

'Entre pureza y revolución':
Essays in Honor of
JUAN CANO BALLESTA

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Introduction

CANDELAS GALA and ANNE E. HARDCASTLE

“**H**E AQUÍ LOS RESULTADOS de mi investigación sobre un período de la literatura española que es indudablemente el más rico y brillante de los tres últimos siglos” (259). With these lines Juan Cano Ballesta closes his seminal book *La poesía española entre pureza y revolución (1930-1936)* (1972). Students who had the fortune to sign up for Cano Ballesta’s course on twentieth-century Spanish poetry learned about this period from the pages of this book—one of several foundational studies of Spanish poetry and culture written by Cano Ballesta. Although his first and most prolific scholarly attention has centered on the poetry of the first several decades of the twentieth century, throughout his career the topics of his books have marched forward in time to cover the breadth of the past century and into the current one: the period of 1890-1940 in *Literatura y tecnología. Las letras españolas ante la revolución industrial* (editions in 1981, 1999); 1920-1936 in *La poesía española entre pureza y revolución* (editions in 1972, 1996); 1933-1942 in *La poesía de Miguel Hernández* (editions in 1962, 1978); 1936-1976 in *Las estrategias de la imaginación (Utopías literarias y retórica política bajo el franquismo)*; 1980-2000 in *Poesía española reciente 1980-2000*; 1970-2005 in *Nuevas voces y viejas escuelas en la poesía española (1975-2005)*. Taken as a whole, the work of Cano Ballesta presents an extensive, insightful panorama of more than a century’s poetic development in Spain.

Of particular interest has been the productive tension between two fundamental artistic concepts, *pureza* and *revolución*, whose respective ebb and flow throughout the century have been chronicled at least implicitly in much of Cano Ballesta’s work. *Pureza* (pure poetry, art-for-art’s sake) calls the poet to a labor of aesthetic rigor, of language as the focus of artistic exploration and discovery. *Revolución* (socially committed poetry), on the other hand, calls the poet to put his/her pen into the

service of social and political struggles of his/her day, that is, poetry for ideological causes. Although it is easy to present *pureza* and *revolución* as opposite poles, the reality of the dichotomy—as Cano Ballesta has himself expressed—is one of interaction and commingling. The author's first book is dedicated to the study of Miguel Hernández, a poet whose work occupies a transitional space between the *pureza*-leaning poets preceding the Spanish Civil War (1936-39) and the *revolución*-minded ones following it. Through Miguel Hernández, Cano Ballesta perhaps received an early and foundational education in the interaction of these two poetic vocations. Cano Ballesta's books repeatedly explore the reflection of social concerns in pure poetic language and the use of seemingly distant aesthetic imagery for the purpose of socio-political engagement. His scholarly studies often point out the deep inter-penetration of aesthetic styles with shifts in cultural and social issues. A poet's society and surroundings inevitably seep into his/her style and poetic production no matter the aesthetic abstraction. This exchange between *pureza* and *revolución* is certainly the case with Miguel Hernández. Cano Ballesta has gone on to show this to be strikingly so also in the imagery of many Civil War poets, both on the right and the left; and again, as he has argued for the *novísimos* of the 1960s and 1970s, aesthetic abstraction, that is, escape from Spanish political oppression, is a significant part of a subtle message of resistance. Across the breadth of his work, Cano Ballesta's extensive studies of Spanish poetry have promoted the dynamic interaction of *pureza* and *revolución* as a simple but profound way to approach twentieth-century art that gives weight and respect to both the artistic and social elements of poetic production.

While Cano Ballesta's work has focused almost exclusively on poetry, and on Spanish poetry in particular, the tension between *pureza* and *revolución* is one that moves beyond national and genre boundaries. The same shift occurs in much of the Western world from a modernist aesthetic at the beginning of the twentieth century to a more committed or politically engaged position following the social and political upheavals between 1920-1945. Artists and writers in general, not just in poetry, struggle with redefining the role of literature and art in societies experiencing both the rapid aesthetic transformations and intense social conflicts of the century. Arguably one of Cano Ballesta's most significant scholarly contributions has been the broad study of this creative and ongoing interaction between *pureza* and *revolución* as a vibrant ten-

sion underpinning the evolution of numerous literary movements even to current day. The scholars of this collection demonstrate how fruitfully Cano's orienting dichotomy may serve to explore not only poetry, but also prose fiction, song lyrics, and plastic arts from both Spain and Latin America.



With at least six scholarly books, nine edited volumes, and some 97 articles published to date, Cano Ballesta is a truly productive as well as influential scholar. A leading expert on Miguel Hernández, Cano Ballesta has also repeatedly demonstrated his keen understanding of Spanish poetry based on meticulous textual research, establishing critical frameworks that continue to be used by scholars and students. Among his many contributions the idea of *pureza* and *revolución* leads the present volume for its important perspective on poetic creation and impact on critical understanding of the vibrant relationship between aesthetic and social callings. A brief overview of several of Cano Ballesta's major works attests to the varied manifestations of this idea in his studies as well as the diverse themes he has examined throughout his career.

Cano Ballesta's book *La poesía de Miguel Hernández* (1962) argues for the singular place of Hernández in Spanish poetry. Well-versed in but also in many respects resistant to the dominant pure poetic trends of his day, Hernández forges the beginnings of a new socially committed poetic movement to be taken up by the poets of the post-war generation and beyond. Cano Ballesta's study examines the complete poetic production of Hernández emphasizing the interconnections between biography, form, imagery, and poetic vision and voice. He shows how Hernández's poetry remains unique, intensely intimate and simultaneously universal in his lyrical journey of human passion and tragedy. A sometimes contradictory voice in his mimetic adoption of varied poetic styles (*gongorino*, *garcilasiano*, *nerudiano*, *alexandrino*, etc.), Hernández's own voice arrives late and is cut short by his untimely death. Nevertheless, Cano Ballesta concludes, the apparent paradox of Hernández's poetry is at the heart of its strength: from the most intimate exploration of the self, Hernández also speaks to the turbulent reality of his time and to timeless human emotions. In short, Cano Ballesta demonstrates how