

RECENT RESEARCH ON RAMON SENDER

CHARLES L. KING
University of Colorado

For my purposes here I define «*recent* research» as that research done on Sender since the author's death, January 16, 1982. Since, however, the recent publication of two books which reprint research completed—for the most part—*before* 1982 is of such importance in advancing Senderian criticism, they will be briefly discussed here before focussing on *new* research, i.e., new scholarship completed or published since January 1982.

The first of the two books to which I refer is *La verdad de Ramón J. Sender*, a collection of seven articles, six by Francisco Carrasquer, one by Víctor Fuentes, and a bibliography by Elizabeth Espadas, all of which had appeared previously in journals¹. There is some *new* research represented in the bibliography by Espadas inasmuch as it has been updated from 1974 until 1979. *Senderianos* are fortunate indeed that Carrasquer's excellent commentary is thus made more accessible, especially his wide-ranging yet profound article on possible sources of Sender's philosophical-religious ideas: «La parábola de la 'Esfera' y la vocación de intelectual de Sender»². Carrasquer's essay is, in my opinion, the most competent one yet to appear on Sender's philosophical-lyrical-mystical speculations as to the so-called spherical, i.e., the unified nature

¹ Francisco Carrasquer (Leiden, Holland, Ed. CINCA, 1982), 178 pp.

² This article originally appeared in *Norte* (Amsterdam), 14, 2-4, May-August 1973, pp. 67-95.

of total reality; it is a study which must be taken into account in future investigations of the subject.

The second book to which I refer is *Ramón J. Sender. In memoriam*, edited by José-Carlos Mainer and published in Zaragoza in 1983³. Reprinted in it are thirty articles, essays or chapters from books by the following critics: Rafael Cansinos Assens, Pedro Salinas, José Luis Cano, Francisco Yndurain, Patrick Collard, Sherman Eoff, Julia Uceda, Roger Duvivier, Madeleine de Gogorza Fletcher, Manuel Andújar, Angel Alcalá, Marcelino Peñuelas, Rafael Bosch, Manuel Béjar, Jaime Pérez Montaner, Jean Pierre Ressayot, Charles Olstad, Julian Palley, Margaret Jones, Maryse Bertrand de Muñoz, Francisco Carrasquer, Eduardo Godoy Gallardo, Laureano Bonet, and Charles L. King. Republished also is Valle-Inclán's prologue, signed in 1928, to Sender's first book, *El problema religioso en Méjico*.

In addition, *Ramón J. Sender. In memoriam* includes four *previously unpublished* studies of Sender, i.e. *new research*. The first of these is the Prologue to the volume, Mainer's valuable survey of Sender's entire career, «Resituación de Ramón J. Sender»; the second is a paper read at the University of Zaragoza on March 12, 1982, by Leonardo Romero Tobar, «Sender en la literatura española»; the third a chapter from Peter Turton's doctoral thesis at the University of Laval, «Los cinco libros de Ariadna: La puntilla al minotauro comunista»; and the fourth a lecture delivered by José Manuel Blecua in Zaragoza, March 8, 1982: «La poesía de Ramón J. Sender.»

Each of these four new studies widens and deepens our understanding of Sender, the man and the author: Romero Tobar demonstrates the presence of antecedents in Don Ramón's work from both Medieval and Golden Age Spanish Literature; Turton reveals, in a painstaking analysis of the political dimensions of *Los cinco libros de Ariadna* published in 1957, that Sender, through his literary alter ego, Javier, clearly contradicted statements about the participation of Communists in the Civil War directly expressed by Sender in 1937 in his journalistic book, *Contraataque*; Blecua's perceptive analysis of the Aragonese's poetry is the second

³ Published jointly by the Diputación General de Aragón, Ayuntamiento de Zaragoza, Institución «Fernando el Católico», and the Caja de Ahorros de Aragón y Rioja, 499 pp. It is subtitled «Antología crítica».

of its kind and may possibly stimulate further study; the first serious study of Sender's poetry was Rafael Bosch's six page article, «'The Migratory Images' of Ramón Sender», in 1963 in *Books Abroad*.

Mainer's book is, quite obviously, an important one for Senderian scholars. Its studies, however, do not attempt, according to Mainer, «recoger la totalidad ni siquiera lo mejor que se ha escrito sobre Sender, sino disponer en forma coherente una suerte de estudio unitario —con varias voces y enfoques— sobre su figura y su obra» (21).

The most noteworthy of «recent research» on Sender must be José Luis Castillo-Puche's book, *Ramón J. Sender: el distanciamiento del exilio*, published by Destino in 1985. A distinguished journalist and novelist himself, Castillo-Puche provides special insights in both the dangers and the advantages deriving from being both a journalist and a creative writer. While never abandoning journalism, Sender avoided its pitfalls; the distancing of exile helped him move, Castillo-Puche demonstrates, «de lo directo y espontáneo a la transfiguración poética, de lo real a lo simbólico, de lo periodístico a lo estéticamente elaborado»⁴.

Even as a chronicler of his time, exile —with the distancing that it effected— was, Castillo-Puche insists, Sender's most fertile period, and «quedará siempre como la aportación más valiosa en cuanto a capacidad fabuladora, aventura, ingenio, ternura e ironía» (29). Even in Sender's earliest journalistic works, one can discern, writes Castillo-Puche, «un don para la expresión y una capacidad de lirismo que habían de dar paso al gran escritor...» (109). Only a journalist-novelist of Castillo-Puche's stature could provide such valuable insights into the reciprocal interaction between the journalist and the novelist in Sender and into the effects of exile upon his creative writing.

Castillo-Puche's otherwise excellent book is marred by occasional inaccuracies, especially in its biographical and bibliographical details. For example, Sender's time of service on the editorial staff of *La Tierra* is cited as 1920-1922; the correct dates are 1919-1923, a period painstakingly established by Roger Duvivier⁵. Casti-

⁴ *Ramón J. Sender: el distanciamiento del exilio* (Barcelona, Destino, 1985), p. 109.

⁵ In his article «Las premisas de la obra autobiográfica en la primera

llo-Puche's book reports that Sender served in Morocco three years, 1922-1924, rather than the correct fourteen months, 1923-1924⁶. Other errors include calling the daily *La Libertad* a «semanario», reporting Sender's joining the staff of *El Sol* in 1925 rather than in 1924, Sender's beginning of exile in 1939 rather than late in 1938, listing a review as an article and a thesis for the licenciante degree as a doctoral thesis, etc.⁷.

Though doctoral theses vary greatly in quality and scholarship and in significance of topics investigated, a survey of them over the years can at least indicate academic interest or lack thereof in certain authors or themes. In the decade of the fifties, one Ph. D. thesis on Sender was completed, my own in 1953 at the University of Southern California. In the sixties, ten doctoral theses were devoted to Sender, nine exclusively to him and one only as part of a comparative study. In the seventies, twelve theses were devoted totally to Sender and two partially to him, all in the period 1970-1976. Since 1976 only two doctoral theses have been done: Patrick Collard's truly outstanding work in 1980 at the University of Ghent in Belgium, and Fernando Samaniego's unpublished study: «Poética y textos en *Imán*, de Sender», in 1984 at the University of Washington.

There is, of course, other evidence of decline during the last decade in critical interest in Sender. In his Prologue to the memorial volume, José-Carlos Mainer laments that though the accomplishments of the Aragonese writer would seem to have earned him «el primer lugar entre los novelistas españoles de este tiempo... es obvio que... la crítica de hoy no parece muy dispuesta a otorgárselo, al menos sin salvedades de peso. Y entre éstas, las más llamativas y en gran medida evidentes son las que acusan de profusión, prolijidad, cierto oportunismo temático, descuido estilístico, falta de plan novelesco..., rasgos que, en definitiva, amenazan anegar una decena de títulos indiscutibles en un rimero de tí-

época del escritor Ramón J. Sender», *Ramón J. Sender. In memoriam*, pp. 137-153.

⁶ The correct time is reported by me in my book *Ramón J. Sender* (New York, Twayne, 1974), pp. 11, 19-20.

⁷ On p. 139, Castillo-Puche lists a thesis for the licenciante degree at the University of Barcelona in 1972 by Juan Egea Pont as a doctoral thesis: «*Crónica del alba, estudio sobre la frustración*» (directed by José Manuel Blecua).

tulos banales o de posibilidades narrativas malbaratadas» (13). Sender continued to write until the day of his death; five of his books, three of them novels, have appeared posthumously, bringing his total production to 102 books, 64 of them novels. I recently read his last eleven novels; regretfully, I found little in these last efforts which equalled the «decena de títulos indiscutibles» to which Mainer referred, works such as *Mr. Witt en el cantón*, *El rey y la reina*, and *Requiem por un campesino español*. The fact that Sender essentially repeated himself, especially during the last decade of his life, probably accounts for some of the loss of critical interest in his work in recent years.

Published in April, 1987, *Homenaje a Ramón J. Sender*, edited by Mary S. Vázquez, includes twelve new studies on Sender in addition to a bibliographical essay by Elizabeth Espadas and my own annotated bibliography of 142 «articles» from Sender's syndicated column, «Los libros y los días», 1975-1982⁸. My bibliography is a continuation of the annotation of «Los libros y los días», begun in my *Ramón J. Sender, An Annotated Bibliography, 1928-1974*, published in 1976⁹.

Homenaje a Ramón J. Sender reveals the current direction of Senderian research. Two articles, one by Manuel Béjar and the other by Michiko Nonoyama, probe the meaning of *Siete domingos rojos*. In another article, Malcolm Compitello discusses *Requiem por un campesino español* in relation to the author's exile. The remaining ten essays in the volume are as follows: a study of social realism in Sender's novelistic work by Rafael Bosch; «Evo-cación mágica y terror fantástico en dos obras de Sender» by Rodolfo Cardona; a discussion of Sender's impact on Spanish literary critics by Francisco Carrasquer; «Sender o la polémica» by Marcelino Peñuelas; «Fauna in Selected Novels of Sender» by Kessel Schwartz; a study of *Novelas ejemplares de Cíbola* by the Belgian Patrick Collard; my own analysis, «Sender's Poetic Theology»; an overview of Senderian criticism until about 1982, especially of both unpublished and published doctoral theses on Sender, by L. Teresa Valdivieso: «La crítica suscitada en los Estados Unidos por la obra senderiana»¹⁰, and «Las mocedades de Ramón

⁸ Newark, Delaware. Juan de la Cuesta Hispanic Monographs, 1987.

⁹ Metuchen, N. J. The Scarecrow Press, XIV + 287 pp.

¹⁰ The present study, though not limited to criticism in the United Sta-

J. Sender en el periodismo alto-aragonés (1919-1923)», by Roger Duvivier.

I should like to single out Duvivier's paper for special attention here. Through painstaking, time-consuming investigations which involved spending considerable time in Huesca, Duvivier provides long-needed information on Sender's work as *redactor jefe* of the newspaper *La Tierra*, beginning when he was only 18 years of age. Duvivier gained access to a complete file of *La Tierra* from its first issue, October 3, 1919, until the time in 1923 that Sender had left the paper for military service. At the time he talked with people in Huesca who could provide him with, as he says, «un mínimo de información concreta sobre el ámbito del que procedía el periódico»¹¹.

Duvivier establishes in his essay that *La Tierra* was a weekly from October 3, 1919, the date of its first issue, until June 25, 1921, and that it became a daily (as Sender called it in his conversations with Peñuelas). Among the 88 weekly issues Duvivier discovered nineteen contributions signed by Sender either by name or initials; in the daily *La Tierra* he found 86 contributions, including, in Duvivier's words, «cuatro poemas de ostentatorio influjo modernista y seis cuentos deliberadamente insustanciales» (8). The first contribution identified as by Sender was in the issue of November 29, 1919, and the last on January 17, 1923. Not only does Duvivier document Sender's early journalistic apprenticeship and some youthful literary efforts, but he also contributes 105 items to an eventual, all-but-definitive bibliography of the Aragonese author's total production.

The fourth of the eight suggestions I made in my *Annotated Bibliography*, incidentally, called for some «bright (and persistent) member of the next generation of Senderian scholar-critics to find the files of the newspaper *La Tierra* of Huesca for the years during which Sender acted as its editor (though his name did not appear on its masthead) and see whether any articles by Sender appear therein (either under his real name or a pen name)» (XII). It appears that Duvivier was just that bright young man.

tes, is a continuation of Valdivieso's survey, continuing where her work stops — in 1982.

¹¹ Page 2 of Duvivier's manuscript, which was read in a special session of the 1983 Annual Meeting of the Modern Language Association of America in Chicago.

Another suggestion I made was that someone also «go through the files of *El Sol* from early 1924 until October 1930 to find articles written by Sender» (XII). Patrick Collard, a compatriot of Duvivier, did indeed do that (though not at my suggestion) as part of his doctoral thesis of 1980. Though his research occurred before 1982 and therefore before the period I am examining, I must add here parenthetically in the interest of Hispanic Bibliography that Collard reports having discovered in *El Sol* 114 book reviews by Sender, until then unknown¹². Some day in the not-too-misty future I hope that we Senderianos can pool our findings and bring forth an all-but-definitive Senderian primary-source *bibliography*. Two additional modest, small steps towards that end were taken by me during the period under review: «A partial Addendum (1975-82) to *Ramón J. Sender: An Annotated Bibliography (1928-1974)*», which appeared in the May 1983 issue of *Hispania*¹³, and the annotations of 142 additional articles from Sender's syndicated column, «Los libros y los días», 1975-1982, to which I have already referred.

Space limitations prohibit more than mere mention here of other excellent research done on Sender the last four years. They include another scholarly study by Roger Duvivier, «Las premisas de la obra autobiográfica en la primera época del escritor Ramón J. Sender», originally published in French¹⁴; María Francisca de Vilches intelligent study of Sender as a literary critic, the first of its kind¹⁵; Mary S. Vázquez's noteworthy article, «A prison of Parallels: The Natural and Human Spheres in *Imán*»¹⁶; a penetrating study by José-Carlos Mainer of the use of dramatic elements by

¹² In his valuable book, *Ramón J. Sender en los años 1930-1936 (Sus ideas sobre la relación entre literatura y sociedad)* (Gent: Rijksuniversiteit te Gent, 1980), p. 11. Collard also reports that 131 articles called «Postales políticas» by Sender appeared in *Solidaridad obrera* (Barcelona) between March 17, 1931 and July 12, 1932, p. 13. My own *Annotated Bibliography* lists 18 «Postales políticas» during that same time and two earlier ones (October 1 and 18, 1930).

¹³ Volume 66, No. 2, pp. 209-216. In it I annotate 27 new books by Sender, 1975-1982, and list 32 new editions or reprintings of his books in addition to 211 reviews.

¹⁴ *L'autobiographie en Espagne*, Aix-en-Provence, Université de Provence, 1982, pp. 203-206 (Etudes Hispaniques 5).

¹⁵ «Ramón J. Sender como crítico literario (1929-36)», *Revista de Literatura* (Madrid), 45, 89 (1983), 73-94.

¹⁶ *Hispanófila*, 82 (September 1984), 45-56.

Sender in his narratives, «La narrativa de Ramón J. Sender: La tentación escénica», in *Bulletin Hispanique*¹⁷; worthy articles on *Requiem por un campesino español*, especially those by Angel Iglesias Ovejero and Robert G. Havard¹⁸, and four articles in the March 1982 number of *Insula* by Laureano Bonet, Jorge Campos, Julia Uceda and Patrick Collard —Collard's article being «una versión reducida y modificada» of a chapter from his book of 1980: *Ramón J. Sender en los años 1930-36*.

In conclusion, recent research on Sender, though diminished in quantity from earlier periods, has been of excellent quality. It has been both information gathering and critically evaluative. It has both widened and deepened our knowledge and understanding of the man and his work, thus continuing to lay a solid foundation on which future *Senderianos* may brightly build and rebuild. With the perspectives of added time and building upon past research, today's Senderian research is better than ever.

¹⁷ 85, 3-4 (1983), 325-246.

¹⁸ «Estructuras mítico-narrativas de *Réquiem por un campesino español*», *Anales de la literatura española contemporánea*, 7, 2 (1982), 215-236, and (Havard), «The Romance in Sender's *Réquiem por un campesino español*», *Modern Language Review*, 79, 1 (January 1984), 88-96.