Miguel Hernández and the Aesthetics of the Double

F. Komla Aggor
Texas Christian University

Recibido: 6 de agosto de 2015 *Aceptado: 5 de octubre de 2015*

To Agustín Sánchez Vidal

Abstract: An important dimension of Miguel Hernández's poetry is his aesthetic of the double. From his earliest poetry to his final verses, this aesthetic is manifested in a variety of ways, creating a coherent energy through his work. On one level, the double is expressed by means of ambivalent representations of realities, with no drive toward resolution. On another level, opposites and contradictory units are merged in an effort to forge new realities altogether. In its propensity toward ambiguity and indeterminacy, Hernández's aesthetic helped set the stage for what would become the philosophical cornerstone of a postmodernist literary culture in Spain.

Key words: the double; postmodernism.

Resumen: Un aspecto importante de la poesía de Miguel Hernández es su estética de la dualidad. Desde su poesía inaugural hasta sus últimos versos, esta estética se manifiesta de varias formas, creando una energía coherente a través de su obra. En un plano, la dualidad se expresa mediante representaciones ambivalentes de ciertas realidades, sin deseo por la resolución. Desde otra perspectiva, las entidades opuestas o contradictorias se mezclan en un esfuerzo poético por forjar nuevas realidades. En su afán por la ambigüedad y la interpretación abierta, la estética de Hernández ayudó a construir la base para lo que luego sería el pilar filosófico de una cultura literaria posmodernista en España.

Palabras clave: dualidad; posmodernismo.

The Genesis of an Aesthetic

A core principle underlying the ideological and aesthetic integrity of Miguel Hernández's poetry is its constant drive against fixity and closure. Within verses and between bodies of poetry, dualist representations reign supreme, as opposites cohabit freely as independent or unified entities. The genesis of this dualist principle can be traced largely to three biographical factors. An environmental factor has to do with Orihuela's ambivalent reality as Hernández's primary source of artistic inspiration, that is, the tension between the freedom radiated by his native town's open, attractive landscape and the parochial, repressive nature of its Catholic-abiding citizenry.[1] A personal factor relates to the conflict between Hernández's own nature as a secular, earthly-oriented individual and the urgency he felt, during the early stages of his literary career, to embrace, even if dubiously, the neo-Catholic ideology propagated by his friend and mentor Ramón Sijé. These two factors complement a third, namely, an avid self-instruction in literary traditions —particularly the Baroque— that was facilitated by Orihuela's archbishop Luis Almarcha, who availed the poet of his private library for his unlimited use.

In referring to the Baroque, I have in mind two of its conceptual pillars-contrast and antithesis-as particularly affirmed by Guillermo Díaz-Paja and Eugenio D'Ors. In comparing the Baroque with Renaissance thought, Díaz-Plaja isolates the combination of contrasts as constituting what he describes as "el *leitmotiv* persistente de todo lo barroco" (64). D'Ors is even more categorical, for he labels as Baroque all style based on antithesis: "Siempre que encontramos reunidas en un solo gesto varias intenciones contradictorias, el resultado estilístico pertenece a la categoría del Barroco" (36). Exaggerated as these affirmations might seem, they serve as a reliable guide in comprehending the theoretical and aesthetic interstices of Miguel Hernández's poetry, which is steeped in allegorical diction. Still, it needs to be stressed that Hernández's poetry rises beyond the neo-Baroque, as it fashions a brand of poetic aesthetic in which are dovetailed the classical (grounded in Luis de Góngora, Francisco de Quevedo, and Saint John of the Cross) and the modern (inspired by such writers as Vicente Aleixandre, Pablo Neruda, Federico García Lorca, and Rafael Alberti). This eclectic brand of aesthetic, which, as we shall see, borders on the postmodernist, is

[1] In a letter he wrote in May to Josefina, this is what Hernández said: "Yo necesito tu persona y con tu persona, la vida sencilla de Orihuela, no la de sus vecinos, sino la de sus tierras y sus montes" (1988, 85).

shaped by a distinct poetic imagination and linguistic authority that are always inspired by, and drawn on, the Orihuela milieu.

My study builds on a 1978 article by Luce López Baralt in which she focuses on stylistic variation and coherence to show Hernández as a poet of contrasts (see "Unidad y coherencia en la poesía múltiple de Miguel Hernández"). Consequently, my reference to stylistic differentiation among the various bodies of poetry will be selective, with a view to ensuring that the two studies serve effectively as complementary critical resources. In my analysis of the poems, I proceed along the core themes that run parallel to the complete trajectory of Hernández's poetry.

The Earliest Poetry and the Double

Nature —the Orihuela landscape and its elements— serves as foundation on which Miguel Hernádez's poetic kingdom is edified. It is the fountain from which flow the creative streams of images, symbols, metaphors, even language, and it represents the fertile soil on which his imaginative powers blossom.[2] The poet himself suggests as much in his brief treatise, entitled "Poética": "El limonero de mi huerto influye más en mi obra que todos los poetas juntos" (1986, 90). What is particularly significant is the erotic function associated with these natural elements and the key role they play in the poet's conceptualization of the double —flowers and plants (lilies, spikes, orange blossoms), fruits and fruit trees (melons, palm trees, figs and fig trees), insects (bees and beehives, wasps and their nests), reptiles (snakes and worms), birds (roosters and nightingales), nuts (especially almonds), etc.

To illustrate Hernández's aesthetic in this initial poetic phase —Poemas Sueltos I, *Perito en lunas* (1934), and Poemas Sueltos II— let us concentrate on his obsessive representation of the Virgin Mary, an icon of the Catholic faith. In a poem entitled "Plegaria" (PSI, OC 192), Mary is held high on the pedestal of holiness, but the romantic diction and tone of the poetic subject's long prayer seems to undermine his religious devotion, for, gradually, he emerges as a passionate individual trapped in lust for the Mother of God.[3] In this spirit of ambivalence, Mary is

[2] No one makes the point most forcefully about Hernández's artistic originality than Agustín Sánchez Vidal, who insists that, even during the poet's most mimetic phase, he always relied on his own voice, which was shaped by his environment (1992: 125).

[3] For clarity sake, I use the following abbreviations in reference to the poetic corpus cited in this study: PSI - Poemas Sueltos I; PSII - Poemas Sueltos II, etc; OC - *Obras completas*, 1992; RNC - *El rayo que no cesa*; VP - *Viento del pueblo*. E.g. "(PS1, OC 192)" refers to Poemas Sueltos I on page 192 of Hernández's 1992 Complete Works.

portrayed as the "Virgen Morena", as dark-skinned as the floors of her garden and as attractive as the heavens, and the song of praise to her is flavored with essences of orange blossoms and adorned with the silk of worms. In *Perito en lunas*, Holy Mary once again occupies the center stage, as a symbolic reflection of the poetic subject's inner sensibility. In octave XIII ("Gallo"), the rooster is described as an archangel charged with executing the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary, but instead of accomplishing his sacramental duty, it engages in a violent sexual act with what appears to be an unwilling hen. In another poem, octave XXX ("Retrete"), this time the Virgin is depicted as the focus of a piece of painting, with serpents and a glorious full moon lying at her feet. Note that, earlier, in octave XVI ("Serpiente"), and later, in "Culebra" (PSII 292-93), the serpent, against its biblical characterization as the source of sin, is glorified by the poetic subject and given free rein to propagate its sinful desire:

> Dame, aunque se horroricen los gitanos,
> veneno activo el más, de los manzanos (OC 259).

And if any doubt still remains about the poet's ambivalent presentation of the Mother of God, the following verses of "Balada de la juventud" should serve to shatter the uncertainty, for not only does the poet enable Mary speak directly for herself, as an icon of holiness and lust, but she reveals herself as an unfaithful lover with a *laissez-faire*, decadent spirit:

> Yo soy virgen casta que todos adoran…
> yo soy manjar rico que todos devoran;
> amante a quien todos suspiran y lloran
> cuando huye a otros brazos (OC 196).

Other instances of Hernández's non-conformist subversion of monolithic notions proliferate his earliest poetry: his presentation of orgy as a holy act ("Horizontes de mayo", OC 174), his metaphoric portrayal of angelic bees that take delight in sucking the entrails of figs (i.e. female genitalia) ("El adolescente", OC 315), his frequent play on neoplatonic love *vis-à-vis* genital sexuality, etc.

In effect, in this initial phase of Hernández's poetry, the poet, freed of guilt, strategically collapses, by means of an aesthetic of the double, socially-constructed ideological polarities. In the socio-historical context of a 1930s Orihuela, therefore, the subject's theological self-

identification as "Yo, dios y adán" ("Huerto-mío", OC 340) stands as a bold rhetorical negation of a conservative, religious mindset, which posits the divine against the human as irreconcilable opposites. For this poet, to be divine is to be human, and vice versa; no wall can separate the two entities. But will this audacious poetic stance be sustained? Yes and no; the poet's comfortable posture soon suffers a crisis, causing a rhetorical shift. The shift occurs in the next group of poems, Hernández's religious poetry, which Agustín Sanchez Vidal refers to as one of the most important in modern Spanish literature (71).

Spiritual Battle

The rhetorical shift is first noticed in a poem, "Primera lamentación – de la carne", which forms part of a section entitled "Miscelánea" within the Poemas Sueltos II group of poems. Still, it is in the poems published in Sijé's neo-Catholic journal, *El Gallo Crisis*, and in those classified under the corpus "Primitivo Silbo Vulnerado" where the spiritual battle reaches its apex. It is also in this range of poems that Hernández's neo-Baroque artistry comes to light most vividly. Note that it was Sijé —the force behind Hernández's push toward the Baroque— who, in a publication of *El Gallo Crisis*, declares: "Todo arte o ciencia de palpitación metafísica es arte barroco, *ciencia barroca*", which he defines as "[el] acercarse a Dios por la interpretación tenebrosa" by way of severe asceticism (*Gallo Crisis* 30-32). Sijé's words find support in Ana Suárez Miramón, who puts the matter more directly: "la complejidad barroca hay que buscarla en esa eterna contradicción manifiesta entre sensualismo y trascendentalismo" (12-13).

"Primera lamentación – de la carne", as the title suggests, registers an important ethical break from the past, for it echoes a re-assessment of the self, one that contradicts the poetic subject's previous extolment of the body as nature's gift. In this poem, written at the threshold of the spring season, the poetic subject finds himself caught in the maelstrom of desire, as he struggles to be unchained from the grip of carnal temptation:

> ¡Conflicto! de mi cuerpo enamorado,
> ¡lepanto! de mi sangre. . .
> Sólo puede haber paces y descansos
> donde no hay carne, ¡ay carne!
>
> Malaganas me ganan, con meneos
> y aumentos de pecados;

me corrijo intenciones y deseos
en vano, en vano, en vano...

¡Oh Muerte!, ¡oh inmortal almendro! cano:
mondo, pero florido,
sálvame de mi cuerpo y sus pecados,
mi tormento y mi alivio (OC 357).

The poem's technical facets —structure, style, word choice, sound— collectively support its ideological force, as they make vivid the paradoxical realities that the subject experiences. The more the subject feels threatened by his sinfulness and desires to escape his body, the more he feels attracted to it. This conflictive condition comes to the fore when, once again, he makes a recourse to the Virgin Mary. If in *Perito en lunas* Mary was portrayed with suggestive sexual emblems, in "A María Santísima" it is her genitality that becomes the poet's focus of attention, as graphic metaphoric references are made to the process of Christ's birth: the material virginity, the pregnancy, the labor process, and the delivery (OC 368-9).

In his struggle against carnal desire, the poetic subject laments the flight of winter and cold weather (symbols of purity) as he is frightened by the approach of spring and heat (erotic symbols). These weather forms, represented as a vacillating play on contrast, pervade the verses throughout this phase of Hernández's work. Consider just two examples:

Frío, fríos, refríos fríos quiero:
dolor, helor, temblor ¡ay! solicito:
temblar, cuerda templada por enero.
("Invierno - puro [Diciembre]", OC 350)

Vendrá otra vez —¡que voy!— la Primavera
a darnos un pecado en una rosa,
y al cabo de su sol seré yo cera.
("Invierno - puro [Enero]", OC 351)

The movement from the cold toward warmth produces a contradictory condition of fear and desire, which the poet calls "la llaga perfecta" ("El silbo de la llaga perfecta", OC 390). In the end, the dilemma ends in a confused state of victory for Desire, for when the subject's long campaign to drive out what he perceives as impurities ("malas ansias" and "intenciones turbias") chokes against the other end

of the polarity (his quest for freedom), he masochistically commands the impurities to stay put: "Que no se salga... ¡Cierra!" (OC 391).

This streak of tension is expressed in other ways throughout Hernández's religious poetry. For example, in contrast to the earlier depolarization of the relationship between God and humans —"Yo, dios y adán"— the poet now erects a gap between the two entities by associating God with Silence and humans with Words. In this poetic vision, Silence enables the revelation of Truth, for it requires only examples, as opposed to words, which cannot be trusted. In "Silencio - broncíneo", silence is referred to ironically as residing between two church bells, and, according to the poet, it is silent vibrations that echo the depth of noiselessness (OC 362). This intricate display of the double further expresses itself in "Silencio - amoroso", in which the poetic subject —reminiscent of St. John of the Cross' ambivalent approach in the Spiritual Canticle— abandons his quest for silence, opting for verbal expression, now that he is faced with a flesh-and-blood beloved:

> Lo que es peligroso
> en una pareja
> de amor, es callar,
> porque sin la lengua,
> discurre la carne,
> políglota terca.
> Silencio. ¿Sí o no?
> ¿Sí? ¿Ya?.... ¡Qué tristeza! (OC 363).

In the same vein, ambivalence characterizes the poet's representation of the Eucharistic wine in "Oda - al vino" (OC 403), in which the altar offering is sanctified and, at the same time, reconstructed as an earthly, hedonistic intoxicant embraced with delight by the poetic subject, who pledges to relish it with passion. Still, as Marie Chevallier cautions us, Miguel Hernández's mystical exercise needs to be considered as a "materialismo místico", an experience inspired more by terrestrial immortality than by transcendental spirituality (168).[4]

Beyond rhetoric, the scheme of contrapositions evident in Hernández's religious verses registers its strongest imprint through the poet's verbal dexterity, especially through his technique of *double entendre*. Consider, for instance, the following metaphoric verses, aimed at portraying the subject's exaltation of God through the use of oceanic imagery:

[4] For a comprehensive study of the erotic in Miguel Hernández, see Aggor (1994).

Elevando tus nadas hasta el bulto,
creando y descubriendo vas presencias,
y llevas las presentes a lo oculto.

Inexistencias paren existencias
se cela en lo secreto lo patente,
nacen, mueren, sigilos, evidencias...

Es la perla tu más bello defecto...

Tu belleza sin bridas es el vicio
de tu virtud...

Luchando en paz, en guerra no reposa
tu Paz, siempre temida y deseada,
más rica cuanto más tempestuosa...

por fin ángel marino, pez terreno ("Mar y dios", OC 442-44).

Further examples can be seen in phrases such as "fieles infieles" (OC 274); "somos, y no, cautivos" (OC 415); "te llevo dentro, y no, me llevo dentro" (OC 433); "Siendo, sin ser, te trasladas/ de tu reposo a tu lucha" (OC 302); "para partir estoy quedo" (OC 300); "del vacío en el vacío:/ forma del silencio mío/ que ausentemente presencio" (OC 314); "gobernador de pompas sin gobierno" (OC 321), etc. This complex stream of contradictory enunciations -doubling in speech, if you will- recalls what Joseph Bristow, in reference to Oscar Wilde, calls "wittiest phrases [that] turn conventional wisdom on its head" (6). Suffice a few examples from Wilde's *The Importance of Being Ernest*.

Algernon — . . . I love hearing my relations abused. It is the only thing that makes
me put up with them at all. (Part I)

Lady Bracknell — I dislike arguments of any kind. They are always vulgar, and
often convincing. (Part III)

Gwendolen - "This suspense is terrible. I hope it will last (Part III).

Such witty imagination, characteristic of the works of many a writer —e.g. Shakespeare, Ramón Gómez de la Serna, Francisco Nieva— finds its equally strong linguistic expression in Miguel Hernández. It is an aesthetic that, from the late 1950s onward, came to define certain artistic works as postmodernist. Dualist representations, synchronic affirmation and negation of terms, accumulation and accommodation

of compatible and antithetical realities, conventional meanings that give way to polysemous interpretations; these features of Hernández's poetry, some of which hack back to the classical past, certainly look forward to the future, one in which a postmodernist artistic culture now takes hold. I am suggesting that, long before postmodernism came to be consolidated as a bona fide cultural and artistic phenomenon in the West, Miguel Hernández's poetic aesthetic already revealed a strong imprint of its fundamental principles in Spain.

Postmodernism, as Jonathan Mayhew once reminded us, is multi-dimensional and hard to apply in any consistent fashion because of its lack of a critical consensus (1994, 15). In my application of the term as a cultural-aesthetic phenomenon to Hernández's poetry, it is largely its more avant-garde grounding to which I find recourse. As such, I do part company with the more self-conscious -to borrow Mayhew's term- literary culture that came to define in the 1980s the works of poets such as Agustín Foxá, Alonso Quejada, Ramón López Velarde, and Tomás Morales, whose attention focuses on colloquial language and urban spaces. In Hernández's work, I wish to highlight what I consider to be an essential criterion of postmodernism as conceptualized by such theorists as Charles Jencks, Linda Hutcheon, or Ihab Hassan. Jencks, a founder of the postmodern movement, calls this essential principle *double-coding*, "the combination of modern techniques and something else", or that which exemplifies itself as opposite pairings (1996, 30). Hassan reconstructs this concept and dubs it "a double view", a principle that, in his view, postmodernism "demands." "Sameness and difference, unity and rupture, filiation and revolt", Hassan proclaims, "...must be honored if we are to attend to history [and] apprehend (perceive, understand) change" (121). Hassan concludes that, as a philosophical, erotic, and social phenomenon, postmodernism veers toward certain forms and yet implies their very opposites, what he calls "their antithetical realities" (125). For her part, Linda Hutcheon sustains this theoretical continuum when she defines the postmodernist phenomenon this way: "postmodernism is the process of making the product; it is absence within presence, it is dispersal that needs centering in order to be dispersed; it is immanence denying yet yearning for transcendence. In other words, the postmodern partakes of a logic of 'both/and', not one of 'either/or'" (49).

So pertinent to Miguel Hernández's poetic praxis are these postulations that, even though in his life this poet might never have come across the *postmodernism* word, it is incumbent on critics of his work

to draw the connection. Listen to his poetic philosophy as pronounced in his treatise, "Poética":

> ¿Qué es el poema? Una bella mentira fingida. Una verdad insinuada. Sólo insinuándola, no parece una verdad mentira. Una verdad tan preciosa y recóndita como la de la mina. Se necesita ser minero de poemas para ver en sus etiopías de sombras sus indias de luces… ¿Quién ve la marina verdad blanca? Nadie… Los poemas desnudos son la anatomía de los poemas. ¿Y habrá algo más horrible que un esqueleto? Guardad, poetas, el secreto del poema: esfinge. Que sepan arrancárselo como una corteza….
>
> Poeta clásico es aquel que da una solución a su vida y, por tanto, a su obra. Romántico, aquel que no resuelve nada ni en su obra ni en su vida.
>
> Impudor poético, vicio romántico: hablar de lo más íntimo, de lo que sólo pertenece a unos cuantos seres queridos. Publicar dolores, desgracias, con demasiado desenfado, es inconsciencia poética, no perdonar imagen ni objeto que se le viene al paso….
>
> Pierde la mitad de valor el verso que se dice y gana doble el que se queda en la garganta (Hernández 1986, 86-90)[5].

Immediately evident in the treatise are the displacement of the poet and the glorification of the reader as ultimate creator of meaning. For Hernández, the poetic text ought to be designed to foster varied levels of interpretation, which then generate avenues for argument and indeterminacy. In the context of a largely self-taught writer of a 1930s provincial Orihuela, Hernández's brief treatise evinces a provocative and forward-looking standard. Surprisingly, even as he stands tall

[5] Let us keep in mind the significant role that Spain played in the development of postmodernism. As Charles Jencks informs us, it was the Spanish writer Federico de Onís who in his *Antología de la poesía española e hispanoamericana* (1934) made the first, tentative, written use of Post-Modernism (17). Furthermore, before Arnold Toynbee in 1946 coined the neologism 'Post Modern Age' and before North American literary criticism became interested in the topic in the 1960s, Spain had registered the presence of the postmodern in a variety of *postist* works such as those of Eduardo Chicharro, Jr. and Carlos Edmundo de Ory (for a list of early *postist* literature, see Jaume Pont, pp. 16-21). For another perspective on Spain's role in the development of postmodernism, see Ramón Esquerra's entire entry on the term (as defined by Federico de Onís) in his 1938 literary vocabulary book, *Vocabulario literario*, p. 246. Another source that reiterates Spain's more contemporary role in the dissemination of postmodernist literary culture is Aggor's *Francisco Nieva and Postmodernist Theatre*.

today as a celebrity among Spanish poets, it is not uncommon to read or hear scholarly comments that continue to underrate the quality of his earliest works, mainly because they are hard to grasp. On the other hand, the "skeletal" *Cancionero y romancero de ausencias* —fairly free of "secretos"— is widely considered as his best literary product, because it is often seen as his most authentic; what amounts to a great misunderstanding, in my view. It may very well be that, even as he struggled to attain originality in his work —perhaps because of the lack of endorsement he suffered from some of his renowned contemporaries— Miguel Hernández's intention all along was to produce a complex poetry, one that is self-contradictory and open to varied interpretation and analysis. Herein, in my view, lies his greatness.

Regarding the poet's ideological stance, surely his earlier bold affirmations became eclipsed by the subject's outpour of an inner conflict, thanks to his newly-found religious preoccupation. What has not changed, however, is his ingrained desire for freedom of expression. If one is to go by Linda Hutcheon's words but in a reversed order, I would say that what one witnesses in Hernández's religious poetry is an essentially secular poetic subject who is caught in a fight with transcendence but goes about *denying yet yearning* for immanence.

Love and the Double

From his preoccupation with God as leitmotif, Miguel Hernández shifts to Woman as the epicenter of what could be referred to as the core of his romantic poetry, which is composed of *El silbo vulnerado* and its associated sonnets, *El rayo que no cesa* (1935), and Poemas Sueltos III. Like his battle with the divine, the poetic subject wrestles with the beloved, this time with an acute existentialist intensity. The subject's rift with the self continues unabated, and the new poetic form of choice, the sonnet, surfaces as a metaphoric confinement within which the captive struggles for a union with the beloved. Love, in this context, cannot but carry a self-contradictory sensibility:

> de esta dulcísima dolencia,
> de no verte estoy viendo que me muero (Sonnet 197, OC 459).

To search for the pleasure of love is to plunge oneself inevitably into its opposite, agony:

Más triste… que un balido
en ti busco el alivio de mis llagas,
y cuanto más lo busco, más me llago (Sonnet 203, OC 462).

Thus, when in Poem 4 of *El rayo que no cesa* the beloved throws a lemon at the lover, the effect produced in the latter is a mixture of pleasure and pain, for the contact symbolizes the touch of the woman's breasts (the lemon), which the lover craves but is denied; evidently a modern evocation of an old myth, that of Cupid's arrow. Similarly, love is depicted as a dangerous game, a perpetual lightning bolt —*el rayo que no cesa*— and a carnivorous knife that torments like a predator:

Rayo de metal crispado
fulgentemente caído,
picotea mi costado
y hace en él un triste nido (RNC 1, OC 493).

What is significant is that, even though the subject is tortured by the fatal knife, he does not panic, nor does he seek to escape the pain; on the contrary, he paradoxically demands a continuation of the cruelty:

Sigue, pues, sigue, cuchillo,
volando, hiriendo (OC 494).

Very much in the tradition of Vicente Aleixandre, therefore, Love ambivalently emerges as *querido contramor* or *esquivo contramor* (Sonnet 9, OC 484), ever attractive yet repellent.

In this afflictive vision of life, the meanings with which nature was previously associated become plagued with ambiguity. In Poemas Sueltos 1 and *Perito en lunas*, nature is presented as an instrument of reinforcement of the poetic subject's erotic sentiments, but in the romantic poems of this phase, nature is often portrayed as a melancholic agent that ironically interrupts the subject's yearning for true pleasure. For example, in Sonnet 198, the poet presents two types of solitude, but the one that is envisioned in a negative light is that derived from his pastoral activity, while the kind engendered by his devotion to the beloved is cast in a positive light. Still, in the final analysis, the poem ends on unstable semantic grounds, a zigzag of sorts that confuses and belies any level of perceived assurance (by "ésta" read "solitude of love"; by "aquélla" read "pastoral solitude"):

Cuando ésta jubilosa, aquélla triste,
y si cuando ésta luz, aquélla umbría,
cuando aquélla casada, ésta viuda (OC 459-60).

Feeling misled, the reader wonders which of the solitude polarities the poetic subject actually weighs over the other, when that which is portrayed as sad ends up married, and that which is jubilant ends up in mourning. Then again, how can one be sure that Hernández's purpose here is not to invert conventional thought, that is, to subvert the idea that marriage produces happiness rather than sorrow? A parallel scheme is presented in "Suspiro y piedra - Eternos" (OC 462-3), where the stone (a tangible natural element) is thrown into conflict with the amorous sigh (the intangible), but in the end, "suspiro" and "piedra" are merged and consolidated into bright stars that hover over the poetic subject's life, both placed on a single path to the destiny of nothingness, "la nada."

As noted in the case of the religious poetry, in the love poetry too message is presented in artistic accord with the dynamics of lexical and formal techniques. Consider these instances: "Me voy, me voy, me voy, pero me quedo,/ pero me voy, desierto y sin arena" (RNC 19, OC 504); "Recuerdo y no recuerdo aquella historia… / Recuerdo y no recuerdo aquel cogollo … Y recuerdo aquel beso sin apoyo…" (RNC 21, OC 505); or this showpiece of verbal accomplishment:

Ojinegra la oliva en tu mirada,
boquietierna la tórtola en tu risa,
en tu amor pechiabierta la granada,
barbioscura en tu frente nieve y brisa.

Rostriazul el clavel sobre tu vena,
malherido el jazmín desde tu planta,
cejijunta en tu cara la azucena,
dulciamarga la voz en tu garganta.

Boquitierna, ojinegra, pechiabierta,
rostriazul, barbioscura, malherida,
cejijunta te quiero y dulciamarga.

Semiciego por ti llego a tu puerta,
boquiabierta la llaga de mi vida,
y agriendulzo la pena que la embarga.

("Pena - bienhallada" OC 478-79)

Lexically, syntactically, phonically, and rhythmically, the verses radiate a palpable collaborative energy in their collective quest to dissolve disparities and forge new possibilities that escape the stranglehold of conventionalism.

As if to unravel itself from an existentialist shell, Miguel Hernández's love concept *poeticizes* suffering in a way that enables metaphysical pain to reconstruct itself paradoxically as an instrument through which the victim —the poetic subject— masochistically rises above, or deals with, affliction. Indeed, the roots of this self-conflictive strategy can be found in classical Aristotelian *catharsis* and in modern psychoanalysis, which in important ways inspired the European avant-garde. In a reference to André Breton's comparable notion of the union of opposites, the French philosopher Georges Bataille affirms the following:

> "Everything leads us to believe," wrote André Breton, "that there is a certain point in the mind where life and death, the real and the imaginary, the past and the future, the communicable and the incommunicable, are no longer perceived in contradiction to one another." I shall add: Good and Evil, pain and joy. This point is indicated both by violent literature and by the violence of a mystical experience: only the point matters. (15)

Consequently, in its forceful representation of what Ihab Hassan calls antithetical realities, the aesthetic of the double surfaces in Hernández's love poetry as an instrument of panacea for the subject's tormented mind, because the resolutions presented through the union of opposites demonstrate the complexity of life as truth and the need to recognize that truth if one is to rise above affliction.

The Poetry of Combat, a Betrayal of the Aesthetic?

If poetic rhetoric has much to do with a poet's life experiences, as it often does, it should be easy to conclude, on the basis of the foregoing analysis, that Miguel Hernández was a tenacious individual. In 1936, at the break of the Spanish Civil War, he joined the Republican army, by choice, and in the trenches he stood out as a soldier-poet, reciting newly written verses designed to urge on his comrades of the 5th Regiment. At this juncture in the evolution of his poetry, art and life become conspicuously unified and the poetic subject's voice is hardly distinguishable from that of the soldier, the subject's creator.

The imminence of combative oratory is announced in Poemas Sueltos III, which immediately precede the war poetry, composed of *Viento del pueblo* (1937), Poemas Sueltos IV, and *El hombre acecha* (1937-39). The poem of agency is "Sonreídme" (OC 519). In it, the poetic subject jubilantly declares his liberation from a repressive past (filled with religious guilt) and professes solidarity with the *pueblo*, whom he urges to build a united front against the exploiters. The stage is set for a full-force committed poetry, in which the dualist principle will lose part of its integrity to a dialectic of incompatibilities. But can a pronounced standard of incompatibility take hold within a postmodernist artistic paradigm, when postmodernism is about inclusiveness?

In the war poetry, two opposite bands emerge in a clear-cut fashion: the forces of Good —*Us*— and the forces of Evil —*Them*. The forces of Good are composed of the poor and the hungry, gardeners, farmers, and the exploited. The forces of Evil, made up of the exploitative bourgeoisie, are given many derogatory appellatives: from "ladrones de naciones," "la hiena," "águilas," "tiburones," "panteras," and "toros de arrogancia," to "asesinos" and "cluecas del capital y sus doblones" to "bárbaros del crimen" and "gentes de la hierba mala." Indeed, if one is to grasp fully the degree of partisan antagonism embedded within the poetry of combat, one ought to read the belligerent Poem 5 of Poemas Sueltos IV, whose inaugural verses read, "Tu famosa, tu mínima impotencia" (OC 628), as well as "Los hombres viejos" (HA, OC 656), against the adulatory "Memoria del 5º Regimiento" (OC 625), which is strategically juxtaposed to "Tu famosa…." Death unto the enemy (already condemned to die wherever they pass), and Life unto the popular forces (who shall not die):

> De la muerte y la muerte
> sois: de nadie y de nadie.
> De la vida nosotros,
> del sabor de los árboles.
>
> Victoriosos saldremos
> de las fúnebres fauces…
> y vosotros vencidos
> como aquellos cadáveres.
>
> ("Campesino de España," OC 606-7)

Nevertheless, as soldiers and civilians of the popular side in reality die in their numbers, while those of the Nationalist band seem to be gaining the upper hand, the poet's rhetorical approach to Death

loses consistency. The graphic cruelty drives him into what could be perceived as a contradictory campaign to the earlier oratory offensive. Take, for example, these verses of "Recoged esta voz":

> Naciones, hombres, mundos, esto escribo:
> la juventud de España saldrá de las trincheras
> de pie, invencible como la semilla,
> pues tiene un alma llena de banderas
> que jamás se somete ni arrodilla.
>
> Allá van por los yermos de Castilla...
> diciéndose en su sangre de generosas flores
> que *morir es la cosa más grande que se hace*.
>
> (VP, OC 579; my emphasis)

The first stanza promises unequivocal triumph, yet the second acknowledges the reality of death, what signals a reversal of the message in "Campesino de España." Keep in mind that the glorification of death is limited to the casualties of the Republican army and its allies, not to those of the enemy. Once the propaganda regarding death changes, however, it is as if the poet were able to garner greater audacity to set down new forms of oratorical paradoxes to urge on his fellow soldiers. Consequently, Hernández can proclaim that to kill is to live —"Es preciso matar para seguir viviendo" ("Canción del esposo soldado," OC 602)— and as long as the motivation for fighting is to achieve liberty, the combatant can be "herido alegremente" ("El herido," OC 666). This awareness of the soldier's tragic vulnerability impels the poet to bring back into focus the symbol of the fighting bull, as manifested in Sonnet 23 of *El rayo que no cesa*. But while in *El rayo* it is the bull's tragic fate that is accentuated —"Como el toro he nacido para el luto/ y el dolor" (OC 506)— in *El hombre acecha*, it is the duality inherent in the fighting bull as killer and victim that carries the metaphoric force intended to expose the soldier's plight:

> Partido en dos pedazos, este toro de siglos,
> este toro que dentro de nosotros habita:
> partido en dos mitades, con una mataría
> y con la otra mitad moriría luchando.
>
> ("Llamo al toro de España," OC 650)

In this military atmosphere, a paralytic dualism comes to define the poet's vision of children's world. With their innocence betrayed

and invaded, children are depicted as maturing into adulthood within young bodies, thus heading early toward death:

> Carne de yugo, ha nacido
> más humillado que bello...
>
> ...trae a la vida
> un alma color de olivo
> vieja ya y encallecida.
>
> Empieza a vivir, y empieza
> a morir de punta a punta
> levantando la corteza
> de su madre con la yunta...
>
> Contar sus años no sabe,
> y ya sabe que el sudor
> es una corona grave
> de sal para el labrador ("El niño yuntero," OC 560-2).

Rhetorically and aesthetically these magisterial verses connect with tradition, evoking Quevedo and Jorge Manrique, or even John Donne, but with a striking distinction in Hernández's representation of the child's world. Designed to command maximum persuasive power within the poet's regiment, the words invoke empathy and the urgency of commitment to the popular cause. The child portrayed in the poem is a symbol, and his/her life, as poetically sung, is metaphoric of the unjust toil and exploitation suffered by the masses (keep in mind Hernández's own life as a child goatherd). These are the children who, according to the poet, are protected by "compañero Stalin" in Russia while violently crashed in their very bedrooms during the Civil War by the forces of Mussolini and Hitler, "los dos mariconazos" ("Rusia," OC 652).

In Francisco Esteve's *Miguel Hernández para niños*, a beautifully written poem begins this way:

> Mi casa contigo era
> la habitación de la bóveda.
> Dentro de mi casa entraba
> por ti la luz victoriosa (Hernández 1989, 95)[6].

By the second stanza, however, what appeared to be a hypocoristic approach to the child's world quickly becomes a horrifying scenario.

[6] Perhaps inadvertently, this poem is omitted from the 1992 *Obras Completas*.

The house is transformed into a tomb and the radiant sunshine gives way to a gloomy darkness. When it rains, the little child feels the building sinking underneath. Soon, the house turns into a city and a coffin, and as it rains it rumbles and drives away the swallows that try to allay the trepidation. On the opposite left page to the poem (in this 1989 edition of the collection) appears Lorenzo Olaverri's artistic accompaniment to the poem, an apt illustrative drawing that enhances the underlying duplexity of the piece. My point is this: Like his general poetic cosmology, Miguel Hernández's vision of the child's universe is complex and *sur*realistic. Shattering the conventional unilateral view of the child as innocent and tender, he forges an aesthetic in which the child emerges as any adult, with characteristics that pervade the human experience: innocence and awareness, joy and horror, safety and violence. Were this poem a piece of painting, it could be comparable to the works of Goya or Dalí, or to Cubist art, whose goal is to destroy perspective and penetrate the exterior of things and uncover their interior. In a 2015 Guggenheim Bilbao exhibition of the African-American artist and musician Jean-Michel Basquiat, a description of his piece called "Loans" (1981) on a museum wall so aptly resonates with Hernández's poetic art that it is worth quoting:

> He paints individuals and objects in ambiguous relationships to evoke tension and challenge perceptions. Basquiat is often [said] to have existed in two worlds —as an "insider-outsider." For the artist, however, the notion of duality was complex, related not just to his own identity but also to social systems of wealth and class…. By combining disparate elements in a single work of art, Basquiat also suggests that opposing forces can be united to create a whole.

Despite the generational, geographic, and vocational gap that separates the Spanish poet and the American painter —Basquiat was born in 1960 and died in 1988— it is hard to miss the philosophical and aesthetic bond between the two figures: their artistic drive to breakdown unilineal ways of seeing the world and to build systems of plurality, no matter how contradictory or incongruous.

In effect, Hernández's aesthetic of the double remains in force, even within the poetry of combat. On one level, it is expressed as a strand of tension and incompatibility —the forces of Evil versus the forces of Good. This betrayal, as it were, by the poet of his core aesthetic principle is forced by the exigency of war, which, understandably, is an antagonistic undertaking. But it would be simplistic to view this

body of work as sheer propaganda devoid of an aesthetic appeal. As demonstrated above, the poetry of combat features a rhetoric of exclusivism —an *either/or* schism— but, at the same time, it creates spaces in which a dualist aesthetic of pluralism —the Linda Hutcheon *both/and* formula— presents itself, often in the form of paradox. Such is the eclectic and diverse mode in which Miguel Hernández built his non-conformist poetic artistry that, in the words of José María Balcells, his poetry defies compartmentalization (Balcells 21); a defiance that, in itself, distinguishes a legitimate postmodernist piece of work.

The Union of Opposites, Glorified

If the reality of war parenthetically provided context and impetus for an artistic order of incompatibility, the final poetic corpus forcefully reconnects with the love poetry in its representation of the union of opposites. This body of poetry consists of *Cancionero y romancero de ausencias* and its group of uncollected pieces, partly written during the war and in prison from 1938 to 1941. As an expression of the poet's sense of the approach of death, *Cancionero* reconstructs the earlier dualist play on life and death as a consolidated tripartite reality, which Hernández calls "las tres heridas," namely, Life, Death, Love (Poem 25, OC 694). The theater critic David George has written about how theater thrives on ambiguity, not as a dialectic driven toward resolution but as a condition that accepts its contradiction. Speaking about Hegel's dialectics, George describes how all ambiguities create temporary states in which two forces are not reduced to one but coexist, purged of antagonism but preserved in difference (see George, 1989). This dramatic principle, often ignored by many a playwright, finds a firm grounding in Miguel Hernández's poetry and drama, all the way through.

With a renewed sense of compatibility, Hernández marries Love and Hatred, in a skillful display of *double entendre*:

> Rojo es el odio y nutrido.
> El amor, pálido y solo.
> Cansado de odiar, te amo.
> Cansado de amar, te odio ("Después del amor," OC 724).

In this vein, physical imprisonment cannot but lose its quality as enemy to freedom:

… dentro de la triste
guirnalda del eslabón,
del sabor a carcelero
constante…
alto, alegre, libre soy.
Alto, alegre, libre, libre,
sólo por amor.

No, no hay cárcel para el hombre.
No podrán atarme, no…
¿Quién encierra una sonrisa?
¿Quién amuralla una voz?…
Libre soy. Siénteme libre… ("Antes del odio," OC 720)

Love overpowers captivity and death, for it is love —expressed through the *sonrisa*— that feeds and sustains the subject's life in the throes of death:

Sonreír con la alegre tristeza del olivo…
Sonriamos. Doremos la luz de cada día
en esta alegre y triste vanidad del ser vivo.

Me siento cada día más libre y más cautivo
en toda esta sonrisa tan clara y tan sombría.
Cruzan las tempestades sobre tu boca fría
como sobre la mía que aún es un soplo estivo.
("Sonreír con la alegre tristeza del olivo," OC 751)

The poet's articulation of ambivalence goes on, because such is the reality of the "ser vivo" —an embodiment of conflicting emotions and sentiments whose coexistence make up what life is. Consequently, the home, which in the poetry of combat is depicted as an abode of horror, reemerges with high intensity in its dualistic representation. In Poem 40 (OC 699), houses are personified as eyes that synchronously gleam and frighten; as mouths that spit, bite, but kiss; and as arms that let go and, at the same time, embrace. Upon an outcry, while all the houses are invaded and ravaged, they remain calm, as hopeful reproductive dwellings.

Throughout the final corpus, terms and entities emerge that, on the surface, could be viewed as disparate or contradictory, but they are always placed within paradigms of harmonious coexistence. A most impressive example is the interplay between light (or day or sun) and darkness (or night or shadow), salient symbols in Hernández's poetry.

Let us consider these extracts from "El niño de la noche:" "Quise llevar la risa como lo más hermoso./ He muerto sonriendo serenamente triste"; "Vuelvo a rodar, consciente del sueño que me cubre./ En una sensitiva sombra de transparencia"; "Me arrojan de la noche. Y ante la luz hiriente/ vuelvo a llorar, como siempre he llorado" (OC 754-5). A union of polarities is presented in "Sigo en la sombra, lleno de luz: ¿existe el día?" whose title readily reveals the inherent paradox (OC 756). Other poems in which the same motif is manifested are "Yo no quiero más luz que tu cuerpo ante el mío" (OC 751-2), Poem 108 (OC 740), and Poem 15 (OC 763). Even in "Eterna sombra," in which the poetic voice seems to suffocate under the strain of darkness, a flash of light appears at the end of the tunnel that illuminates the promise of hope, to which the subject is beckoned:

> Soy una abierta ventana que escucha,
> por donde ver tenebrosa la vida.
> Pero hay un rayo de sol en la lucha
> que siempre deja la sombra vencida (OC 759).

As one of the last verses written by Hernández —if not the very last— the chiaroscuro effect imposed on the reader by "Eterna sombra" gains special significance in the poem's iteration of the complexity of life as a condition that accepts its diversity and contradictions. To be postmodernist is to be ambivalent; it is to let opposing forces unite to create a whole. In my view, Miguel Hernández's aesthetics of the double —his poetic formula for viewing a complex world— is a postmodernist mechanism of entrenching his stance against the tyranny of fixture and fate. This facet of his artistic contribution to the development of European literary culture should not be ignored.

Works Cited

Aggor, F. Komla. *Eros en la poesía de Miguel Hernández*. York, N.C.: Spanish Literature Publications, 1994.

---. *Francisco Nieva and Postmodernist Theatre*. Cardiff: U of Wales P, 2006.

Balcells, José María. *Miguel Hernández*. Barcelona: Editorial Teide, 1990.

Bataille, Georges. *Literature and Evil*. Trans. Alastair Hamilton. London: Calder and Boyars, 1973.

Bristow, Joseph, ed. *The Importance of Being Earnest and Related Writings*. London and New York: Routledge, 1992.

Chevallier, Marie. *Los temas poéticos de Miguel Hernández*. Madrid: Siglo XXI Editores, 1978.

Díaz-Plaja, Guillermo. *El espíritu del barroco*. Barcelona: Editorial Crítica, 1983.

D'Ors, Eugenio. *Lo barroco*. Madrid: Aguilar. n. p.

Esquerra, Ramón. *Vocabulario literario*. Barcelona: Editorial Apolo, 1938.

El Gallo Crisis. Imprenta Zerón, Orihuela, No. 2, 1973.

George, David. "On Ambiguity: Towards a Post-Modern Performance Theory." *Theatre Research International* 14.1 (1989): 71-85.

Hassan, Ihab. "The Question of Postmodernism." *Romanticism*, *Modernism*, *Postmodernism*. Ed. Harry R. Garvin. Lewisburg: Bucknell UP. London and Toronto: Associated UP, 1980. 117-26.

Hernández, Miguel. *Cartas a Josefina*. Introducción. Concha Zardoya. Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1988.

---. *Miguel Hernández para niños*. Ed. Francisco Esteve. 6th ed. Madrid: Ediciones de la Torre, 1989.

---. *Obra completa*. Eds. Agustín Sánchez Vidal and José Carlos Rovira (collaboration of Carmen Alemany). Vol 1. Poetry. Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1992.

---. *Prosas líricas y aforismos*. Ed. María Gracia de Ifach. Madrid: Ediciones de la Torre, 1986.

Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History*, *Theory*, *Fiction*. London and New York: Routledge, 1988.

Jencks, Charles. *What is Post-Modernism?* 4th ed. London: Academy Editions, 1996.

López Baralt, Luce. "Unidad y coherencia en la poesía múltiple de Miguel Hernández". *Sin nombre* 9.3 (1978): 75-102.

Mayhew, Jonathan. *The Poetics of Self-Consciousness: Twentieth-Century Spanish Poetry*. Lewisburg: Bucknell UP. London and Toronto: Associated UP, 1994.

Miramón, Ana Suárez. *La renovación poética del barroco*. Madrid: Editorial Cincel, 1981.

Pont, Jaume. *El postismo: un movimiento estético-literario de vanguardia*. Barcelona: Edicions del Mall, 1987.

Sánchez Vidal, Agustín. *Miguel Hernández, desamordazado y regresado*. Barcelona: Editorial Planeta, 1992.