

MIRELLA D'AMBROSIO SERVODIDIO

**THE QUEST FOR HARMONY:  
THE DIALECTICS OF  
COMMUNICATION  
IN THE POETRY  
OF EUGENIO FLORIT**



SOCIETY OF SPANISH AND SPANISH-AMERICAN STUDIES

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In a steadfast devotion to his craft that spans a period of more than fifty years, Eugenio Florit has moved within the mainstream of contemporary Spanish poetry, thereby shaping with his opus a remarkable compendium of the divergent poetic configurations of the century. While vibrating empathically with contemporary trends, Florit has headed the beat of his own drum and the result is an interesting confluence of styles arrived at in an unbroken process of experimentation and growth.

The trajectory of his work in its formal aspects, clearly posited by various critics,(1) is one of impressive scope and range and weaves deftly from one school of writing to another in a manner that is alternately successive (postmodernism, vanguardism, neogongorism) and simultaneous (pure poetry, surrealist poetry, traditional poetry) with the adoption of a «confessional» voice marking the poet's arrival at a final plateau. On a *prima facie* basis, then, Florit's poetry appears notably protean and pluralistic in nature. Yet, a careful study of his writings suggests that the seminal concept governing his poetry is one of duality rather than diversity for, despite the varying vestments with which he clothes his verse, the differences of tenor and timbre are more apparenial than real. The outer parameters of Florit's cosmos remain poised in dialectical opposition between Classicism and Romanticism, formalism and expressionism, artifice and passion, externally reflective of the polarity which besieges the poet from within and beleaguers him to the end.

The notion of duality as it applies to Eugenio Florit's poetry may be considered from various viewpoints. On one level, and as expressed by Dámaso Alonso in his much cited article, «Escala y Caribdis de la literatura española,» the pull between opposing forces is a permanent characteristic of Spanish literature and, as such, has historic and cultural roots: «Este eterno dualismo

dramático del alma española será también ley de unidad de su literatura . . . y es ella --la dualidad misma y no ninguno de los elementos contrapuestos que la forman, considerados por separado-- lo que es peculiarmente español.»(2) This peculiarly Spanish dualism finds continued expression within contemporary poetry and, indeed, provides an effective framework for numerous studies of this period. Among these, Ciplijauskaitė's «De lo estético a lo humano»(3) and Debicki's «Una generación poética»(4) are especially interesting for the light they shed on a generation of poets whose trajectory is closely linked to Florit's in several important ways. The duality that typifies the poets of the generation of 1924-25 is summarized by Debicki in the following manner: «. . . la obra lírica de estos poetas revela frecuentemente un conflicto entre dos aspectos del mundo, o entre dos actitudes ante la realidad . . . el doble deseo de ver la poesía como creación de una realidad y como encarnación de valores existentes humanos; el anhelo de seguir al mismo tiempo tradiciones formalistas (la gongorina, la metafórica contemporánea) y tradiciones expresivas (la popular tradicional, la surrealista); el interés simultáneo en la exactitud expresiva y en el misterio de la poesía.»(5) Divergent perceptions of reality and concomitant differences in poetic expression, elegantly isolated and defined by Amado Alonso in «Clásicos, románticos y superrealistas,» are now in confluence and conflict within a given opus, signposts of a new generation to which Florit adds his voice.

On an existential level, the duality which permeates Florit's poetry is expressive of the tension and polarity intrinsic to human existence when it is viewed as dialectical. Because the poet's spirit posits itself in a state of disequilibrium, his struggle is one of mediation and integration of the diverse modes in dialectic tension without sacrifice to the distinctions which provide them with articulation and content. A battle is pitched between the poet's reality as a Kierkegaardian *inter-esse*, a being-between the terms of a contradiction that cannot be resolved but must be resolutely endured,(6) and his longing to realize himself as an *in-dividuum*. Herein does he give tangible expression to the Hegelian conception of spirit not as a simple, self-identical substance but as a dialectical unity of tensed factors. The notion of polarity thus becomes incorporated with a unitary conception of being.

The classic underpinnings of the concept of polarity provide another dimension for our consideration. The Pythagorean

doctrine that all things are combinations of «opposites,» the Heraclitean conception of the balance of «exchanges,» and the Socratic belief in the reconciliation of «opposites» into a «higher» harmony are useful guideposts to Florit's poetry and lay an important groundwork for understanding and interpretation. In the *Phaedo*, the Hellenic counterpart of the «mystical way» of Christianity, we encounter, perhaps the greatest approximation to those polarities that impact on Florit, e.g. the pull between body and soul, life and death, corruptibility and immutability. Mortality, here, presupposes a two-world interpretation with its very nature a struggle between a higher and lower level.

For Eugenio Florit, this struggle reaches its greatest tension in the extensive body of religious poems which graph his personal *via crucis* and testify to the paradox and contradiction that appear to constitute the very essence of religious experience. As defined by Stace in *Time and Eternity: An Essay in the Philosophy of Religion*, «the religious impulse in men is the hunger for the impossible, the unattainable, the inconceivable--or at least for that which is these things in the world of time.»(7)

In Florit's poetry, then, the notion of polarity, whether understood existentially, Platonically, mystically, or historically, is a seminal one and even receives certification in the titles of two principal collections: the bald acknowledgment of duality in *Doble acento* and the struggle for unity of *Poema mío*.

With the central premise of duality once established, a case must be made for the choice of method for its further study. An exclusively chronological approach has been rejected on the grounds that dialectic tension is operative in all stages of Florit's work. To support the notion of mature serenity advanced by several critics(8) would be to bypass Florit's most recent book, *De tiempo y agonía* (1974), which provides persuasive evidence of continued bifurcations in the poet's path.

A thematic breakdown of the concept of polarity, in all its ramifications, would afford another method of study and would involve the examination of such antithetical categories as ideality and reality, essence and existence, facticity and transcendence--to cite only a few. The danger of this approach is that a «catalogue» of themes does not in itself disclose the locus of the fountainhead from which they flow and which, ultimately, shapes them into a coherent poetic vision. The search for this locus, the encounter and delineation of «el tema vital que desde los adentros preside

misteriosamente sobre los demás temas,» as defined by Pedro Salinas,(9) has provided the framework of this study.

From what William James called the «blooming welter of life,» Florit has developed a given set of ideas and attitudes, summarized in recurring symbols, in poetic intuitions, emotions, and doubts, and refined and clarified in a lifetime of effort. They constitute his poetic «universe.» In our judgment, the vital concern that informs this universe, subsuming all other considerations, is the quest for harmony; a quest, implying at its starting point the cognition of a lack, for a harmony equally applicable to an objective state as to a state of mind. The nature of this quest, the emotions that generate it, and their relation to the concept of duality will constitute the body of this study.

#### Notes

1. The first substantive study of the trajectory of Florit's work is that of Angel del Río in «La literatura de hoy: Eugenio Florit,» *Revista Hispánica Moderna*, New York, Año 8, núm. 3 (1942). In recent years, the most complete analysis can be found in «La poesía de Eugenio Florit» written by José Olivio Jiménez as a prologue to Alice M. Pollin's *Concordancias de la obra poética de Eugenio Florit*. It also serves as prologue to Florit's *Antología penúltima* (Madrid: Plenitud, 1970). A trustworthy account of the poet's trajectory may also be found in Orlando E. Saa's book, *La serenidad en la obra de Eugenio Florit* (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1973).
2. Dámaso Alonso, «Escila y Caribdis de la literatura española,» *Estudios y ensayos gongorinos* (Madrid: Gredos, 1955), pp. 26-27.
3. Biruté Ciplijauskaitė, «De lo estético a lo humano,» *El poeta y la poesía* (Madrid: Insula, 1966).
4. Andrew Debicki, «Una generación poética» *Estudios sobre poesía española contemporánea* (Madrid: Gredos, 1966).
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 50-51.
6. Soren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), p. 279.