

JOSÉ MARTÍ AND LEWIS MASQUERIER

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Reading José Martí's articles about the United States and the characters he refers to in his *Complete Works*, reveals his complex vision of a nation well in its way towards imperialism and the rich political and social inclinations of numerous peoples and individuals of its population who willingly or unwillingly contributed to its peculiar brand of civilization.

A case in question is that of the elderly journalist William Masquerier whom he briefly refers to in one of the issues of the Argentinian newspaper *La Nación* of Buenos Aires. He was born in the State of New York, where he died on the 1st of August, 1888.

Details of his demise with nearly all New York papers coinciding with the news of the death of US Vicepresident William Almon Wheeler, whom Martí praised, together with the greater part of the press, for his honesty in office, and whose grave conceived in simplicity and modesty was symbolic of his entire political career.

The most complete local press versions on the Masquerier grave, to which Martí had access, suggest that in 1888 he was doing his journalistic job under high pressure from his revolutionary responsibilities with scarcely enough time for research. This was the context information at his disposal, which was clearly insufficient to prevent him from correctly interpreting the meaning of exotic diagrams, complex phrases in foreign languages and various images on the walls, most of them not easily interpreted and in most cases confusing, which covered most of the gigantic "mausoleum", and attracted those of the public by its mysteries and went there to see for themselves what the press had termed incomprehensible and irrational, and in which Masquerier had invested a considerable part of his fortune.

Far apart from the minimal information offered by Martí in his article, a result of hurried reading of the local press, forced by circumstances in which the elderly Masquerier lived, whom he called "the frenchman", which by the way was not his nationality, reveal that he was a politician of substantive importance in the State of New York, committed during most of his life to the objective of achieving rational and humane solutions with the important problema, until today pending, not only in the United States, but the entire world: the need for a far reaching reform of society on a substantive world problem, equality and justice for human beings of the world, achieved only with Socialism without violence.

In his youth Masquerier graduated in Law. He became a journalist, researcher of Phonetics, which allowed him to investigate, write and publish a dictionary in that special field. He often declared himself in favor of fairness for workers, farmers and businessmen, without recurring to class violence. He gave special attention to the equitable distribution of lands for agricultura. In 1845 Masquerier had based enthusiastically his candidacy for governor of the State of New York that failed miserably.

He was not, therefore, just a character with a well developed inspiration.

In 1840 Masquerier sent a letter tp Robert Owen (1771-1858), today surnamed in England “father of British Socialism” whose teachings inspired him to propose, not a world reform, but above all the reform of the United States, without exploitation and, above all, without violence. That is why Marx and Engels characterized him as a “utopian socialist”.

To understand Masquerier and his “Mausoleum”, on the other hand, there is need to know the details of the political development of life in the United States and England. at the end of the XVIII Century and the first half of the XIX Century.

It must not be forgotten that Owen lived in Scotland and there made his capital, a result of the production of British cotton textiles, an important line of production in the days of the industrial revolution in England. It was there that he developed his first reformist ideas, that cost him important losses of capital the lands he bought with that end in mind, under the pressure of local business men.

He tried, but was unable to achieve, the consolidation and application of his ideas that later evolved towards the cooperative system. He thought that in the United States conditions were to this end more favorable, but time proved the contrary. There his financial commitment grew and Masquerier was forced to invest an even higher percentage of his capital earnings that he was forced to invest for the survival of his

idealistic schemes. After his early failures he was forced to reduce to a minimum his reserves of capital, and had to return to his country pained by the defeat of his ideas, and the collapse of his personal finances.

But Masquerier did not stop thinking and writing on the ethical principles of the ideas to which he devoted all his life. His purpose, it should be underlined, was the high ethical objectives of cooperation of workers, farmers and capitalists originally conceived by Owen.

Factories and urban mechanical shops would not evade the rational concept that could reach even the homes. Newspapers, for instance, should be published and distributed free to their readers from in the capitals.

That gigantic effort was synthetically represented in drawings, symbols, and signs in the "mausoleum", in truth a gigantic monument, completely unusual for citizens of his time, and more for our own, the purpose of which was to permanently maintain alive the flame of Socialism. But time was lacking for writing the book that would explain a brilliant work that stones had made eternal.

Several years after, the 5th of June, 1888, in the presence of a public that the local press described as "numerous", Masquerier dedicated to himself his "mausoleum" in Cypress Hill Cemetery, New York, that came into being with the purpose of remembering Owen's teachings forever. Scarcely two months later Masquerier passed away.

We must insist that Masquerier was an exceptional journalist that wrote for several local newspapers and other *publicaciones*, Among them the *Standard*. He founded the *Greenpoint Gazette*. He cooperated with the Boston *Investigator*. He invented a *Phonetic Dictionary of the English Language*.

If we should like to synthesize his lifelong achievements we could quote one of many journals of his days: he struggled for “the just distribution of land and labor, insure the fights for women and the strengthening of the antislavery movement”. It was not all for him, just the beginning. There was nothing extravagant in these aspirations, but the weight of so much misery, hunger, unemployment and social needs, ignored in Martí’s days until today, not only in the United States, but in an appalling number of countries of the world. Notwithstanding the pain of its failure, the gigantic monument continues to stand at a considerable cost with funds the origin of which is unknown. It continues to be a multiseular memory of objectives of a just dream still to be reached, for which the people of the world have suffered and continue to struggle, shedding tears and blood for total liberation.