

LATIN AMERICAN POETRY AND VARIOUS CRITICAL TENDENCIES*

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- LATIN-AMERICAN POETRY: ORIGINS AND PRESENCE.* By GORDON BROTH-ERSTON. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975. Pp. 228.)
- POESÍA.* By RUBÉN DARÍO. Prologue by Angel Rama. Edited by Ernesto Mejía Sánchez. Chronology by Julio Valle-Castillo. (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1977. Pp. 564.)
- CÉSAR VALLEJO: THE DIALECTICS OF POETRY AND SILENCE.* By JEAN FRANCO. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976. Pp. 296.)
- LECTURAS DE OCTAVIO PAZ.* By PERE GIMFERRER. (Barcelona: Anagrama, 1980. Pp. 118.)
- THE POETRY OF JULÍAN DEL CASAL: A CRITICAL EDITION.* By ROBERT JAY GLICKMAN. (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1976–1978. Volume 1, Pp. 287. \$15.00 cloth, \$6.50 paper. Volume 2, Pp. 466. \$20.00 cloth. Volume 3, Pp. 491. \$17.50 cloth.)

The explosive development of the new Latin American narrative, according to some critics, served also to heighten the value of poetic creation in Latin America. For others, however, the success of the novelists resulted in the poets' being forgotten. What is certain is that although critical studies of the work of Borges, Cortázar, Fuentes, García Márquez, and Vargas Llosa continued to multiply, it was evident that criticism of the poets was not at the same high level. Moreover, economic considerations entered in because commercial publishing houses preferred to bet on the guaranteed sale of a book on leaders of the "boom" rather than risk having to store unsold copies of poetry criticism. In the last ten years, however, concern over the absence of poetic criticism has been somewhat eased by the appearance of numerous studies that take on the always complex work of the Latin American poets.

Each one of the critical texts commented on here represents a different orientation to the phenomenon of poetry and each constitutes a response of the last decade to the need for rigor and recapitulation. Some of these books have a breadth of perception that makes them required texts for general reference, as is the case with Gordon

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Brotherston's book, *Latin American Poetry: Origins and Presence*. Pleasingly written, it reminds us that good literary criticism does not have to be written in obscure language. One can argue with the author over his initial claim that "in language and politics, Latin America . . . is not a single entity and never has been" (p. 1). But what is most valuable in the book are the information and commentaries that are offered to the reader who is not an expert on the matter (some passages reveal the author's didactic approach to the British reading public). A careful reworking of articles Brotherston previously published in various journals, *Latin American Poetry* may well become the ideal tool for courses and seminars on Latin American poetry.

One of the most influential books of the past ten years is Jean Franco's *César Vallejo: The Dialectics of Poetry and Silence*. Vallejo appears in her pages as a literary figure unknown to most readers, with all discussion presented in a language that achieves the difficult synthesis of erudite rigor and elegant and effective prose. The first paragraph of the book is a model "lead," the kind of opening paragraph that is recommended in North American journalism and that is incomprehensibly absent from literary criticism. In a few skillful sentences, Franco compels the reader to keep on reading. The critical concepts she uses owe much to Russian formalism while the bibliography is a model of what bibliographies should be: a guide for the reader who will continue investigating, and not the mere transcription of cold bibliographic data found in so many texts. An accusation she directs at the so-called Anglo-Saxon world causes one to reflect on the imperfect knowledge of Latin American poetry that exists in certain parts of the world: "There is always resistance to those Latin American writers who can neither be readily incorporated into the literary system nor categorized as exotic" (p. x). One should remember, moreover, that in the last few years Vallejo has become the favorite author of the critics, especially after the appearance of Julio Ortega's edition (Madrid: Taurus, 1974) and the book by Juan Larrea, *César Vallejo y el creacionismo* (Madrid: Visor/Alberto Corazón, 1976).

Venezuela's economic strength has benefited culture in the establishment of the Biblioteca Ayacucho, a series of probably definitive books on the top literary figures of the continent. To this collection belong the edition of Rubén Darío's poetry (Caracas, 1977), prepared with a prologue by Angel Rama that should be considered required reading for anyone who tackles this topic, and an edition of the work of Ernesto Mejía Sánchez that constitutes a model for works of this type. This same collection also reveals an interest in poetry. Pedro Grases took charge of the edition of Andrés Bello's *Obra literaria* (1979), with a chronology prepared by Oscar Sambrano Urdaneta; Fernando Alegría contributed the prologue, notes, and chronology to the edition of Pablo Neruda's *Canto general*; Cintio Vitier was in charge of Jose Martí's *Obra literaria*, in which

his poems hold center stage. In sum, this series of books is one that no library specializing in these areas should lack.

The third volume of Robert Glickman's impressive critical edition must be carefully noted as a seminal work in the area of computer analysis of vocabulary and other linguistic-literary aspects of poetry. While in the first volumes the author undertook what for some years may be the definitive edition of the work of Julián del Casal, in the third volume he presents scientific data on the frequency of adjectives, nouns, slogans, titles, and rhythm of this Cuban writer's poetry. It should be remembered that this critical approach is still in embryonic form in the Hispanic world. One exception is Ned Davison's *Sound Patterns in a Poem of José Martí* (Salt Lake City: Damuir Press, 1975), in which an interdisciplinary approach to poetry is successfully attempted, in this instance through the use of musical concepts and techniques. Texts like these argue for the use of methods characteristic of other disciplines (such as computer analysis and musical composition) to elucidate the least known aspects of the poetic process.

Pere Gimferrer takes a personal approach to the poetry of Octavio Paz and uses a method that seems antiacademic to some. His text contains neither a single footnote nor one bibliographic entry. Mistakenly considered to be journalistic criticism, this type of critical creation reveals a clear, accessible, and personal language (Gimferrer is more important in this book than Paz himself); it is a study of one poet by another poet. *Piedra del sol* (1957), *Blanco* (1966), and *Pasado en claro* (1974) are the works chosen to show the "itinerario," "fijeza," "discurso interrumpido" (Gimferrer's terms) and the "paradigma de la lectura," which is circular in the case of *Piedra del sol*. Gimferrer provides another model to be followed by poets wanting to write about their masters. Moreover, the fact should be noted that Gimferrer received an essay prize for a critical book on poetry. In view of the fact that Spanish publishers are still preoccupied with the "libro político," the gesture made by Jordi de Herralde and the other members of Anagrama's jury merits applause.

Concerning Paz, the 1979 Barcelona edition of his *Poemas (1935–1975)* makes him more accessible to scholars. The author says in the prologue, "Los poemas son objetos verbales inacabados e inacabables. No existe lo que se llama 'versión definitiva': cada poema es el borrador de otro, que nunca escribimos" (p.11). This idea is familiar to Rachel Phillips, author of the classic *Las estaciones poéticas de Octavio Paz* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1976). The original title is *Poetic Modes of Octavio Paz* (New York: Oxford, 1973).

In sum, the traditional approaches are being maintained, and one hopes that they may be only a first step toward other, more productive paths. The examples of Franco, Brotherston, and Gimferrer seem to be the works with the greatest promise.