

# MANUEL ANDÚJAR: EXISTENTIALISM AND MESTIZAJE

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We are all familiar with the principle that in order to understand the present one must understand the past. Santayana is famous for his dictum, «Those who forget the past are condemned to repeat it», and Jameson finds it important to begin his *Political Unconscious* with the words «Always historicize!» Thus, in an analysis of Spanish cultural trends in the last quarter of the twentieth century, it is more than worthwhile for one to ask to what extent has this culture understood the past. This is meant to be neither a rhetorical nor a pompous statement. We offer it because it is well known that the history of the Spanish twentieth century — and specifically the years following 1939 — is one in which many of the nation's intellectuals fell into oblivion. The problem placed before those who define official culture at this juncture is to decide which of those forgotten authors, painters, etc., are worthy of recuperation and necessary to a correct rewriting of the historical march of Spanish culture onward towards the twenty-first century.

An important turning point in literary Spain's vision of itself may be seen in the generation of 1968. Lourdes Ortiz, speaking in 1989 in San Lorenzo de El Escorial, described this generation as the last group of young literati to be influenced by French culture. She maintains that the connection to Sartre, Camus and structuralism and the concomitant interest in Marx and Freud was replaced, in younger generations, by a connection to English literature and thought. The dialectical differences between the French and English-oriented cultures, the first being more politi-

cally and philosophically radical, at least in its outward manifestations, may help the critic to understand a novelistic movement in the late 1970s that attempts to break with the sociopolitical nature of Spanish narrative. To this one must contrast the other cultural trend, fully in the 1980s, to amend literary history through the recuperation of texts that were lost to the reading public for largely political reasons.

The years 1988-89 have been quite telling with respect to official and semi-official Spain's desire to recover its cultural past. Aside from traditional homages, for obvious chronological reasons, such as those paid to Gómez de la Serna and Jarnés, many figures from the post-war exile have grown to an importance that they knew only among a select intellectual few for many decades. In addition to the constant recognition given Francisco Ayala, perhaps the dean and best known of the exiled writers, prizes have been awarded to María Zambrano and Rosa Chacel. In the art world, 1989 produced two splendid exhibitions of exiled surrealists: Mercedes Varo and Eugenio Granell, whose surrealist novel, *La novela del indio Tupinamba* was reedited by Editorial Fundamentos in 1982 and whose second novel, *Lo que sucedió*, has been more recently reedited by Editorial Anthropos, in 1989. Furthermore, Granell has been awarded the 1989 Comunidad de Madrid Art Prize. Turning to younger writers, Plaza Janés has decided to republish the complete works of Antonio Ferrés, a novelist who went into self-exile after his years of resistance in the antifrancoist movement. The project is still in process.

The subject of this essay, Manuel Andújar, has also recently received the public notice long overdue him. While well known to his contemporaries and specialists of the Spanish exile, Andújar is now gaining a new following, thanks to the reedition of many of his works and a televised series based on his trilogy *Visperas*. In 1987 Editorial Endymión published *Partiendo de la angustia*, which originally appeared in México in 1944, and it is fitting to study this work, even though it may suffer in comparison to later novels, for, as Andújar's first novel, composed during the early years of his exile, it represents the young author's artistic and philosophical concerns, and allows one to hypothesize as to what might have been his immediate contribution to literature in the peninsula had he not been forced into exile.

Various sources have been suggested as essential to Andújar's novelistic art, but two writers stand out as most influential upon his early development: Gabriel Miró and Benjamín Jarnés, the latter affirming for Andújar certain Orteguian concepts that, rather than clash with the author's intense social and political commitment, combined with it and thus helped to create Andújar's specific literary personality: a constant preoccupation with style, at times a very baroque style, joined by an equally constant philosophical approach to the particular problems that lie before him.

In *Partiendo de la angustia* this novelistic approach leads to an existentialist presentation of the problem of the Mexican *mestizo*. In an autobiographical article Andújar recognizes the existential content of the work, categorizing himself modestly as a forerunner of the philosophical current that was about to take hold in Europe:

Mientras explanaba cuentos y para descargar las sensaciones que la atmósfera y criaturas mexicanas me habían producido, compuse, quizá más emocional que ajustadamente, la novela no extensa pero creo que sí intensa, *Partiendo de la angustia* (1944), premonitoria en el tufo a un existencialismo que todavía no pontificaban ni Albert Camus ni Jean-Paul Sartre, aunque esa sensibilidad flotaba ya en el ambiente de la época («Una versión...» 17).

This is not an immodest statement on the part of Andújar, for there are many indices of pre-war Spain's involvement in European intellectual currents, perhaps the most important of which, for this essay, is Benjamín Jarnés's role in the founding of the international PEN club. In fact, Jarnés's *Vida de San Alejo* was the first work published by that organization, in 1934.

Andújar's novel chronicles the personal vicissitudes of a government functionary whose immediate superior has been elevated to a major post in the Mexican government. But while the story line reflects the protagonist's personal reaction to the political and social injustices he witnesses, his problematic relations with the opposite sex form a more essential connecting link throughout the novel, and it is here that one finds the most systematic expression of an existential vision of the self. Anselmo is presented to the reader as the victim of a domineering mother. As his career develops, he becomes aware of the need to liberate himself. In a

monologue whose language is markedly similar to that of *La familia de Pascual Duarte* — a novel that Andújar did not read until after the publication of *Partiendo de la angustia* — the son contemplates a violence that he is ultimately incapable of:

Ni siquiera ha conseguido todavía la conciencia de la culpa grandiosa, que es el punto de partida de la regeneración. Y la necesidad de forjar el pecado, el pecado primordial, comienza a dominarle.

...Él desea un ataque tan profundo a las normas que lo tiranizan, que lo encarcelan, que su fantasía se debate en proyectos.

El desmán de mayor importancia es matar. Matar únicamente para desahogar un puro instinto destructivo, sin amorosos lazos de odio con personas conocidas; con rígida indiferencia.

Por algo priva en los crímenes el arma blanca. La comunión de los hados, que vincula a la víctima y a su sacrificador, se efectúa mejor sin la mezcuidad mecánica de la pistola, hundiendo el cuchillo en los tejidos y en la carne, para que tropiece en los huesos exponiéndonos a que la sangre nos salpique... (41)

Anselmo's potential antagonistic relationship with his mother is truncated, but the son's relationships with other women form a definite parallel to the existential statement the author develops. After stating that his character has yet to enjoy any real contact with the opposite sex, he points to his frustration and his inability to discover a superior force that might offer him salvation: «Hasta entonces ningún acontecimiento exterior, superior a sus fuerzas, que lo arrastrase, vino a salvarlo. Cuando apelaba a su voluntad él mismo percibía que imploraba a un espectro» (9). From this early statement, the exposition of the male-female problem will lead logically and finally to a successful sexual relationship, but ironically with an inexperienced Indian girl who is only thirteen or fourteen years old. Thus his personal growth, which has begun to exhibit itself in a newly developed self-assuredness («En Anselmo se observaba una sonrisa inquieta, calmada, de reprimida y celosa plenitud. Y los otros, sin poder precisar, lo advertían distinto, como lleno de savia y de ritmo» [105]), is dependent upon an outsider, a non-white and non-*mestizo*. In this manner Andújar creates a sociological metaphor of the existentialist concept, yet

to be enunciated, of *être-pour-autrui* (the self as seen by others). Leonor, the Indian, an other in this so carefully delineated Mexican society, finally allows Anselmo to focus upon and create himself.

The particular plot line regarding women is never removed from the overall existential argument. Directly previous to his first encounter with Leonor, Anselmo travels with his superior to the countryside, where they will spend the night with a group of woodcutters. The protagonist finds himself totally alienated, not just as a result of having left the city, but also because of the importance to him of the physical activity by which the Indians make their living:

Él estaba alejado de su medio real... Él se había desenvuelto siempre en la capital, en un sector social determinado y limitador. Ignoraba cómo es el hombre que suda y reniega. (91-92)

Anselmo's thoughts continue to develop along this line until the final moments of the passage:

Anselmo se da cuenta —por el movimiento de los labios— que Lupe le pregunta discretamente al jefe:  
—¿Y su acompañante? ¿Quién es?  
Y él mismo no hubiera sabido, a decir verdad, qué contestar. (93)

The subsequent relationship with Leonor, an Indian, constitutes a reinforcement of the concept that internal realization is dependent upon a relationship with the other. If Anselmo's feelings of alienation are caused by his experience with the other, so too are his later feelings of self-fulfillment, equally dependent upon an Indian other.

Anselmo's inexperience with women should not really be seen as terminated when he finds himself with Leonor, for while the couple have sexual relations, the young Leonor is not yet fully a woman. In fact, Anselmo has had previous sexual encounters, with a jaded fortune hunter, but this simply lends a greater aspect of purity to his relationship with Leonor, whose attraction to the protagonist is in no way motivated by secondary interests. Anselmo's romantic involvement with the other parallels his disinvolvement with all of the society that surrounds him, for he views it as in-

authentic. Thus, when an injustice is committed against him, precisely as a result of his own disinterested act of good will towards an indigent pregnant woman, he makes no effort to vindicate himself. What is more, in a monologue that could well belong to a Camus novel, he concludes that suffering may be positive, a refuge for those who seek their authenticity:

Y lo curioso del caso es que no le brotó un afán vehemente de reivindicarse, de esclarecer lo sucedido. Juzgaba preferible que todo siguiese así, enmarañado, arbitrariamente complejo, nadando entre la calumnia y la inocencia... La injusticia que se sufre —meditaba— es ya un altivo refugio. Al padecer «soy», con mi silencio «tengo» un arma siempre dispuesta, un motivo permanente, aplazado, fermentado, de rehabilitación individual. (70-71)

Stated in existentialist terminology, the collective other, as a representation of social ills, is a phenomenon to be rejected, while a specific other, which exists equally outside of that collective phenomenon, affords the road to personal fulfillment and authenticity. And when the author projects this philosophical view onto a social stage, he finds the other to be best represented in the terms of racial differences that so impressed the young Andújar upon his arrival in the Mexican capital.

Turning now to this question of the coexistence of classes and races in Mexico, we may define more clearly the particular brand of existentialism that Andújar employs in this novel. The problematic self, at one level, is projected against a collective self, and that collective self is in turn set against a background of poverty and corruption. But the testimony of the novel is not to this poverty and corruption, nor to the general population, but to the particular question of *mestizaje*, a subject that has never ceased to be of interest to the author. Witness, as an example, his book-length essay *Andalucía e Hispanoamérica: crisol de mestizajes*, published in 1982.

Both Anselmo and his superior are *mestizos*, and early in the novel the value of this social group is emphasized. A meditating Anselmo refers to «(L)os empleadillos de tres al cuarto que meditan, asentando el milagro de la compraventa, que su mestizaje tiene razón de ser, a despecho de los azares y de la violencia, que un muro de cemento industrial los asfixia» (10). Soon after-

wards his superior states, more explicitly, «Qué orgullo le debemos a nuestro mestizaje! Sin él no podíamos divagar así, tendiéndose al propio tiempo que al pasado al porvenir» (14). These two declarations exist as a logical parallel to the novel's structure. With his own anguish as a point of departure — precisely the work's title — the protagonist's somewhat abstract statement refers to the *mestizo's* struggle. The successful superior sees the issue in a more explicitly self-centered manner. Historical accident («Mi bisabuela, negra dominicana. Por parte del padre, origen andaluz. El avorazado desvirgó una india y se casó...» [14]) leaves him in the center of society and history. The author cannot resist a poetic aside, entering the narration with the four word sentence, «(O)livo, tiniebla y cobre» (14), but while this phrase would seem to glorify the role of the *mestizo* in Mexican society, the central issue of the novel is still Anselmo's lack of self-identification, for he sees himself not as a combination of three races, but, on the contrary, as not belonging to any one of them. Perhaps the choice to present Anselmo in this manner is a result of Andújar's European intellectual upbringing. Although his purposes here were to analyze the *mestizo* personality, it would seem to this writer that, consciously or unconsciously, the author utilizes the character of his *mestizo* to illustrate the kind of existential thinking that was beginning to appear in the Europe he had just left behind. Thus we find the *mestizo* government minister who willingly confesses to Sartrean bad faith with regard to his bureaucratic responsibilities, contrasted with his *mestizo* secretary, Anselmo, who agonizes in his search for personal authenticity:

¡Es tan pueril e insignificante lo que a él le sucede! Los acontecimientos exteriores que le rodean y rozan equivalen a naderías, a podadas vegetaciones; los hechos íntimos son de una penuria espiritual desoladora. (41).

The existential approach to *mestizaje* is, if one will allow me the term, a *metamestizaje*, in which a young author in the process of relocating himself applies one continent's discourse to another's society. Nowhere is this clearer than in a kind letter to Anselmo from a *mestizo* schoolmate, in reality, given the discourse, from Andújar himself. The language is that of Andújar's later essay on the phenomenon; here we may see it as the first of many state-

ments on the advantages of that interracial mixture which Andújar finds in México and his native Andalusia:

Rechazo los aspectos crueles de las dos civilizaciones que nos alumbraron a los mestizos. Pero creo firmemente que en nuestro origen indígena radica una fuerza y una belleza que aún no entendemos bien, porque las hemos estrangulado. (79).

It is the author's existentialist discourse that tempers the school-mate's *mestizo* pride. It is, likewise, Andújar's existentialist spirit that constantly Europeanizes this otherwise Mexican sociological theme.

Certain critics have seen Galdós as a source for Andújar's prose. The author questions this, stating that all contemporary writers reach back to Galdós to some extent; he is the creator of the modern novel. In fact it may be Andújar's later emphasis on historical writing that most causes the comparison with the nineteenth-century novelist. But if we accept the view of Andújar as an heir to Galdós, the generation of 1898, Ortega and Jarnés, we find in him a carefully constructed, deliberate conflation of the dehumanization of his immediate predecessors and the social commitment preached by nineteenth-century realism and twentieth-century existentialism. He manages to maintain in this novel both the complicated artistic style that is the legacy of vanguardism and the social and personal commitment that the following epoch created, in the form of existentialism. And if, as Sanz Villanueva suggests, *Partiendo de la angustia* represents «una radical insatisfacción existencial» que «no volverá a encontrarse en el resto de su escritura» (43), one might suggest that had Spanish history not forced Andújar to make that very history the main theme of his works, the existential nature of this first work might have become the dominant tone of his later novels.

#### WORKS CITED

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