

## NOTA BIBLIOGRÁFICA

SÁNCHEZ, Manuel Antonio Péres. *De catro a catro: a sailor-poet's vision of the sea.*

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The vernacular literature of Galicia, reborn in the last half of the XIXth Century after a long period of decline, has seen since then the emergence of a relatively small but distinguished number of writers of considerable talent and achievement. In the decade of the 1920's the figure of the young writer Manuel Antonio dominates the panorama of Galician poetry.

Born to a humble family in the Galician sea village of rianxo in July of 1900, Manuel Antonio Pérez Sánchez moved to Santiago de Compostela in 1915 and a year later became associated with the movement to defend the culture and language of Galicia. He remained faithful to the allegiance he made during his adolescent years to the Galician language. He published, always in *Galego*, several poems in regional magazines before his book of poems *De catro a catro* appeared in 1928. This book has the subtitle: "Follas d'un diario d'abordo" and it is a collection of poems written while the poet worked as an Assistant to a merchant marine captain on the pilot's boat Constantino Candeira during the years 1926 and 1927.

*De catro a catro* is the only book of poems published during the short life of Manuel Antonio. In January of 1930, two months after his last trip as a merchant marine, Manuel Antonio died, a victim of tuberculosis, in the small Galician village of Asados.

In 1972, more than forty years after his death, Galaxia, the largest publisher in **Galego**, published his other books of poems. Several prose writings were subsequently published by Galaxia.

Notwithstanding the existence of these other books of poems by Manuel Antonio, the fact remains that the young writer had assured for himself a permanent place in Galician literature on the strength of a single booi: **De catro a catro**.

Great emphasis has been placed on the artistic skill demonstrated by the imagery of **De catro a catro** and its affiliation with the avant-garde literary movements of the 1920's. In evaluating the work of Manuel Antonio, Ricardo Carballo Calero said: "Creacionista por sus procedimientos, pero creacionista lleno de personalidad, una personalidad que rebasa el creacionismo, la personalidad más fuerte de todo el creacionismo".<sup>1</sup> Manuel Antonio himself admitted to the presence in his work of several of the artistic movements of the 1920's: "Ten, ademáis o seu arte resonancias futuristas, creacionistas, dadaístas o non sei qué máis, todas elas anárquicamente escolmadas o autocráticamente peneiradas".<sup>2</sup>

María do Carme García states that the Chilean poet Huidobro, contemporary to Manuel Antonio and founder of **creacionismo** has the greatest influence on the Galician poet:

E o creacionismo de Huidobro o que máis influencia deixou en Manuel Antonio, astra tal punto, que moitas das imaxes do noso poeta pertencen á mesma xoiería imaxinista do poeta chileno. As estrelas, as lúas, as noites, os faros, os horizontes, as ondas, as pipas, os mariñeiros, o mar, as gavotas, os ventos e os bares están presentes de cotío en ambos poetas. Incluso, si fixéramos algunhas comparacións antre as súas obras, poderíamos achar versos moi semellantes antre os dous polas imaxes e verbas empregadas.<sup>3</sup>

Contrary to the former statement, not many of the images of the two poets that are compared offer the close resemblance mentioned by María do Carme García. It is understandable that

elements of the sea should be present in the two poets because the subject matter in **Poemas Árticos** by Huidobro and **De catro a catro** by Manuel Antonio is the same. But there are also fundamental differences, as Carballo Calero is quick to point out:

Endebén, un creacionismo puro, gratuito, no que o poeta sexa creado como a natureza crea unha arbre, de xeito que sexa imaxe visionaria e non imitación da realidade empírica ou transposición dos datos da realidade ouxetiva; un creacionismo deste tipo, que teóricamente sustenta Huidobro, non chega a darse en Manuel Antonio, en quen cáxegue sempre a imaxe é logaritmo dunha experiencia, ou en quen, polo menos, a carón de combinacións autónomas de imaxes que manipulan elementos dun determinado campo ontolóxico, son frecuentes os tropos motivados, por moi lonxe que se percure o nome que designe o ouxeto.

De por parte, Manuel Antonio non participa da creencia segundo a cal a poesía é un xogo de sorpresas no que o humor ceiba os foguetes do lirismo.<sup>4</sup>

Outeiro Espasandín understood the originality of the Galician poet, in an article written shortly after the publication of Manuel Antonio's book: "**De catro a catro**, é antes de nada, a revelación d'un mar non visto aínda por ninguén".<sup>5</sup>

In fact, **De catro a catro** presents us with a more complex vision than that projected by Huidobro or by other poets of the sea and this study strives to ascertain that vision more clearly.

The critic María do Carme García states that "... se é certo que a sua poesía ten resonancias creacionistas, tamén o é que o sentido de xogo e humor que esta tendencia encerra, non aparece no noso poeta...".<sup>6</sup>

Some of the images presented in **De catro a catro** contradict the former statement that the poetry lacks a playful sense of humor. In one of the nineteen poems collected in the book,

"S.O.S.", readers are given a playful vision of two stars: A estrela d'os cabarets — c'un cigarro nos beizos — pide lume aos catro puntos cardinaes. Pol-a Galaxia chea de seixos — un astro vello vai c o seu farol".<sup>7</sup> In another poem, "O cartafol d'o vento", the poet gives us a mockingly humorous image of the Sun: "C'a boca aberta — cai-lle a baba — está mirándonos o babilón d'o Sol." (p.165)

But this humorous touch is only one aspect in the complex vision of Manuel Antonio. Critics have pointed out the "authenticity" of Manuel Antonio in *De catro a catro* without analyzing the elements that support it. Manuel Antonio wrote this book while working aboard a ship and this circumstance should not be overlooked. In that regard the title is, in itself, revealing. *De catro a catro*, from four p.m. to four a.m. is, in fact, the shift worked by Manuel Antonio on the journeys he undertook during the years 1926 and 1927.

What Manuel Antonio does better than Huidobro or other poets who have sung the sea, is to present that element of nature and those related to sealife with the perspective and sensitivity of a sailor. The series of metaphors with which Manuel Antonio describes a long journey at sea is a striking example of his descriptive powers. He succeeds in conveying as an authentically lived experience the almost unreal circumstances under which the sailors live for days on end. His avant-garde images capture masterfully the essence of those moments. The sense of the passage of time appears to be lost: "Troqueles reiterados — o reloxe e o Sol — alcunaron monedas efímeras — que repetían todas — a mesma cara e a mesma cruz." (p. 149) A feeling of unreality and immobility overwhelms the travellers in the following metaphor, which Domingo García Sabell considers a miracle of Galician contemporary poetry:<sup>8</sup> "N'a fasquía d'os barcos anónimos — postos a flote pol-a madrugada — estraviados no roteiro d'o serán — persisteron sempre — a mesma foula e o mesmo ronsel." (p. 149)

Finally, the apparent loss of direction induced by the monotonous rhythm of navigation is described with powerful images: "C'as nosas mans suicidas — espallaremos n'o carrousel d'os ventos — os catro puntos cardinaes. Mentras — o timoel — arrumará proa a Ningures." (p. 150)

The suggestiveness of Manuel Antonio's poetry is enhanced by the selective use of verbal tenses that complement his rich array of metaphors. The range of the Galician poet's imagination is evident in one of the most moving poems of *De catro a catro*: "Sós". The feelings of the sailors travelling the immense length of the ocean is ably and artistically represented here. The poem begins with two lines in which the skilful use of the Past Perfect Progressive serves to describe the emotion invading the souls of the sailors upon the gradual arrival of dusk: "Fomos ficando sós — o Mar, o barco e mais nos: — Roubaron-nos o Sol: — O paquebote esmaltado — que cosía con liñas de fume — áxiles cadros sin marco." (p. 153)

The use of the verb *roubar* conveys the idea of the helplessness and insignificance of men in surroundings like the boundless ocean: "Roubaron-nos o vento: — Aquel veleiro que se evadeu — pol-a corda floxa d'o horizonte." (p. 153) The stillness of the sea is such that it brings forth the sensation of death: the boat thus becomes a floating coffin. (p. 154) This feeling of awe leads to a forced introspection in which the sailor is left alone with his thoughts. The last line of "Sós", with its simple rearrangement of the elements appearing in the first stanza of the poem, are indeed a fitting end to one of the most impressive and best achieved poems written about the sea in any language: "Fume de pipa. Saudade — Noite Silenzo Frío — E ficamos nós sós — Sin o Mar e sin o barco — nós." (p. 154)

One of the original aspects of Manuel Antonio's technique in *De catro a catro* is the use of the Future Indicative. The Future is sometimes used with a kind of *creacionista* or fantastic touch. The sailor is one with the ship and participates in its delight in sailing and discovering: "Inventaremos frustradas descobertas — a barlovento d'os horizontes — pra acelerar os abolidos corazóns — d'os nosos veleiros defraudados." (p. 145) Sailor and boat are viewed as collectors of foam and wind: "Encadearmos adeuses d'escuma — pra todas as prayas perdidas". "Xuntaremos quadernos en branco — d'a novela errante d'o vento. Pescaremos na rede d'os atlas — ronseles de Simbad." (p. 146)

Sailor and boat are like riders of the wild horses of the storm. The excitement is an inebriating diversion from anguish:

"E cazaremol-a vela — sobre o torso rebelde d'as tormentas — pra trincar a escota d'unha ilusión." (p.146) Birds' wings offer sailors the opportunity for fantastic games: "Xuntaremos páxaros sin xeografía — pra xogar c'as distancias — d'as suas áas amplexadoras." (p.151)

The Future tense is also used to envision typical and repeated activities or occurrences related to the life of the sailors. In "Recalada", Manuel Antonio gives us in one stanza the picture of sailors bar-hopping between ports. The image captures the essence of the activity by ignoring the time elapsed between two identical actions: "O vaso desbicado n'outro porto — remataremol-o eiquí n'o mesmo bar — cabo do mariñeiro desconecido — que nos repite a mesma ubicua sorriso loira." (p.159) The past tenses (Preterite and Imperfect) used alongside the Future give us the feeling of continuity and fatal recurrence: the actions supersede the value of instants and become, thus, obligated rituals in a way of life: "Mañán despertaremos — n-a ausenza d'esta xornada. Esquivou-se unha folla — d'o diario efusivo. Eramol-os esputadores — n'a prestidixitación — d'unha hora artificial." (p.160)

In another poem, "Aogado", Manuel Antonio combines three tenses to present a drowned seafarer. To the effect of visual enactment produced by the use of the Future and the Imperfect (the action seems to be happening in front of our eyes), the use of the Present Indicative in the final stanza adds that of a funeral tribute by the ship that has lost its companion:

Xa che levarán os ollos  
relingadores de lonxanías  
e pescadores de profundidad.

...

O vento aínda escovaba  
c'as poutas d'escuma  
n-a xerfa  
mais cadaleitos.

...

A noiva goleta  
enloitada de branco

que cose roitas esquencidas  
acena n-o vento as suas velas  
como ese pano d'as despedidas. (pp. 155-6)

Manuel Antonio, analyzing his own poetical work, said: "A sua única páxina romántica é o suicidio do seu sentimentalismo."<sup>9</sup> In spite of the last statement, what sets the poems of Manuel Antonio in **De catro a catro** apart from other typical **creacionista** poems is the intimate treatment of the elements and situations presented by the Galician poet. Many of the images of **De catro a catro** amount not only to an ingenious combination of words and ideas but to an attempt to reveal in a meaningful light the essence of objects, persons and situations.

Two of the images of "Navy Bar" convey this uncanny quality. The last glass drunk by the sailors in the bar is described as "cheo de despedidas" and the walk towards the ship is presented in the following manner: "Pol-as ruas dispersas — íbamo-nos fechando — cada un dentro d'a súa alta mar." (p. 162) The impact of alcohol is superbly described in the last metaphor: it widens and scatters the streets walked by the sailors. The effect of inebriation is, in fact, as uplifting and discomforting as the feeling of a high tide enclosed within oneself.

Many other images of **De catro a catro** convey a vision of reality unlikely to be found in anyone who had not lived the daily life of a sailor. Some of these images stem from a careful initial perception by the objective senses of a sailor. The sails of a sailboat are battered by "unha rafega de trasmigracións." (p. 148) The wind lost the pages of its notebook. They are perhaps "... esas que os chubascos — mecanógrafos — tecolean n-o manual d'os mastros?" (p. 165) The faint light of the Sun above the cruising boat is "... un paxaro triste — que se pousaba n-o penol" (p. 172) The sea of the lost sailors is a "Náufrago d'o neboeiro — que desviou o rumbo — d'os puntos cardinaes." The feeling of disorientation after the fog is skilfully conveyed in this image: "Hoxe ninguén da c'a relinga — pra aferrar os panos d'o horizonte." (p. 172)

Other images originate from a deep understanding of the psychology of sailors. A metaphor in the poem "Recalada" pre-



sents with simple power the romantic impulse hidden behind the most apparently base instincts of the rude travellers of the sea: "N-os burdeles xa saben — que a nosa moeda — ten o anverso de ouro — e o reverso sentimental." (pp. 159-60)

The personification of objects and elements that form part of the life and work of the sailors is another technique used by Manuel Antonio that contributes to give them an endearing quality. The old schooner has distant eyes decorated by jovial faces exchanged by the old sailors in opposing climates. It carries on its rudder a thrust of tense arms that twisted the ample horizons of the sea. (p.147) The tides of the poet's heart ascend and descend within the numberless heart of the old *fragata*. (p.148) While the wind laughs mischievously below his mast, the white pilot's boat tells the sailors the stories of the pilot, the mastman and the young boy: "O barco foi percorrendo — as cicatrices sentimentaes — que lle deixaron vellos navegantes." (p.163) One given day, as with sad premonition, the pilot's boat sets sail speechless, never to return to port. (pp.163-4)

The unknown star which was never trapped in celestial maps is the drowned sailors' widow: "Viuva reiterada de todol-os vinte anos — que os mariñeiros repiten — cada volta que afogan." p. 168) The sleepy head of the tide bounces back and forth while reading the book of the sails: "Mentras sonea a mareta — vai folleando n-o libro d'as velas." (p.177)

Another device used by Manuel Antonio to bring things closer to the reader is the dialog that the poet establishes with his subjects. When describing the old schooner (pp.147-8), the drowned sailor (pp.155-6) or the unknown star (pp.168-9), the poet addresses them with the familiar forms of the second person singular subject pronoun. The coldness and aloofness generally felt in avant-garde poetry is here replaced with a warm feeling of familiarity.

*De catro a catro* stands out in comparison with other poems about the sea because of its predominant use of the first person plural forms. While, for example the "I" pervades and dominates in Huidobro's *Poemas árticos*, in Manuel Antonio's *De catro a catro* the "we" is overwhelmingly present. The works and actions of the sailors are almost always described with forms of



"we": halaremos (145), xuntaremos (146), temos (149), armaremos (151), sabemos (151) fomo-nos (157), atoparemos (159), fumaremos (159), presentámos (175), etc. The relationship with things or the effect of actions on persons are identified with adjectives or pronouns of the first person plural: Nosos veleiros (145), nos desfollou (150, noso corazón (152), Roubaron-nos (152), As nosas soedades (153), agarda-nos (157), a nosa moeda (159), encheron-nos (161), mirándonos (165), as nosas velas (173).

While the "I" excludes, the "we" invites to share experiences. It is in part because of the use of the forms of "we" that *De catro a catro* has that appealing air of intimacy, that feeling of collective experience and enjoyment not found in other books of poems about the sea.

The "I" of the poet seldom appears but it is used throughout the last poem of *De catro a catro*: "Adeus". This poem closes artfully the book. The sailor-poet is inland, walking the streets of his native village. He sees a sailboat leaving the port without him. His "I" is now projected symbolically unto the departing sailors. It is an encompassing and fraternal "I" that speaks to us in the last lines of *De catro a catro*: "... alguém que chora dentro de mim — por aquel outro eu — que se vai n-o veleiro — pra sempre — comá un morto — c'o peso eterno de todol-os adeuses." (p. 179)

These last lines are an appropriate end for the book of a poet who was to leave this world such a short time after he wrote this poetry. Manuel Antonio died in 1930 at the age of 29. But his sensitive spirit, his original vision of the sea, his gracefulness and artistry, will forever live with the moon and the stars, the sailboats and the sailors, the waves and the ocean of his remarkable book *De catro a catro*.

## NOTES

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1. Ricardo Carballo Calero, *La poesía gallega del siglo veinte*. (Madrid, 1955), p.17.
2. Manuel Antonio. "Prólogo dun libro de poemas que ninguén escribén", in: F.

Fernández del Riego. *Escolma de poesía galega*. IV (Galaxia, Vigo, 1955), p.90.

3. María do Carme García Rodríguez. "Sobre a poética de Manuel Antonio", in: *Homenaxe a Manuel Antonio*. Universidade de Santiago de Compostela (Santiago de Compostela, 1979), p. 26.
  4. Ricardo Carballo Calero. "Manuel Antonio", in: *Homenaxe*, p.13.
  5. Outeiro Espansandín, "De catro a catro", *Nós*, LVIII (October of 1928), in: Manuel Antonio I, *Poesías*, (Galaxia, Vigo, 1972), p. 35.
  6. María do Carme Rodríguez, *Homenaxe*, p. 28.
  7. Manoel Antonio, "De catro a catro", in: I, *Poesías*, (Galaxia, Vigo, 1972), p. 175.
- Subsequent quotes refer to this edition and will be identified in the text.
8. Domingo García Sabell, "Manoel Antonio, o aparecido", in: I, *Poesías*, p.59.
  9. Manuel Antonio, "Prólogo", in: F. Fernández del Riego, p.91.