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D. L. Shaw sobre John Kinsella: *Lo trágico y su consuelo: Estudio de la obra de Martín Adán*

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John Kinsella, *Lo trágico y su consuelo: estudio de la obra de Martín Adán*. Lima: Mosca Azul Editores, 1989, 212 páginas.

Martín Adán (Rafael de la Fuente y Benavides, 1908-1985) occupies a significant place not only in Peruvian poetry, where he stands second only to Vallejo, but also in the general pattern of development of Spanish American poetry in the modern period. In 1935, four years before Adán brought out his first collection of poems, *La rosa de la espinela*, Neruda published in *Caballero verde para la poesía* his famous manifesto "Sobre una poesía sin pureza," advocating a poetry which would reflect *La confusa impureza de los seres humanos* and be *penetrado por el sudor y el humo, oliente a orina y a azucena salpicada por las diversas profesiones que se ejercen dentro y fuera de la ley*. Where the tendency to which that manifesto belonged was to lead we all know. In Spain, after the war, the Generation of 1950 enthusiastically produced "social" poetry. In Spanish America, where pressure from the Left was if anything stronger, it produced a host of "committed" poets whose outlook was eventually formulated in extreme terms in Nicolás Guillén's "Informe Central" in 1978 in which he fustigated *puros juegos de imaginación, verbalismos intrascendentes, ociosas policromías, entretenidos crucigramas, oscuridades deliberadas* and *el tratamiento amoroso de realidades o de temas que corresponden precisamente y son gratas a los imperialistas*. In Spain, however, as a recent book by Santiago Daydi-Tolson on him reminds us, Valente broke with the mainstream by postulating a conception of

poetry which was in a sense cognitive as well as expressive. Similarly in Spanish America, Kinsella cogently points out in his excellent analysis, for Adán *la poesía es la única forma de descubrir la verdadera esencia de la realidad* (p. 28).

Adán's poetry was not a reaction against Neruda's idea of radically "impure" poetry; it was a parallel development with roots in the longstanding tradition of seeing poetry as a means of exploring the eternal problem of the human condition. The three main parts of Kinsella's book: the first on Adán's views on poetry and the situation of the poet, the second on his tragic vision of life, and the third on his search for transcendence, analyze this exploration, concluding with a pithy chapter on Adán's poetic evolution. This really has to be seen in relation to *modernismo*. Only recently has a new consensus begun to emerge in which both critics of an older generation like Monguió and younger figures like Jade increasingly agree in the recognition that *modernismo* is best understood as a movement centering on a crisis of values. Impure, committed poetry necessarily tends to postulate a recovery of confidence in rather simplified value-judgements. Hence the true inheritors of Darío's belief that the poet is essentially a visionary, with special insight into the really real, are poets like Adán who continue to hold that poetry can penetrate the arcane. Kinsella's book superbly relates Adán's poetry to this quest, showing, however, that in the end it fails *porque la esencia de la realidad no se puede alcanzar verdaderamente, y, si se vislumbra, las palabras no la pueden concretar*. His careful analysis of "Senza tempo. Affrettando ad libitum" at the end of his second chapter is a key-section, leading to his dissection of the central ambiguity of Adán's work, the *pasmo-despasmo*, the alternation of anguish and acceptance of what Adán's central symbol, the rose, suggests *algo último, una realidad final que trasciend[e] a la terrestre, un grito por la presencia del Absoluto que dará significado y sentido a su existencia* (p. 135).

The various levels of significance associated with the rose symbol in Adán form the subject of the seventh chapter and in many ways the book's core. Systematically throughout his study Kinsella works outwards from individual poems, examining both themes and the verbal texture which figures them forth. This approach pays splendid dividends in his analysis of the sonnet-sequence "Travesía de extramares" (1950) in which the intrinsic ambiguity of the rose symbol reaches its full development. Here Kinsella crowns his argument, showing that Adán never finally resolved this ambiguity or with it his own existential malaise. We should be grateful for this, for it is what fuelled the poet's output. Kinsella's book unhappily lacks both an index and a bibliography other than the one scattered through the footnotes. This is a pity, but it does not prevent this from being the

best study of all of Adán's work to date and a useful contribution to our understanding of post-*modernismo* in general.

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