. (I. ii, 321)

Isabel and her friend Teresias speak about faith, an example of the pararational both in *La muerte* and Euripides's play about Dionysus, *The Bacchae*. In the Greek tragedy King Pentheus like Governor José refuses to believe in the God Dionysus whom Marqués portrays through Rodrigo, the proponent of independence against the Governor's design for a Protectorate. Although Isabel wants a reconciliation between the opponents, Teresias maintains that if that does not come to pass they must choose and remain faithful to their choice (I. ii, 350-51). Contrary to José's conviction that science and technology alone will bring improvement to the island, she believes in the Dionysian world of love and life: a simple home, an honest husband, and a daughter able to enjoy youth and love (II. i, 380). In her strongest plea for the pararational Isabel exhorts Casandra to have faith in Alberto, her intended husband:

Tienes que creer en él ciegamente . . . irracionalmente, con la misma fe ciega con que creemos en Dios. Cuando la razón haga caer a pedazos todo lo que te habías creído seguro, . . . cuando te veas de pronto en un mundo arrasado, desolado, tendrás el asidero de tu fe que será tu única salvación. (II. ii, 387)

This sentiment and many of its words are repeated through the voice of Isabel in Casandra's prayer soliloquy (II. ii, 396-97).

In José's first appearance, the implication that progress and security are achieved only through reason is contrasted with Dionysian feeling and nature, the latter in the sense of both instinct and the physical world. He is rebuking Isabel for her sentimental concern over the upcoming interview with a rural delegation about its grievances, assuring his wife that the time has come for reason to prevail over emotion, and that the technology he will bring is exactly what the people need. She retorts that he should speak to her in the language of the heart, not of science. In the interest of equilibrium she warns against bringing too much progress: "Pero no pases del límite. Ten cuidado de que la dosis no sea excesiva. Porque le puedes matar algo que vale más que toda

la ciencia y todo el progreso del mundo" (I, i, 329). Overvaluation of intellect is the danger here, and her affective side knows that there are things that science cannot prove nor even express; they simply are and are felt (I, i, 329). When Gilbert Murray explains the meaning of Dionysus, his words are strikingly similar to Isabel's: "Reason is great, but it is not everything. There are in the world things not of reason, but both below and above it; causes of emotion, which we cannot express, which we tend to worship, which we feel, perhaps, to be the precious elements in life" (272).

Isabel has another role in the nature-science debate, a subject often discussed by Puerto Ricans because of the enormous contrast between the *jibaro's* rural life style and the influx of industrialism. After the farm representatives have spoken for greater liberty, José reflects that "la semilla que alguien sembrara aún no ha muerto"; he is referring to the exiled Rodrigo who long ago sowed the seed of freedom (I, i, 338). Dionysus, god of liberty, agriculture, and the vine, is a seed. Isabel furthers the agro-political metaphor: "¿Y por qué matarla, mi Joseíto? ¿Por qué no dejarla germinar? . . . ¡Es tan hermoso ayudar a la naturaleza en su empeño de lucha contra la muerte! ¡Es tan hermoso ayudar al triunfo de la vida!" (I, i, 338). The drama is replete with other allusions to nature and agriculture in keeping with Marqués's concept of Puerto Rican reality, but which are also germane to the god of Nature and vegetation: for example, several references to the *coquí*, the ceiba tree, and nightingales; the stone and its importance to the young man from Altamira, and the customs scene at the airport where an official questions a woman and Rodrigo about carrying seeds and plants.

Opposites are again stressed in the scene where guests and dignitaries gather for the treaty ceremony. It is rumored that Casandra will appear in an expensive evening cape bought by her father, but one of the women present mockingly says that this daughter of a rural mother will not dare to wear it for fear of seeming a peasant playing the role of a princess (II, ii, 407). Also, the description of the officials suggests a predisposition to rationalism as well as lack of feeling: they are intelligent and skillful but limited to their specialties, without "la nobleza que confiere una auténtica comprensión y sabiduría de la vida y sus problemas, o la mirada encendida por el fuego de una eterna juventud visionaria" (II, ii, 403). Dionysian associations are patent here, particularly to the young god of life and fire whose epithet, Pyrigenes, means "born from fire," and to the wine god with "a fiery nature" (Otto 146).

Stage directions for the signing ceremony further stress contrast:

debe haberse establecido desde el principio cierto sutil contraste entre la 'atmósfera' del grupo de funcionarios al fondo de la terraza

circular (más formal, más 'política' y 'oficialesca'), y la 'atmósfera' de la terraza inferior (más 'social', más festiva y frívola, y por ello quizás más humana también). (II. ii, 408)

Another example of opposites are the male and female choruses, a division frequent in Greek drama as in Euripides's *Lysistrata* (Haigh 309-10). They sing twice in *La muerte*: following Casandra's prayer scene and after she has shot José. The repeated words are "Dolor y miseria. ¡Amor!" i.e., grief and want because of hubris exacerbated by rationalism; love and life as the antidote (II. ii, 397). The word "dolor" (grief) recalls *The Bacchae* where Pentheus's name is defined as "grief" (Euripides 192).

Music is a major factor in the play, as it was in Greece, with a CORO MASCULINO and a CORO FEMENINO listed in the *dramatis personae*, followed by MUSICA IRREAL, MUSICA DRAMATICA, MUSICA RELIGIOSA, a VALS VIENES, and the "BLUES." It is believed that Greek drama originated with the dithyramb, song and dance by a chorus honoring Dionysus. Since "dithyramb" derives from Dithyrambus, an epithet of the god meaning Child of the Double Door (Dionysus means Twice Born), it is significant that the choruses appear twice. Music was an essential part of the spring dramas in Athens celebrating the agricultural deity's birth. Nietzsche says in *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music* that folk songs originate in a Dionysian substratum, a statement in accord with the play's popular waltz, the Blues, and the religious music accompanying Casandra in the death scene of José.

Casandra, young and in love, is the epitome of life and an embodiment of the Dionysian principle, but as her father adamantly continues to oppose the principle, she is led to discharge the negative function of a maenad in the god's ritual of life and death. Maenads and Sibyls were divinely possessed women who ecstatically served their god through ritual or prophecy, and the Greek Cassandra, the prophet whose warnings go unheeded, is of this lineage. In Euripides's *Iphigenia in Aulis* "the wild Cassandra / Will loose her laurelled hair, / Bright hair tossed wide on a wind of dreams, / And cry aloud when God / Cries to men through her" (Oates 2: 309; lines 760-64). The lines mean for Erwin Rohde that "she wildly shakes her head like the Bacchantes," and he adds that in Euripides's *Hecuba* she is the "frenzied prophetess" (317, n. 65; Oates 1: 809; line 114). In *The Bacchae* King Pentheus is killed by his mother Agave during her maenadic rapture while worshipping Dionysus. Pentheus rejected him but out of curiosity he climbed a tree to watch the ceremony. The priests saw him, uprooted the tree, and Agave tore off his head. Casandra has a nightmare in which she cuts down the palace ceiba.

The tree represents José and the dream foreshadows her patricide, although she is a daughter maenad and not mother Agave.

A maenad is also described as bloodstained from killing the ritual animal and with eyes that "stare wildly" (Otto 94). Marqués's description of Casandra includes both these bacchic specifics: her evening dress is in the style of a Greek tunic, and right after Alberto's accidental death she enters the area where the Protectorate is to be signed with "el cabello . . . semisuelto . . . una mirada alucinada . . . pliegues de la túnica gris manchados de sangre: la mano y parte del brazo . . . están también ensangrentados . . ." (II, ii, 413). Since this is the only scene with daughter and father together, stage directions state that it must add a special significance to the symbolic encounter, and since the Protectorate itself symbolizes the final affront to the god of freedom, this is the moment for a maenadic assertion of Dionysus. José acknowledges Casandra at once, but the lighting and strange music lend a mysterious air to her presence, as if she were not his daughter but a voice and force from the beyond censuring a fallen mortal. In keeping with the play's polar structure, she speaks in antithetical terms: "¡José! ¡Devuelve lo que nos has quitado! ¡Limpia lo que has mancillado! ¡Humilla lo que has ensalzado! ¡Resucita lo que has matado!" and her father responds: "¿Quién me habla, Dios Santo? Esa voz . . ." (II, ii, 415). She then shoots him fatally before he signs the document.

In the last scene her hair is again undone like a devotee of Dionysus, and "su cuerpo se mantiene hierático, su mirada perdida en el misterio de la noche, el brazo derecho en alto . . . la mano abierta como sacerdotisa que derrama dones" (II, ii, 416-17). With the double reference to priest, Casandra is a maenadic night follower of Dionysus, and the blessing she dispenses is freedom because her murder of José has symbolically prevented a further loss of liberty for the people. Death as symbolized by the stagnation of a Protectorate did not enter the palace, but it had already destroyed the god of love and life in the Governor's soul.

Dionysus is never seen in the play but his voice is heard from afar as in a religious apparition: he is the Voz de don Rodrigo and the Gran Voz with whom Teresias communicates. A voice uttering words is historically the manifestation of spirit, as in the Christian belief that 'the word became Flesh,' and inasmuch as music always accompanies Rodrigo's words, his link with the dithyrambic god is further strengthened. Throughout the drama Rodrigo speaks like a god either with biblical allusions or his own divine-like utterances. For example, with liturgical magnificence and prophetic intensity his voice refers to the parable about a house built on sand that will fall, or Christ's declaration that he had not come to bring peace but a sword (I, ii,

351, 346). The divine Dionysus too arrives with violence, sweeping away the security which prevails and causing "walls to fall in ruins" (Otto 79, 95, 97). He does so because he is that inner force for change which shakes the complacent in order to further life; thus after Rodrigo's arrival there is an armed attempt to assassinate José and a bloody uprising in the countryside. Directly following this violence José says to Teresias that even the blind forces of nature favor the island by having spared it a cyclone for over twenty years (II. i, 366). Marqués is using metaphoric and ironic language: José has had political power for over twenty years as had Muñoz Marín but all has not been calm, and Dionysus is now in full rage. As Martin notes, the Governor is "blind" to the imminent storm which will take his life ("*Caligula*" 28).

Like Dionysus "whose appearance is far more urgent, far more compelling than that of any other god," Rodrigo comes to his homeland as did Dionysus to Thebes with the message of freedom and change (Otto 79). When questioned at the airport about bringing seeds into the country, the voice of Rodrigo answers that it is the seed of freedom; Dionysus is both seed and freedom with the "highly significant name of the 'liberator'" (I. ii, 340; Otto 97). Rodrigo's importance in the feeling-reason conflict is clear when Alberto marks the treaty as a desperate move by José to counter Rodrigo's influence, i.e., the Governor's rationalism is now reaching the Heraclitian point of enantiodromia where it will convert to its irrational opposite. Subsequent to Rodrigo's return the Governor soliloquizes that his enemy will not vanquish him, and then after the rural rebellion he imprisons Rodrigo as Pentheus did Dionysus. Although jailed, the god's spirit continues to influence others and to bring about the leader's downfall. A political system must favor the free expression of its people and cannot tolerate a status quo which does nothing but solidify the pride and power of its ruler. Such was the reality for Euripides and Marqués. A regime whose axiology depends exclusively on rationalism provokes a Dionysian reaction in order "to transform the ordered, placid world," but due to fear this reaction will be "opposed by established systems of governance" (Hughes 56, 55).

The confrontation between Teresias and José at the beginning of Act 2 is perhaps the most substantive example of Dionysianism. Curiously it is the only scene with advisor and ruler together, as in *The Bacchae*. Teresias was to deliver lyrics apropos a national hymn for the future Protectorate, and this friend of many years, addressed by José as a visionary, vents his disgust with the leader in his first impassioned words: "¡Estás loco!" (II. i, 366). He had said to Pentheus: "your mind is most pitifully diseased" (Euripides 191). Madness is a lack of balance between intellect and emotion with pride and tyrannical power as dire examples of it. The wise man's judgment of Pentheus

in *The Bacchae* applies equally to José: "But though you seem . . . to be intelligent, yet your words are foolish. Power and eloquence in a headstrong man can only lead to folly; and such a man is a danger to the state" (Euripides 189).

The balanced Teresias reminds the ruler of past opportunities to achieve freedom peacefully but which were not taken due to the leader's obsession with perpetuating his power (II. i, 373, 374). Alberto will likewise note José's mental deterioration when he criticizes the Governor for chances missed through the desire for control and security. José's decline is further apparent from his scorn of the populace and his arrogant individualism: "¡Al estampar mi firma en ese documento estaré elevando a este miserable, estúpido pueblo, a un nivel de dignidad que jamás ha conocido!" (II. ii, 393-394). Such a disrespect for life had earlier led the Governor to think that only he could bring happiness to the land (II. i, 370). Teresias then confronts him with the real flaw, fear of change and loss, tantamount to fear of life: "¡Protectorado! Te gusta esa palabra. . . . ¿Sabes por qué? Porque necesitas un 'protector' que te garantice la seguridad que tú mismo no has sabido proporcionarte," and he concludes with the admonition that "protectors" devour the weak (II. i, 375). For Carlos Solórzano the Protectorate has all the characteristics "de un infantilismo, de falta de madurez humana que revisten, hoy en día, todas las fuerzas materiales que subyugan al hombre" (85). José cannot find security against change because he cannot accept the whole of reality which must comprise the Dionysian constants of faith, love, and the furtherance of all life through the practice of human equality. These are Isabel's virtues sorely needed by an insecure José, who, as Shaw observes, depends on "his wife's presence for relief from nervous tension" (32). The governor does turn to his wife because when a man's inner capacity for feeling is inoperative, there is a psychological conflict driving him to seek this energy externally in a feminine figure. For Hughes "Dionysus is the daring to leave the security of the commonplace and enter the challenge of the unusual," i.e., to have the healthy abandon of the hero (222).

José is drinking more and more, not in the celebration of life, but to obliterate the fear of it, and the god of life and wine "destroys his enemies with madness" (Hughes 53). Teresias is aware of a tragic end when the Dionysian Gran Voz lets him see the future, and the visionary reacts to it, in a psalmodic tone, with words to be repeated by the chorus: "¡Ay dolor, dolor! ¡Dolor y miseria. . . . Porque Tu mano, Señor, caerá sobre el palacio . . . Se ha roto el equilibrio de Tu ley inmutable. Y la sangre de los míos correrá . . ." (II. ii, 385). Equilibrium between feeling and reason is the divine injunction which Teresias accepts because he reveres the inflexible laws of human nature (II.

i, 367). Dionysus is that affective half of human wholeness which must be heard, and the divine message to the Josés and Pentheuses who break the law is that blood will flow.

Teresias's words to Pentheus about the danger of power in the hands of a foolish leader parallel those to José: "Cuando se borra el límite entre la farsa y la vida, se tiende a vivir sólo la farsa. Pero no basta entonces vivir la farsa. Se pretende . . . que otros también la vivan" (Euripides 189; Marqués II. i, 368). If one does not live for life one exists in a foolish, absurd realm and imposes it on others. When Teresias then refers to himself as a free voice and reproves José for demanding the lyrics, the Governor accuses him of exaggeration: "Te complaces en hacer un drama absurdo de una cosa racional, lógica. . . . Es el himno revolucionario, el himno que surgía del pueblo hace más de cien años" (II. i, 369). The accusation is both foolish and ironic because the hymn is no product of a true revolution, and Teresias—Marqués is not involved in an absurd drama although the play is about the absurdity of carrying reason and logic to the extreme.

Madness is a persistent theme in the Dionysian myth, and *La muerte* has suggested that the Governor is unbalanced by his denial of the human potential for feeling. Therefore the problem is ultimately psychological. In a section on the Jungian approach to drama, Grínor Rojo alludes to *La muerte* when discussing the subject of "las raíces 'intrahistóricas' de la nacionalidad" and its relation to Jung's concept of the collective unconscious (185-86). Similarly William Siemens analyzes Marqués's *El apartamento* with support from R.D. Laing and Carl Jung, psychologists also referred to in Richard Hughes's study of Dionysus and rationalism. Hughes finds the psyche a bipartite structure of consciousness and the unconscious with Dionysus as "the unconscious itself" (53). In this context, José's antagonism toward Rodrigo transcends political or ideological motivations and focuses on his disturbed unconscious, i.e., his affective need to embrace life by overcoming the myopic belief in reason as the sole reality. Hughes paraphrases Jung when saying that the psyche is a "complex, self-regulating organism, striving continually for a realization of its whole self" (55). In Jung's words:

Whenever life proceeds one-sidedly in any given direction, the self-regulation of the organism produces in the unconscious an accumulation of all those factors which play too small a part in the individual's conscious existence. . . . The further we remove ourselves from it [the unconscious] with our enlightenment and our rational superiority, the more it fades into the distance, but is made all the more potent by everything that falls into it, thrust out by our

one-sided rationalism. This lost bit of nature seeks revenge . . .
(*Civilization in Transition* 26-27).

José is no stereotypic villain, and he is correct in saying that reason should control emotion (I. i, 328). There is however the peril that reason will refuse to admit its limitation when faced with loss, change, or a diminished control over events; in effect, José's reason is refusing to accept death, and the living of life is thereby inhibited. A death-like existence ensues—the farce mentioned by Teresias—whether it be called the status quo or insanity (II. i, 368). Power then seems to be the godly recourse for permanence and immortality, and, indeed, José wants an entry in the book of immortality written by the gods. For Teresias this is legitimate if one's actions are pure and just, but hubris disqualifies the Governor (II. i, 372). The alternative to pride is the Dionysian affirmation of life, all of life, including mortality. Dionysus, the vegetation that dies and is resurrected each year, teaches that human existence is not life against death but "life with death" (Otto 139): "He who begets something which is alive must dive into the primeval depths in which the forces of life dwell . . . because in those depths death lives cheek by jowl with life" (Otto 136-37).

It seems likely that René Marqués intended such a mytho-psychological content as presented herein. This highly cultured playwright was surely cognizant of and formed by these elements' long tradition in drama since the fifth century BC through today's Eugene O'Neill, Jean-Paul Sartre, and many others. Be that as it may, in *La muerte* an ancient myth and a modern work of art unite to observe the truth that human affects must temper reason's bent to control life. With Dionysus there is death but also rebirth; without him, only death.

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