

Alberto Acereda. *South Atlantic Review* 66 (2001): 166-167

***Fuerza invisible. Lo divino en la poesía de Rubén Darío.* By Louis Bourne. Málaga: Anejos de Analecta Malacitana, 1999. 392 pp.**

The volume of writings devoted to Rubén Darío is one of the most impressive in the history of Spanish and Spanish American writers. In 1974 Keith Ellis published his groundbreaking *Critical Approaches to Rubén Darío* (Toronto: U of Toronto P) where he wisely presented the range of methods and perspectives employed by critics to study Darío's life and works. One of these approaches was defined by Ellis as intrinsic, and it included critical studies related to internal aspects of Darío's work such as the philosophical, spiritual or religious positions. While the need remains clear for even greater attention paid to the wider subject of Hispanic *Modernismo*, Louis Bourne's book is a serious and well-defined contribution to Darío studies. This volume adds new and valid findings to the critical analysis carried out in and around Darío's divine poetry, and it joins a long line of critics (Marasso, Anderson Imbert, Mantero, Gullón, Jade, Skyrme) who claimed for the prominence of religion, heterodoxy and the divine as one of the capital themes in Darío's works.

This book sheds valuable light on Darío's literary significance by examining and assessing the poetry (and in many instances the prose) written by the Nicaraguan author. Bourne argues that the deepest poetry ever written by Darío should be found in those poems related to death in opposition to life. Even in his erotic poetry, Darío is continuously in search of the divine, the unknown, which is not necessarily the orthodox idea of God. His poetry is also full of doubt and his life is the one of a skeptic in search of answers. Bourne structures his book chronologically. Chapter one deals with Darío as a young author writing his early poetry from "La fe" to the poetry of *Azul...*, where Bourne finds opposition to the doctrines of the Catholic Church in favour of liberalism and masonry. Chapter two studies some of the poems included in *Prosas profanas* where Darío assumes divine ideas in relation to the occult ("Coloquio de los centauros", "Las ánforas de Epicuro"). Chapter three proves the ongoing skeptical position in Darío by studying the growing despair of poems such as the nocturnes or "Lo fatal", included in *Cantos de vida y esperanza*. The final chapter covers some of the poems of his latest books: *El canto errante*, *Poema del otoño*, and *Canto a la Argentina*. Bourne argues that all Darío's poetry is a continuous fight between the ascetic and the pagan, spirituality and sensuality. The book concludes with an interesting

comparison between Darío's vision of the divine and the one by Miguel de Unamuno.

Bourne's study, however, formulates an approach that frequently gives more importance to the philosophical and religious significance of Darío than to the lyrical and aesthetic value of his poetry. The reader feels that too often the author perceives Darío more as a philosopher than as a poet, and this is when Bourne's analysis fails to understand that Darío's poetry cannot easily be bound by any one category. Darío was not a philosopher, and his inner contradictions, as seen in his writings, belong to the intrinsic variations and contradictions of Hispanic *Modernismo* as a whole. It is also in this area where Bourne could have expanded his study: by making connections with other *modernista* authors such as Amado Nervo or José Martí. Nevertheless, the reference to José Asunción Silva's poem "Sinfonía color de fresas en leche" (pg. 16) cannot be seen as a poem against Darío, but against the *preciosista* poetry badly imitating Darío. The influence of Gustavo A. Bécquer in religious matters is never as clear as Bourne pretends to be, following Antonio Regalado's advice. The same can be said regarding Darío's readings of Rosalía de Castro, another of Regalado's suggestions which clearly misleads Bourne since the Nicaraguan never read or even mentioned the poetry written by Rosalía. (pg.16). Perhaps Bourne would have been better off carrying out his own research without listening so much to others' advice. That is the case with one of Eduardo Zepeda-Enríquez's comments (pg. 31, n. 64) that wrongly questions Ricardo Llopesa's edition, or confuses *alejandrino* and *endecasílabo* (pg. 346, n.131).

There is no doubt this book includes important references to other writers, critics and theorists, and most impressively to other studies by philosophical, theological and theosophical critics. But it has to be pointed out that there are important Darío critics omitted in Bourne's bibliography such as R. Gullón, A. Rama, I. Zuleta, I. A. Schulman, M. A. Salgado, and J.M. Martínez. All in all, although there is no easy way to say something new about Darío, Bourne succeeds in doing so, and in understanding the universal meaning of Darío's poetry. This is a thoughtful, lucid and intelligent book that offers a real contribution to one of the best poets of Hispanic literary history.

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