

The most important findings: a summary

Proceeding further from research already carried out on the work of the poet José Hierro* this study has reached the following conclusions:

Each of the collections of poetry from *Tierra sin nosotros* to *Libro de las alucinaciones* forms a composed cycle. Altogether they form an emerging structured entirety, which reveals itself to the reader as the poetic expression of the profundity of human experience.

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One essential feature of the poems is their intratextual references, implying that their whole significance can only unfold within the context of a perceptible *poetic process*. Up to the point of *Libro de las alucinaciones*, any approach which takes the poems singly and arbitrarily from the entire composition can only provide an extremely limited approach to Hierro's work.

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Positioning José Hierro's work in the realm of politically committed literature is misleading. Classifying the poet as a *poeta social* by no means does justice to his work. The many instances of this false classification which are firmly lodged in literary history are based on a one-sided emphasis encountered in the literary world during the 1950s on *littérature engagée*, as well as on mistaken conclusions drawn from biographical details relating to Hierro's political imprisonment during the Franco regime and also on the limitations in the interpretation of single poems taken out of context.

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The intertextual references in Hierro's work are of exceptional significance. Besides such authors as those of the *Siglo de Oro* (San Juan de la Cruz, Calderon, but primarily Lope de Vega), central figures in Spanish tradition such as Unamuno and Ortega y Gasset and certain modern poets (e.g. R. Darío, A. Machado, J.R. Jiménez, R. Alberti, P. Salinas, G. Diego), it is the work of Romain Rolland, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry and Stefan Zweig which provide notable textual references in the collections up to and including *Cuanto sé de mí*. To take but one example, the use of such significant expressions as *alucinación*, *reportaje* and *demonio* and the way these are poetically formulated can be traced back to the poet's intensive preoccupation with the three last-mentioned authors. Hierro's work, at the very latest from *Alegría* onwards is firmly anchored in European culture – a feature not commonly attributed to the first generation of poets after the Spanish Civil War. Thanks to Rolland and Zweig, Hierro's self-image as a poet developed through engaging with the life and works of such major literary and artistic figures as Beethoven, Shakespeare, Hölderlin, Goethe, Nietzsche and Dostoyevsky.

* Cf. Bibliography, in particular A. de Albornoz, J. Andivia Gómez, J.M. Barrajón, J. Benito de Lucas, B. Brown, D. Cañas, S. Cavallo, G. Corona Marzol, J.O. Jiménez, J.J. Lanz, E. Le Vagueresse, L. López Baralt, P.J. de la Peña, D.M. Rogers and E.E. de Torre.

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Hierro's perception of the external world is heavily influenced by his experience of a reality overshadowed by suffering and pain (war, imprisonment and death). It is against this background that his experiences of melancholy form the starting point of his poetic career. However melancholy is not reduced to mere self-pity and a retreat from the real world but provides Hierro with the energy for the unfolding of a poetry which accepts the world, facing up to the challenges brought by fate with resilience. Hierro's resulting view of himself is also to be seen as closely embedded in the intertextual network of his poetry. In particular the heroic idealism in Romain Rolland's portrayals of artists' acts, along with works of similar intention by Zweig and Saint-Exupéry, as a basic pattern of intertextuality for the drama of the soul which develops in the collections from *Tierra sin nosotros* up to *Libro de las alucinaciones* onwards.

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Many of Rolland's personae (Jean-Christophe, Olivier or the female characters in the novel), alongside many others, but also Shakespeare's Prospero, Ariel and Hamlet, Calderon's Segismundo, Goethe's Prometheus, Tasso and Faust and many of their antagonists make up a choir of different intertextual voices, resounding in the *yo* of the lyrical subject. These many voices make clear that Hierro's poetry manifests elements of basic dramatic structures and their corresponding antagonistic ones: Opposing pairs such as for instance *alegría/dolor*, dreamer/man of action, *esteta/héroe*, *sombra/luz* are outlined as motifs in the referential texts and then developed by the poet throughout the work in the manner of Beethoven's compositional technique. In analogy to the study of music, it is only the symphonic sounding of all the voices together and the performance of the different movements in order which allows the full expression of the meaning of José Hierro's poems.

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The characterisation of Hierro's poetic hallucinations as *profane mysticism* should be taken literally if the meaning of the Greek *μύετιν* is taken into account. This is seeing with the eyes of the soul – a leitmotif which recurs in very many poems, in particular in the change of perspective from the inner to the external world. Interestingly it is this seeing with closed eyes which is present throughout the intertextual reference texts of Rolland and Saint-Exupéry.

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This aspect of sensual perception appears more strongly when Hierro's dramatis personae lose the sensory organs by which they perceive the external world, as for instance in the case of Beethoven's deafness or Handel's blindness, particularly emphasised as implying increased sensitivity in Rolland biographies which served Hierro as a reference. The induction of acoustic or visual hallucinations can develop artistic fantasy and make this effective, particularly when accompanied by a loss of sensual perception.

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In terms of their heroic idealism, Rolland's protagonists Jean-Christophe and Beethoven possess model character for Hierro. When dealing with a world seen as broken and lost it is only heroic artistic genius which can create an aesthetically formed reality from the melancholic mood of a lost paradise, ideally in the re-creation of the original harmony within a cosmos determined by the rules of music. This reality does not simply ignore the age of suffering and darkness lamented by Rolland's Empedocles, but generates out of this lucid moments of joy –*por el dolor a la alegría*– the motto of Beethoven und Hierro. It is this which may explain why Hierro's poetry constantly strives to attain the aesthetic effects of a musical ideal.

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At the same time, it was this aesthetic course which was obliged to lead José Hierro into a quandary. From poem to poem, it became clear to him, that as a modern poet, he was unable to create a poetically complete contrasting world and one able to withstand the richness of reality, and this least of all with the help of poetry – always inferior to music. Thus, like a modern Sisyphus, Hierro followed the course of heroic idealism book by book until in the middle of the 1960s he left the paths trod by Rolland and Zweig and declared his *Struggle with the Demon* at an end – himself defeated but redeemed. The poet's enforced silence over the next quarter of a century seems a logical consequence. The new poetry announced at the end of *Libro de las alucinaciones* for an indefinite point in the future was to be significantly different from what had gone before. In *Cuaderno de Nueva York* the poet transports himself with all his figures from the European world of the arts to America. In Manhattan, at the end of his poetic journey, his verse is relaxed and in Goethe's sense free of demons: *sin demonio ni alucinaciones*.