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ADJUSTING TO REALITY:
PHILOSOPHICAL
AND PSYCHOLOGICAL IDEAS
IN THE POST-CIVIL WAR NOVELS
OF RAMON J. SENDER

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I

INTRODUCTION

Sender studies present a number of intriguing difficulties. The author was uncooperative with biographers¹ and sometimes rather unreliable when talking about himself. He was reluctant to polish his work once it was written² and yet often moved later either to repudiate³ it or re-use the material for different ends⁴. Then there is the sheer volume of it all—more than a hundred full-length books and uncollected articles by the thousand⁵—with a range and variety to match. Furthermore, the issues and passions of the Spanish Civil War—central to large parts of his life and works—still live on in Spain and elsewhere and this can distort judgments⁶ on him.

A few years ago⁷ such difficulties might have deterred a potential student of Sender, now it is to be hoped they will only serve to whet his appetite. He can certainly count on a number of useful critical tools

¹ See CHARLES L. KING, *Ramón J. Sender* (New York, 1974) —henceforth *Sender*—, p. 13.

² See MARCELINO C. PEÑUELAS, *Conversaciones con Ramón Sender* (Madrid, 1970) —henceforth *Conversaciones*—, p. 252.

³ This he did with *O. P. (Orden público)* (Madrid, 1931), *El Verbo se hizo sexo* (Madrid, 1931) —hereafter *El Verbo*—, *Siete domingos rojos* (Barcelona, 1932) —hereafter *Siete domingos*— and *La noche de las cien cabezas* (Madrid, 1934) —hereafter *Noche*. See CHARLES L. KING, *Ramón J. Sender: An Annotated Bibliography, 1928-1974* (Metuchen, N. J., 1976) —henceforth *Bibliography*—, and his «A Partial Addendum (1975-82) to Ramón Sender: *Bibliography, 1928-74*» in *Hispania*, 66 (May 1983), pp. 209-16 —henceforth «Addendum»—.

⁴ For example, *O. P.* and *Noche* were incorporated into *El verdugo afable* (Santiago de Chile, 1952) —henceforth *El verdugo* (1), there is a later, modified version of this (México, 1970), henceforth *El verdugo* (2)—, *Siete domingos* became *Las tres hermanas* (Barcelona, 1974) and *El Verbo* was incorporated into *Tres novelas teresianas* (Barcelona, 1967).

⁵ See KING, *Bibliography*, an extraordinarily valuable piece of work.

⁶ There is an exaggerated concern with Sender's early politics, which are relatively unimportant in the overall picture of his life and work. To a degree this is understandable in Spain which is still struggling to free itself from the polarisations of the Civil War and the Franco period.

⁷ During the period 1939-65 nothing of Sender's was available in Spain, only one of the pre-Civil War works was republished outside Spain, and a host of publishing houses throughout Central, South and North America were used for his new works written in exile.

and studies to help him⁸ and a clear, measured consensus view⁹ that the author is one of the greatest Spanish novelists of the twentieth century with an assured and permanent international reputation.

Collard and Nonoyama¹⁰ have gone a long way towards mapping the ideological basis of Sender's pre-Civil War work —fictional and non-fictional— and their research has provided an excellent base from which investigation into his later work and therefore his evolution can be pursued. It is this evolution that underlies the intriguing difficulties I referred to.

My study, going on from there, is an attempt to elucidate the major themes in the post-Civil War works and to place these within the context of Sender's whole life and work. It aims to substantiate my three basic contentions concerning Sender, viz that the Civil War experience was crucial to him and fundamentally changed his view of reality, that the major interest of his subsequent work tends to be philosophical and psychological, and that the later books have a distinctive ambiguity and structural complexity. Given this complexity I have opted to base my study on the detailed analysis of a small number of works. The inevitable limitations of such a selection were felt to be more than justified by the value of detailed analysis and in so far as the works chosen are representative¹¹ of many more in Sender's post-Civil War canon.

*La esfera*¹² —that most overtly philosophical of Sender's works— would have figured prominently among my choice of novels had it not already been the subject of a number of fine studies¹³ to which I shall refer in due course. The same reason dissuaded me from choosing the

⁸ To those mentioned should be added PEÑUELAS, *La obra narrativa de Ramón Sender* (Madrid, 1971) —henceforth, *La obra*—, FRANCISCO CARRASQUER, «*Imán*» y la novela histórica de Sender (London, 1971) —henceforth «*Imán*»—, MICHIKO NONOYAMA, *El anarquismo en las obras de R. J. Sender* (Madrid, 1979) —henceforth *El anarquismo*—, PATRICK COLLARD, *Ramón Sender en los años 1930-36* (Gent, 1980 —henceforth *Sender 1930-36*—, and *Ramón J. Sender in memoriam. Antología crítica*, ed. José-Carlos Mainer (Zaragoza, 1983) —henceforth *Antología crítica*. «*Imán*» is reviewed by G. G. BROWN in *Modern Language Review*, 68 (1973), pp. 680-82. *El anarquismo* and *Sender 1930-36* are reviewed by me, in *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, respectively 57 (1981), pp. 150-51 and 59 (1982), p. 159.

⁹ This emerges from the *Antología crítica* and in particular from Mainer's introductory 'Resituación de Ramón J. Sender', pp. 7-23.

¹⁰ In *Sender 1930-36* and *El anarquismo* respectively.

¹¹ The extensive range of American works is not represented. For a useful general appreciation of them see MANUEL ANDÚJAR's «Ramón J. Sender y el nuevo mundo», in *Antología crítica*, pp. 189-240.

¹² Buenos Aires, 1947. All my references will be to the later, slightly modified version, Madrid, 1969. The very first version was entitled *Proverbio de la muerte* (México, 1939).

¹³ Particularly interesting are those by SHERMANN EOFF —in *The Modern Spanish Novel* (London, 1962), pp. 213-54—, KING, in *Sender*, pp. 81-106, and MANUEL BÉJAR's, «Las adiciones a *Proverbio de la muerte* de Sender», in *Antología crítica*, pp. 385-97.

splendid novels, *El lugar del hombre*¹⁴ and *El rey y la reina*.¹⁵ *Antología crítica* contains a number of noteworthy articles¹⁶ on them.

The particular attraction of *El verdugo* —my first choice— arose from its re-use of materials from three pre-Civil War works. It could provide insight into Sender's ideas over some twenty years together with clues as to his techniques of composition. To avoid any duplication of Peñuelas's study¹⁷ which —in any case— did not investigate these literary debts, I decided to concentrate on the quite distinctive English version¹⁸ which for many years Sender had regarded as definitive and is in many respects more interesting.

*Las criaturas saturnianas*¹⁹ was also chosen, to show that Sender's historical novels were not so different from others within the post-Civil War period. An added interest was the opportunity of demonstrating the strength or otherwise²⁰ of Sender's powers in his late sixties. Since parts of *Las criaturas* derived from *Emen hetan*²¹, it seemed appropriate to look at that too, even though it is of lesser merit. Carrasquer's refutation²² of earlier assertions²³ of the atypicality of *Emen hetan* clearly had not convinced all critics²⁴ so further arguments as to its significance for *Las criaturas* seemed desirable. I was keen too to suggest important qualifications to Carrasquer's presentation of the main character in *Las criaturas* and what I saw as his neglect of crucial psychological dimensions in Sender.

Crónica del alba,²⁵ the most extensive and well-known²⁶ of Sender's works, was an inevitable and important choice for analysis. Surprisingly,

¹⁴ México, 1939. My references are to the later edition, Barcelona, 1968.

¹⁵ Buenos Aires, 1949.

¹⁶ For example, CHARLES KING, «El papel de Sabino en *El lugar de un hombre* de Sender», pp. 351-55, and MARYSE BERTRAND DE MUÑOZ, «Los símbolos en *El rey y la reina* de Ramón J. Sender», pp. 375-84.

¹⁷ *La obra*, pp. 195-214.

¹⁸ *The Affable Hangman* (London, 1954) and (London, 1963). My references are to the latter.

¹⁹ Barcelona, 1968 —henceforth *Las criaturas*.

²⁰ BOTH MAINER and EDUARDO GODOY GALLARDO, in *Antología crítica*, pp. 7-23, and pp. 425-35, respectively «Resituación de Ramón J. Sender» and «Problemática y sentido de *Réquiem por un campesino español*— suggest there are *altibajos* in Sender, and the latter critic mentions *Las criaturas* specifically in that context.

²¹ México, 1958.

²² In «*Imán*».

²³ See CHARLES F. OLSTAD, «The novels of Ramón Sender: Moral concepts in development» (unpublished Ph. D., University of Wisconsin, 1960) in the chapter entitled «Random Probings», and JOSEFA RIVAS, *El escritor y su senda* (México, 1967), p. 173.

²⁴ See JEAN PIERRE RESSOT, «Más allá del bien y del mal: *Las criaturas saturnianas*, de Ramón J. Sender», in *Antología crítica*, pp. 465-72.

²⁵ (Barcelona, 1965-66) —hereafter *Crónica*. All my references are to the later three-volume edition, Madrid, 1971.

²⁶ It has been made into two films, *Valentina* and *1919, Crónica del alba*, directed by Antonio Betancor.