

The study undertakes the challenge of deciphering Pureza Canelo’s dense, oblique poetry, made labyrinthine in part through the creation of a metapoetic idolect laced with inter- and intra-textual nuances. The adjectives I use to describe Canelo’s writing are culled from Pritchett’s analysis, and the poet herself, in the preface to *Pasión inédita,* recognizes that she is a poet of “only a small circle of readers” (“sólo una entrancada minoría”). With clarity, precision and learned insight the Pritchett does a remarkable job of interpreting the poetry, which is consistently metapoetic in nature.

The “Introduction” formulates the essential elements of the second poetics, delineates struggles and triumphs with the creative process, and clarifies the concept of the poem as artifact. It also presents a critical-theoretical context elaborating on formulations by Savoj Zizek, Jacques Lacan and others that are useful for understanding Canelo’s texts. In addition, Pritchett establishes Canelo’s relationship to a line of poets, including Juan Ramón Jiménez, Bécquer, Keats and William Butler Yeats, who like her address metapoetic issues. The philosophical formulations found in the poetry are linked to Martin Heidegger’s concept of being-in-time. Other artistic concepts addressed throughout the study, such Modern
versus postmodern, “nearing” and “passage,” enable readers to more clearly understand Canelo’s location within a broad culture context. Reading the monograph it becomes progressively evident that Canelo’s struggle with the word emerges from a decidedly postmodern stance. Her oeuvre, Pritchett asserts, reminds readers and, “perhaps with more urgency, the poet herself that poetry understands little, perhaps nothing, of unqualified truth” (13).

In Pursuit of Poem Shadows is an outstanding contribution to the understanding of a significant and highly original late-twentieth-century Spanish poet. The book will be of interest primarily to scholars of Spanish poetry, but because of Pritchett’s efforts to project Canelo’s poetics beyond the intellectual borders of Spain, the potential audience is wide-ranging, offering diverse literary scholars rich insights not only into contemporary Spanish poetry but also into literary theory and philosophy. The author’s readings of Canelo are brilliant and perceptive. For example, the interpretations of Pasión inédita found in Chapter 6 expand previous critical analyses by clearly outlining the omnipresence of a metapoetic content, delving into such topics as “The wedding of Poet and the Creative Other” (145), pronominal subjectivity and questions of space. Pritchett is thoroughly familiar with the poet’s works and her scholarship is meticulous. She holds a magnifying glass to texts examining in detail nuances of the hermetic idiolect and idiosyncratic syntax. She also perceptively traces the tensions, for example, between numinosity and quotidian, that appear, disappear and reappear in the oeuvre. Most importantly, the interpretations are admirably enlightening enabling a deeper understanding of Pureza Canelo’s poetry.

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