

dos peligros: primero, el de caer en meras elaboraciones eruditas de catálogos de intertextos o fuentes, sin la adecuada valoración de los datos, y segundo el de «jugárselo todo a una carta», pues está claro que el comentario total de un texto pasa por el estudio de las relaciones intertextuales que éste establece con otros autores y con otros géneros, diferentes del que cultiva, pero tampoco hay que olvidar otros factores decisivos en la producción del texto: el público al que va dirigido, las motivaciones internas o externas del autor, la circunstancia política o social, etc. Al filólogo clásico le conviene cierto grado de eclecticismo, por encima de las modas que imponga la teoría de la literatura.

Al leer algunas de las aportaciones, cuando se hila tan fino respecto a lo que parecen decir y aludir los autores, también puede preguntarse el lector si no estaremos nosotros en mejores condiciones que el público antiguo para detectar las relaciones intertextuales, ya que disponemos de un *corpus* cerrado, ordenado y no sólo confiado a la memoria humana. Es inevitable que surjan dudas de hasta qué punto fueron los antiguos conscientes de que usaban este método de composición. ¿No estaría a veces el intertexto en su propio contexto? El tema no está cerrado ni agotado y, desde luego, es sugerente, porque los textos dialogan: con sus antecesores, con su propio autor y con el público al que iban dirigidos. Incluso son capaces de dar un salto de siglos para hacer esto último con sus intérpretes modernos.

Finalmente, con los ejemplos propuestos, ahora que está tan de moda el tema, y que se preguntan los críticos y el público cuál es la diferencia entre el intertexto y el plagio, quizá sean –una vez más– los antiguos los que respondan desde sus obras. Por un lado un nuevo concepto de originalidad –nacido en el siglo XIX– y por otro una falta de pudor absoluta, que convierte en clásico indispensable a cualquier diletante, han reavivado la polémica. Se ha hablado mucho y se seguirá hablando y en éste, como en otros muchos temas, todavía no se ha dicho la última palabra. Pero ahí está de nuevo la grandeza de nuestros clásicos; no precisaban de grandes premios editoriales ni de otros títulos de reconocimiento para reelaborar y convertir a veces lo mediocre, y a menudo lo sublime, en más sublime todavía: *O tempora, o mores!*

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MICAELA JANAN. *The Politics of Desire: Propertius IV*, The University of California Press, Berkeley - Los Angeles 2000. xi + 244 pp. ISBN: 0-52022318-7.

Propertius' elegies are difficult, not because the Latin is obscure or irregular, but because of the sudden leaps of thought and changes of focus that leave the reader puzzled as to the coherence or unity of the poems. In an earlier, more positivistic age of scholarship, editors rearranged and recombined verses and whole poems in accord with their own pedantic sense of what constitutes poetic logic. The so-called New Critics, in turn, sought coherence in the undertones of the poetry subtle allusions to mythology or to Greek models, and patterns of imagery or metaphor, that bound together the apparently *disiecti versus* of the elegies into a congruent and harmonious whole. For all their delight in paradox, however, what the New Critics shared with their more literal-minded predecessors was the conviction that a good poem was necessarily unified, with all the parts fitting together to produce an organically interdependent totality.

Micaela Janan argues, on the contrary, that Propertius' elegies do not and cannot have such unity by their very nature as expressions of the poet's desire. For desire, whether erotic or in the form of the wish for a social identity, is essentially the manifestation of a split in the self. The twists and gaps in Propertius' poems are not to be edited or explained away, nor treated, in the manner of Paul Veyne, as the clever games of a mandarin elite, but rather to be interpreted as signs of the radical incompleteness of the desiring subject.

In order to understand this kind of poetry, Janan appeals to the theories of the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, whose ideas she had exploited with stunning success in her earlier book on Catullus entitled *When the Lamp is Shattered*. In the field of psychology, it was Lacan above all who challenged the unity of the individual subject. The human self, he argued, is marked by an absence or lack that derives from the desire to recover the infantile bond with the mother. The self strives to overcome this deficiency with substitutes that in principle can never do the job: love objects such as Propertius' Cynthia in her «infinite variety» (p. 21), or ideological surrogates like Augustan «Romanitas,» which afford a specious image of a coherent identity. But all such efforts to appropriate symbols of wholeness are in vain. As Janan summarizes Lacan's view (p. 4), «division founds subjectivity: the subject cannot be healed without being abolished altogether.»

In the fourth book of Propertius' elegies, the two themes of love and national character meet – as Janan puts it, its «distinctive features point to the political-erotic subject's incoherence as its chief theme» (p. 16) – and Janan's achievement in the volume under review is to show how both aspirations are equally riven by contradiction. Janan argues that the question of what it is to be a Roman was particularly salient in Augustus' principate, as the emperor sought to unify his subjects by means of a shared social identity. Thus, she is particularly attentive here to «the social and political forces that shape the subject within Roman erotic poetry» (p. 4); for Propertius' elegies respond «to a social crisis characterized by the disintegration of an ideologically secure sense of self» (p. 12).

There is no room in a brief review to do more than suggest the rich interpretations of Propertius' elegies to which Janan's sophisticated method gives rise. After two initial chapters in which she explains Lacan's psychological theory and her own extension of it to include the problem of social identity (along with a discussion of the poems addressed to the enigmatic figure of Gallus in Book I), Janan devotes individual chapters to a detailed analysis of poems 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, and 11 in Book IV. In each case, she demonstrates that lacunas and lapses identified by scholars are neither artistic flaws, nor do they point to a deeper, implicit unity. Rather, they are functions of a tension that is inseparable from the poet's engagement with the logic of desire. Of the Vertumnus elegy (4.2), for example, Janan remarks that the «quintessence of himself [that] Vertumnus reveals is that he has no quintessence,» thus dissolving any possibility of a self-consistent identity in «a protean capacity always to be something else» (p. 15). So too, Propertius' «dream-landscapes» are «untroubled by the principle of non-contradiction» (p. 16). In the Tarpeia elegy (4.4), one of the poems that receives a chapter of its own, Janan returns to the well-known problem of how Tarpeia can have been drawing water from a spring «despite Tatius' barricade» (p. 71); her answer is that the ambiguous location of the spring cuts across and deconstructs the «conceptually untenable» oppositions between enemy and friend, Roman and foreigner, loyalty and betrayal (cf. p. 30). Thus, the poem «interrogates the very binary logic implied in framing its loyalties as either “pro-Augustan” or “anti-Augustan”» (p. 71).

Rather than summarize Janan's arguments further, I recommend that the reader explore this book at leisure, allowing the time needed to master Lacan's technical language, which may seem arcane when quoted out of context. For despite such mysterious formulas as «the Real's mutinous effects as a gap within the Symbolic» (p. 9), Janan writes with grace and clarity. What I should like to do here is raise a question about a possible gap in Janan's own method which arises from her choice – perfectly legitimate in itself – to focus on one strategy of interpretation at the expense of others.

The idea that artistic unity is not an ideal but rather an effect, which necessarily conceals tensions and rifts within the work, is not a new one in post-modern criticism. Apart from the contributions of Lacan and his followers, such thinkers as Jacques Derrida and the marxist philosopher Louis Althusser, with his principle of symptomatic reading («lecture symptomale»), have, in different ways, argued that inconsistencies are an irreducible part of narrative as such. For example, Mieke Bal, in her book *Lethal Love* (1987), observes: «Characters embody contradictions; only if we endure lapses can we take them as existing in a stable and unchanging, if fictive, ontology.» Or again, Pierre Macherey affirms in *A Theory of Literary Production* (1978): «What begs to be explained in the work is not that false simplicity which derives from the apparent unity of its meaning, but ... those disparities which point to a conflict of meaning.» Janan's decision to read the crisis of social identity in psychoanalytic terms in part displaces other, potentially productive approaches to poetic inconsistencies.

But the more interesting possibility, it seems to me, is that such a critical strategy is already anticipated in ancient criticism itself, and more particularly in that extraordinary and still neglected treatise by Plutarch entitled «How a Young Man Should Listen to Poetry.» Plutarch, it will be recalled, states roundly that «we know no poetry that is without a story [ἄμυθον] and without lies [ἀψευσδῆ]» (16c). If young men are to be permitted to study it, accordingly, they must be taught to read against the grain, and learn how to find those inconsistencies, slips, and omissions that contradict the false values that poetry necessarily communicates by virtue of its status as fiction (plasma). The student is advised to listen or read always with an eye to the incoherence of the text, not because it is badly constructed, but because it cannot help but mislead even as it offers indications of a higher morality (e.g., 19a). To Homer's descriptions of gods warring among themselves they must be encouraged to respond, in Homer's own words: «You yourself know a better tale than that» (20e). When Pindar advises immoral revenge against enemies, they must declare to his face, as it were: «But you yourself say otherwise!»; and to Sophocles they must be prepared to assert: «But we heard you say» the opposite (21a).

I emphasize that this way of reading is necessitated, according to Plutarch, by the very nature of poetry. Poetry is thus divided against itself, and lacks that unity or identity which modern and especially post-Romantic criticism has demanded of it. I am inclined to believe that the radical character of Plutarch's approach to poetry has been obscured by the assumption that unity is an aesthetic value, and for that reason it may be more profitable to situate Plutarch in the context precisely of post-modernism, alongside Derrida, Althusser, and Lacan himself. If I may introduce a personal note, I have found this collocation productive in a post-graduate course I teach, together with a colleague who specializes in post-modern criticism, on the subject, «Literary Theory: Ancient and Post-Modern».

I see that I have wandered from the book under review to a theme that I hope to address in a future issue of this very journal. Propelled by my own desire, this essay has

acquired the hybrid character of a review and an article, and threatens to lose that unity, or effect of unity, that the canons of scholarly publication approve. But the displacement would be pleasing, I expect, to Micaela Janan.

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BENJAMÍN GARCÍA-HERNÁNDEZ, *Gemelos y Sosias. La comedia de doble en Plauto, Shakespeare y Molière*, Ediciones Clásicas, Madrid 2001, 357 pp. ISBN: 84-7882-439-1.

Muchos han sido los estudiosos que han tratado los arduos problemas que plantea el teatro de Plauto. A pesar de que, salvo honrosas excepciones, en su mayor parte estas aproximaciones han sido incapaces de ganarse la adhesión unánime de la crítica, el estudio del profesor García-Hernández ratifica el *fortuna audaces iuuat*. El autor, sobradamente conocido por sus estudios de lingüística latina, analiza en esta obra el grupo de comedias plautinas calificadas tradicionalmente como «de doble» o de *simillimi*. El estudio ofrece una visión de conjunto sobre la función del doble en la comedia de tres autores, Plauto –fundamentalmente en *Menaechmi* y *Amphitruo*–, Shakespeare, *The Comedy of Errors*; y Molière, *Anfitrión*. El interés del autor no se centra en la proyección que han tenido las obras plautinas en la literatura moderna, ni tampoco en el análisis de los procedimientos de imitación o el grado de dependencia respecto al modelo plautino. Sin menospreciar estas perspectivas, el autor examina detalladamente tanto los elementos que tienen en común las distintas obras como las diferencias. Un notable acierto es que desde el primer momento, en la línea marcada por los trabajos pioneros de V. Propp o C. Levi Strauss, y aplicada ya con notable éxito al drama plautino por autores como Della Corte, Questa y, más recientemente, M. Bettini, se definan de manera rigurosa y precisa conceptos como los del «doble», el «error», y el «engaño», y se establezcan las diferencias que existen entre «ser dobles naturales» (como es el caso de *Menaechmi*) y «parecer dobles», es decir, ser impostores, como sucede en *Amphitruo*, pues se trata efectivamente de procedimientos que dan origen a situaciones de equívocos pero que responden a un funcionamiento muy diferente.

Antes de entrar en el análisis pormenorizado de la obra, merece la pena detenerse a mencionar un punto al que el propio autor confiere gran importancia: me refiero a la relación entre el *Amphitruo* plautino y la filosofía de Descartes, que ya ha sido objeto de un trabajo anterior¹. Se esté o no de acuerdo con la tesis de que esta comedia de Plauto ha sido fundamental para el desarrollo de la concepción filosófica de Descartes, lo que sí parece probado es la miopía de ciertos críticos modernos que no han concedido la suficiente atención a la interacción entre literatura y filosofía, un olvido inexcusable aún más cuando de textos clásicos se trata. En este sentido no debe olvidarse que la comedia «popular» de Plauto, desacreditada por Cicerón y Horacio, fue la que abrió las puertas a la filosofía en Roma, como tampoco el hecho de que es la libertad del lector la que de algún modo inventa la literatura. Como ha señalado recientemente F. Dupont,

¹ B. GARCÍA-HERNÁNDEZ, *Descartes y Plauto. La concepción dramática del sistema cartesiano*, Madrid 1997.