

ARTÍCULO RESEÑA

IN SEARCH OF IDEAL WORLDS: JUAN CANO BALLESTA'S *LAS ESTRATEGIAS DE LA IMAGINACIÓN*¹

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By grouping together in the same work the «*estrategias*» of very divergent poetic voices, Juan Cano Ballesta accomplishes something distinctively «postmodern.» At the end of our tormented century, the utopian —and *modern*— ideals of the revolutionary left have started to share the same status of reality as the fictions of the far right. However, the problem with a study of such wide scope is that it can lead the critic to unifying generalizations, limiting the analysis of a subject that «screams» for a deeper theoretical approach.

This work is of a very fluid style, easy to read, a good balance between the document and the commentary, the quote and the opinion. It also carries the characteristic marks of the scholarly contribution: studying poems almost unknown in the history of Spanish literature, and presenting some unpublished letters by Federico García Lorca and José Hernández. Only because of this, the book goes way beyond the humble self-description of «modesta contribución.»

The book includes an introduction, seven chapters, and two appendices. The introduction («Imaginación y utopía, la vertiente utópica de las letras»), paged in Roman numerals (IX-XX), seems a little cursory. It is here that Cano presents the anthropological foundations which render the concept of *poetic lie* («mentira poética») devoid of any sense whatsoever. Thus, the construction of utopias is

¹ Juan Cano Ballesta, *Las estrategias de la imaginación. Utopías y retórica política bajo el franquismo*. Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1994.

seen historically as one of the most genuine of human endeavors, essential to the very act of imagining. Here the author follows the ideas of the German philosopher Ernst Block (*Das Prinzip Hoffnung*) for whom utopias were the most sophisticated by-products of human hope, the most distinctive attribute of the soul. According to this view, utopias are an exquisite result of reverie, especially in their poetic form, a generating factor of artistic creativity.

The following seven chapters are dedicated to: 1. «Antonio Machado y la crisis del hombre moderno,» 2. «La utopía del 'Amanecer' y del 'Imperio' en la retórica falangista,» 3. «Poesía de la Guerra Civil: dos retóricas de un enfrentamiento,» 4. «La utopía paradisíaca de Vicente Aleixandre,» 5. «*Sonetos a la piedra* de Dionisio Ridruejo,» 6. «La 'libertad' como utopía,» and 7. «Novísimos, postnovísimos y la búsqueda de paraísos estéticos.» The book concludes with two interesting appendices, although these are somewhat unrelated to the central point of the work. The first appendix, «Peripecias de una amistad; Federico García Lorca y Miguel Hernández» (Vicissitudes of a Friendship; Federico García Lorca and...), refutes existing assumptions regarding the friendship between these two poets. Cano succeeds in demonstrating how Lorca and Hernández never went beyond a very limited epistolary relationship—five letters from Hernández to Lorca and one from Lorca to Hernández. There is no doubt of the interest shown by Lorca toward the author of *Perito en lunas*. The other appendix, «Una imagen distorsionada de Europa» (A Distorted Image of Europe), is a study of José Hernández' trip to Central and Eastern Europe. This paper, already published in Spain in 1985, follows the poet's journey through his letters, verses, and personal notes, some of which were given to Juan Cano by Hernández' widow for publication. Hernández' testimonies prove how easily European intellectuals of the period—the 20s and 30s—fell victims to prejudice and ideological distortion.

Of the seven chapters, the ones devoted to Falangist (Chap. 2.5), and Social poetry (Chap. 6) are the most interesting contributions, while the chapter on the Heideggerian Angst of Machado (Chap. 8) does not appear to fit within the focus of the book. Moreover, Cano's view of Heidegger's philosophy seems reductionist. The aforementioned chapters on the *ethos* of Spanish Fascism shows the work of poets not well studied by critics, including Ramón de Basterra, Agustín de Foxá, and Dionisio Ridruejo. Juan Cano presents an excellent analysis of the latter's «Poema a la piedra,» re-

vealing the ideological underpinnings, hidden within the metaphorical (and we could add, phalocentric) images of verticality, solidity, and strength, dedicated to the palace/abbey of El Escorial. The «delirio vertical» of Ridruejo carries multiple levels of meaning: poetic, religious, political, synthesizing the aesthetic of the Cubist movement and the ideas of a «paraíso difícil, erecto e implacable» of José Antonio Primo de Rivera. In Cano's words, «la verticalidad falangista condensa en sí la decisiva veta espiritualista de este movimiento, que luchaba decididamente contra el marxismo y el ateísmo materialista» (115).

Cano Ballesta relates these types of idealizations to the work of poets such as Gerardo Diego with his images of the Castillian landscape. The dry, flat horizons of Central Spain would be the ultimate embodiment of the anti-sensual and anti-decadent forces of History. Cano shows very well how Dionisio Ridruejo managed to intensify the metaphors of Diego, creating oxymorons full of «tensión interna de fuerzas contradictorias» (117). Particularly interesting is also the idea that Falange had, in its beginnings, paganizing tendencies. This, pointed out by Cano only in a brief footnote (p. 117, note 11), is something historians have often forgotten, especially outside Spain.

In the chapters on Fascist utopias [«Imperio» and «Amanecer» (dawn)] Cano Ballesta expresses convincingly the powerful seduction that such images had over the impressionable youth of the Spanish middle class of the 30's. We are dealing with a «discurso nebuloso y místico, emotivo y embriagador» (29) (foggy and mystical discourse, emotional and intoxicating).

The chapter on the *Novísimos* asserts the humanistic values in the reverie («soñar diurno») of this neo-Baroque poetry: Luis A. de Villena, Pere Gimpferrer, Antonio Colinas, a generation of *l'art pour l'art* authors of the 70's and 80's. To Juan Cano viewing this poetry as merely «decadent» is tantamount to a misleading stereotype. The work of Luis A. de Villena, in this regard, embodies a successful combination of «todos los recursos de un renovado modernismo, exquisito y refinado, con sus ecos de melancolía y nostalgia, su paganismo voluptuoso, su extremado canto a la belleza y su verso rítmico de atenuada musicalidad» (p. 151)².

² Trans.: (embodies...) ... all the resources of a renewed and exquisite *Modernismo*, with its echoes of nostalgia and melancholy, its voluptuous paganism, its extreme ode to beauty and its rhythmic verse of subtle musicality.

Returning to the reservations we mentioned in the first paragraph, the foundations of the critical strategies of Juan Cano Ballesta seem somewhat insufficient. Thus, the introductory first chapter appears too brief, both in textual and theoretical length, failing in the process to present a more elaborated taxonomy of all utopian constructions. We must say, however, that the author redeems himself by stating that he is not attempting to establish a complete morphology of the subject. In any case, the type of analysis presented in the book would have benefited a great deal from a more complex theoretical framework. In order to accomplish this, it would have sufficed to apply at this point some of the theories from authors of extensive works on *myth*, such as Mircea Eliade or Carl Jung. It would also have been useful to follow the conceptual distinctions between *fantasía* e *imaginación*³ —as established by the «Diccionario de la Real Academia» itself. Do all utopian constructions originate equally from the imaginary and the fantastic? Consciously or unconsciously, Cano Ballesta himself tends to associate «imaginar» (with the sublimation of a better world as professed by the left), with his «sentimiento de rebelión frente a una situación no satisfactoria o de un análisis lúcido y profundo de la sociedad» (127). Fascist aesthetics, on the other hand, are presented as a *fantasy* about «todas las elegancias cortesanas de una monarquía trasnochada» (45).

Matei Calinescu, quoted several times in the introduction, believes that utopia belongs quintessentially to modernity. If this is so, and we all agree with the Romanian philosopher, how then do we deal with utopias before modernity? Utopian thought is a product of the modern mind, inasmuch as modernity creates ideals of social and political *progress*, and the metaphorical realm of Utopia becomes the ultimate goal of progress itself. What we had before modern times were *Arcadic* idealizations, the mythical past of the Golden Age, Paradise, etc. —precisely those that are revisited and reformulated in the fantastic visions of Falangist poetry.

In fact, the construction of myths, as Carl Jung puts it, is the

³ Obviously, the terms *fantasía* and *imaginación* belong, in a general sense, to the same semantic family, and therefore overlap. However, their use and their very definition by the Spanish Academy of Language signifies a clear conceptual division between them. In their first meaning: *Fantasía* is «la facultad del alma que representa las cosas reales o ideales», while *Imaginación* is «la facultad que tiene el ánimo de reproducir por medio de imágenes las cosas pasadas o lejanas».

result of «the inadequacy of the present»⁴ which marks a psychological process that the Swiss thinker called *compensation*. Such compensation would result in very differently expressed mythologies depending upon the type of ideological premises used in the production of the narratives. Drawing from the same immutable archetype, the eternally unsatisfactory «*now*» became an insufferable threat to the two opposite poles of the political spectrum. One reacted against the ugly world of «la civilización urbana e industrial (...) el espíritu revolucionario y la lucha de clases» (47), the other against the exploitation of the working poor. The energies of the *compensation* factor pointed to the past in the first case, and to the future in the second. The Arcadic visions of Isabella and Ferdinand's great empire and the restoration of a Catholic World Order were destined to clash with the *utopian* republic of social justice in an international and classless world.

Another applicable type of analysis is the Nietzschean distinction between *Apollonian* and *the Dionysian* pathos, which allows us to establish suggestive parallelisms between poetic realms, otherwise opposite. Here, the falangist «Amanecer» (Dawn) of the Spanish empire and the «Aurora Roja» of the Marxist (Red Dawn) would belong in the same category —the Apollonian. Meanwhile, the end of time in «Final Anarchy» and the hedonistic fantasies of the *novísimos* would share the Dionysian paradise. In this scheme the festive subjectivity of Vicente Aleixandre's *Sombra del Paraíso* (Chap. 4) belongs, also, to the Dionysian world. To these poets, the «novísimos» and Aleixandre, who are separated by «only» one generation, the *compensation* mechanism serves to create delicate worlds of beauty and individual happiness, compensating for the ugly realities of their time and place.

The *Fantastic* versus the *Imaginary*, the *Apollonian* versus the *Dionysian*, *Myth* versus *Ideology*, *Arcadia* versus *Utopia*, etc., are only a few of the possible axes of analysis which we believe could have contributed to an enriched study of such a suggestive subject. Our criticism seeks to underline the very fact that Juan Cano Ballesta has presented to us a fascinating theme, stimulating enough interest for the reader to want more. This is one of the virtues of what we call a seminal work. Let us hope the author will

⁴ Carl Jung, «On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry», in *The Spirit in Man, and Literature*. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 1971) 83.

continue to study the realms of Utopia, the «estrategias de la imaginación» in Spanish poetry. Perhaps, next time the theoretic framework will be widened and more elaborate taxonomies will be presented.