

## **Review / Reseña**

Darío, Rubén. *Opiniones* (1906). Tomo 7 (Volume II, 1905-1908), edited by Graciela Montaldo. Buenos Aires: Editorial de la Universidad Nacional de Tres de Febrero, 2024. 377 pp.

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Rubén Darío's *Opiniones* is a compilation of articles originally published by Argentina's periodical *La Nación* in the first years of the twentieth century. These articles were commissioned as pieces on the cultural life of France, as well as the lives of Latin American and American artists living there, such as sculptor Rogelio Irurtia and Isadora Duncan, among others. Darío decided to add at the end of this collection chronicles about his summer trip to Asturias (Pravia y La Playa) in 1905. *Opiniones* has been masterfully rendered into a new annotated reedition by Graciela Montaldo as part of Tomo 7 (Volume II, covering the years 1905-1908) of the poet's *Obras completas* in preparation by the Universidad Nacional de Tres de Febrero (Buenos Aires, Argentina). The *Obras completas* will be the first annotated and complete collection of all of Darío's known published and unpublished writings. As someone who works on nineteenth century Latin American literary culture, this is long-awaited and vast endeavor. It constitutes, as the editors say at the end of the volume, a monumental effort to make Darío available not only to researchers and specialists, but to readers interested in the most important poet of the so-called long-nineteenth century in the Spanish-speaking world.

The annotated edition prepared by Professor Montaldo is comprised of i) an Introduction; ii) a "nota filológica preliminar"; iii) the texts themselves accompanied

by thorough footnotes comparing and contrasting the articles as they originally appeared in *La Nación* with the book version; iv) end notes, which delve into each articles' references, an "apéndice documental" comprised of archival materials (letters, postcards, manuscripts, cartoons, and original excerpts from the press); and, finally, v) a description of the collection which this volume will be part of. All these materials are constructed with the utmost care, professionalism, and with an awe-inspiring attention to detail that, beyond compiling facts and factoids, offers an organic reading of the cultural meaning of Darío's intervention for Latin American and European cultures. In the following pages, after describing the volume in general terms, I will dwell on each of these parts.

As Montaldo states in the Introduction to this volume, the texts compiled by Darío in *Opiniones* contrasts in both subject matter and location (they jump from France to Spain), which means that the only possible explanation for their inclusion in the book is related to its length: without this last third of the book, *Opiniones* would have been too short. This is very interesting, given that the book, which sprung out of a collection of press articles, was expected to be of a certain size (containing prose from certain authors). Moreover, given the economic rationale behind the book (in general funded by the authors), it had to respond to certain considerations of a print run to make the financial enterprise make sense. The book was published by Francisco Beltrán, whose letters to Rubén Darío are published for the first time in the section Apéndice Documental in his publishing house Librería Española y Extranjera.

### *Introduction*

The Introduction contextualizes this particular work of Darío amongst his larger *oeuvre* and the connections between poetry and journalism during *modernismo's* heyday in Latin America and, thanks to him, in Spain (as his piece "Los nuevos poetas españoles" suggests). In that sense, it closely follows one of the guiding principles of the *Obras Completas*: namely, to respect a chronological order of his literary production, while at the same time showing, through volumes and volumes, both the publication of major works (*Azul...*, *Prosas profanas*, etc.) and the changes/breaks/continuities in Darío's aesthetic development. At the same time, it takes into account his material conditions, especially his location and affiliation to different periodicals in Central America, the Southern Cone, and Spain. Montaldo goes on to describe each of the texts, extending bridges between its overarching topics and suggesting ways of reading a possible order given to the chronicles by Darío himself. Thanks to her Introduction,

we find that the subgenres of necrologies and reading and translation practices (in reviews of texts, but also of works of art and dance), as well as his anxieties about women's writings and the place of the poet in the modern city structure much of Darío's political and aesthetic energy.

In more general terms, the Introduction constructs a very nuanced argument of what "culture" means for Darío: a dialogue of variations between the past and the present, a flux of quotations and translations, of renewals and anachronisms that sees Latin poets as decadents and symbolist poets as classical. Stepping beyond lettered culture, Montaldo—as she has done brilliantly in other works such as *La sensibilidad amenazada*, and later in *Zonas ciegas* or *Museo del consumo*—sees the poet as witness, and part of an emerging mass culture that produces both anxieties and pleasures in the otherwise isolated and outspoken unengaged poet (which allows him nonetheless to celebrate popular writers and writers of/for the people, such as Zola and Gorki). A topic that I found fascinating, one which Professor Montaldo discusses here and there in the end notes, is Darío's fraught relation with women intellectuals and also prodigies (he was considered to be one as a kid). Interestingly enough, female prodigies caused him immense anxiety. Gender is one of the lenses through which *Opiniones* can be read most productively.

*"Nota filológica preliminar"*

This short text provides the reader with a compass to navigate the larger text, situating this reedition in the context of the other reprints and reeditions done of *Opiniones* and making apparent to the reader that this is the first academic reedition of the texts—one which consults both the original and the press articles composing it. It also provides a cultural framework for inserting Darío in the mesmerizing library of these references and acquaintances in France, Latin America, and the world.

It also serves as a poetics of sorts for the footnotes, as it clarifies that it will not be dialoguing with Wikipedia or making the book an anachronistic version of itself, but instead will evaluate and analyze the aesthetic, political, and cultural uses of the quotes. It also explains the value of comparing originals.

*Footnotes*

The neat and thorough structure of footnotes comparing the variations, discrepancies, and alterations between the periodical version of the articles and its book version is yet further proof of the care and time put into this reedition. I can say

little about these variations as delimiting a pattern or giving us deep insights into Darío's work, but they make it clear to me that the Nicaraguan poet had a sharp eye for his reading public in Buenos Aires, as opposed to a more "neutral" public for the book form (even though it was published in Spain). I found them particularly useful for seeing which enumerations (in texts full of enumerations) he altered, took out, or altogether changed, always keeping in mind the consumers/readers of these texts, whether they were in Buenos Aires or later on in Europe and Latin America more generally (with the texts circulating in book form).

#### *End Notes*

In the Introduction, Professor Montaldo says that, in times of overaccumulation and instant availability of information on the internet, it would not make sense to simply translate (as in *trasladar*) this information to footnotes. She says that it is much more productive to see and show how information is organized, administered, refurbished, and played upon by Darío for different purposes and publics. This is exactly what she does in the footnotes. In my opinion, these function as micro-essays and capsule reviews on the authors Darío writes about, as well as on the themes that obsessed the poet (and the critic through the poet). One can read in the footnotes an invitation to further investigate topics such as the relations between the nascent culture industry and fame (and infamy); the ever-present influence of patrons, despite the ever-expanding force of a reading public; montage, translation, recycling and even name-dropping as cultural operations to foster connections between different moments in history and to legitimize Darío; the museum as the spatial structure of the compilation itself and of many poetry collections analyzed in the book (in particular Heredia's); the place or non-place (*extranjería*) of the Latin American poet as an opaque yet exoticized/racialized figure (such as the Rastacero); Darío and the printing press as mediators between Latin America and Europe and arbiters of what high culture (and hence popular culture) are to be; and, lastly, Darío's relation to money and status (and his cultural obsession with the bohemian as someone who craves and rejects this in equal parts).

Something about Darío's texts in *Opiniones* can be also said about Professor Montaldo's End Notes and the Introduction. She says in the Introduction that "Las crónicas no eran textos eruditos ni meramente informativos; tampoco eran textos de entretenimiento. [...] Pero quien las escribe lo hace desde un archivo cultural muy amplio, con un gran conocimiento tanto de la cultura clásica occidental como de la

contemporánea europea” (17). The reader of the notes is humbled by the scholarly editor’s linguistic expertise (Latin, French, and Italian, interspersed with Darío’s texts), the internal dialogues between his 1906 production and his prior/later production, as well as by the historical connections between Darío and Latin American literature (particularly Argentine, as well as that of the literary milieu of France and Spain—very inbred, as she points out).

#### *Apéndice documental*

This appendix is referenced in the “nota preliminar” and the Introduction, and, while lending some visual and material support to the book, the reader is left to wonder why these images were selected and not others. Have these been reprinted for the first time? Its immediate relation with *Opiniones* seems evident: in particular the editor’s letters, as well as Martínez Sierra’s texts, Gómez Carrillo’s interviews, and Santos Chocano’s Brazilian letter thanking him for sending a copy of the book. Nonetheless the reader is left to wonder the following: what constitutes its organizational principle, or the general period in which Rubén Darío was writing *Opiniones* (his caricature as well as his manuscript note to *La Nación* point in this direction)? That being said, the documents themselves—in particular, the caricature of Darío—give us a more personal sense of how Darío saw his compilation and how he was seen by editors, painters, and fellow poets at the time of compiling *Opiniones*.

#### *Conclusion*

After providing this quick overview of the critical reedition of Darío’s *Opiniones*, I can only reiterate my admiration for the rigorous work done by the editor and her team, as well as the monumental effort manifest in this part of Darío’s *Obras completas*. Reeditions such as this provide us with a true portrait of the behind-the-scenes operations of *modernismo*: the myriad movements, influences, and circulations of print culture, but also the impressions that popular spectacles, dances, art shows, carnivals, etc. left on Latin American intellectuals living in Europe in the first decades of the twentieth century. But perhaps most importantly, the reedition demonstrates how Darío was a true master, not only as a writer, but also as a reader of a global archive of texts, and how others would read him.