

EKPHRASIS AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY: THE CASE OF RAFAEL ALBERTI

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I. From *La arboleda perdida* to *A la pintura*

It often occurs that writers turn to autobiography as a result of feeling irreparably distanced from the past by an event they perceive as cataclysmic.¹ In such instances, writing becomes a means of bridging that distance, of undoing the tragedy in order to recover what was lost.

This premise is particularly relevant to Spanish autobiographers who wrote from exile after the Civil War and whose nostalgia for the past is compounded by a physical remove from their homeland.² Such is the case with Rafael Alberti, whose autobiography, *La arboleda perdida*, treats the author's yearning for his "bahía gaditana" from the title to the last line. Yet, curiously, the impact of the event that forced Alberti to leave Spain is conveyed more by the pace at which he composed the work than by what Alberti describes. This may be charted in the text in italicized passages that refer to the author's situation as he wrote. We learn from these passages that Alberti began the "Libro primero" in a besieged Madrid and completed it in Paris (in the Fall of 1939), on the ship from Marseille to Buenos Aires (during the Summer of 1940), and in Argentina (1940-42).³ He started the "Libro segundo" in Buenos Aires in the Spring of 1954, and "Libros III y IV" after he returned to Spain in 1977.

As Alberti suggests, the gaps that such references reveal in his productivity after the war are directly related to his anguish.⁴ Most significant is the twelve-year hiatus between books one (completed in 1942) and two (begun in 1954), during which time he turns to painting and poetry to contend

with the “presentes demasiado duros.”⁵ Alberti begins work on various books of poetry in this period,⁶ yet only in *A la pintura* does he interrelate in a significant way the three mainstays of his creative output: poetry, painting, and autobiography.

Conceived in 1945, *A la pintura* may in fact be viewed as the essential link between Books I and II of *La arboleda perdida*. This hypothesis is supported by key features common to both works, the first of which is 1917. The year marks Alberti's move from Cádiz to Madrid, the beginning of his “nostalgias marítimas y salineras” (1:99) that cause him to look for solace in painting and poetry. 1917 is clearly a watershed in Alberti's life and becomes a point of textual reference in his writing. In *La arboleda perdida*, for instance, Book I ends with the story of that move whereas Book II begins with his discovery of the Prado, which also occurs in 1917. More important than the year itself, however, is the image of the autobiographer's exilic consciousness as it is reflected in the patterns of his narrative. Alberti weaves two exiles into one, projecting his sense of perpetual displacement,⁷ as he remembers the museum in 1942 (at the end of Book I) and again in 1954 (at the beginning of Book II). The division between Books I and II becomes a textual sign of both his feeling of severance and of the twelve-year lapse during which *A la pintura* was conceived.

Given this background, it is all the more important that “1917” should be the title of *A la pintura*'s first poem. The poem serves as a programmatic introduction in that it establishes the conceptual framework by which we process the book as a unit. That framework, which is grounded in Alberti's experience of remembrance and introspection, reveals *A la pintura* as emerging from the same consciousness patterned in the narrative discourse of *La arboleda perdida*, Books I and II. This is suggested by the title and explained in the following passage, where Alberti subordinates his past yearning for the south (“yo tenía / pinares en los ojos y alta mar todavía”) to an immediate nostalgia of a different order:

la ilusión de soñarme un olvidado
 Alberti en los rincones del Museo del Prado;
 la sorprendente, agónica, desvelada alegría
 de buscar la Pintura y hallar la Poesía,
 con la pena enterrada de enterrar el dolor
 de nacer un poeta por morir un pintor,

hoy distantes me llevan, y en verso *remordido*,
a decirte, ¡oh Pintura!, mi *amor interrumpido*. (Poesía [1924-1967] 964)⁸

As suggested here, Alberti's poetic impulse is motivated by a "remordimiento" or unfulfilled desire to paint, that is, by a void that parallels his remove from Spain which is barely alluded to ("hoy distantes"). Given that he began the book in 1945, explicit references to the war or to his emotional state thereafter are conspicuously absent. They figure as a "pena enterrada," a silenced breach between the two poles—past images, present words—of his "amor interrumpido."

So rather than specify his desire for roots, Alberti disguises that desire as a nostalgia for painting and the *Prado*. The *Prado* forms the second important link between *A la pintura* and *La arboleda perdida*. Like *1917*, it is developed in the autobiography in ways that guide our understanding of Alberti's poetry. In passages concerning the Civil War, for example, the author prefers remembering his work evacuating paintings in the Prado rather than his activities on the street as the so-called "poeta de la calle."⁹ In later installments (written in 1977) he describes the end of thirty-eight years of exile as a return to the Prado—which he calls his "casa" or "vivienda" (*LAP* 2:76, 77)—as he remembers the nostalgia he felt in 1945 for the museum that brought him solace in 1917.¹⁰

The *Prado* may thereby be taken as a sign of integrity and belonging in *La arboleda perdida* in opposition to the separation and void that Alberti associates with *1917*. This opposition is fundamental to *A la pintura* as well, since the book portrays the author returning to the museum in his memory, figuratively speaking, to "copy" in poetry the same paintings that he copied on canvas as a teenager.¹¹ The act of copying, in both instances a gesture of self-affirmation in a time of psychological duress, is effected in the second case by means of ekphrasis, a technique that acquires special meaning, as I intend to show, when employed by the exiled autobiographer.¹²

To clarify, we turn to certain theories of ekphrastic poetry that will serve to structure our analysis of *A la pintura*. Murray Krieger emphasizes the visual effects of this technique, arguing that poets have traditionally described images painted on hollow objects—shields, jars, and urns, for example—in order to "call attention to the poetic function of words as substantive entities. In doing so, they seem to "still" what is inherently temporal, rendering their subject both immobile ('to still' as a verb) and eternal ('still' as an adverb) (Krieger 105-28). They endow their language with a

semblance of plasticity that is *metaphoric* by nature and that begins in *A la pintura*, with the subtitle "poema del color y la línea," where Alberti emphasizes the integral and cognitive aspect of this poema" composed of and dedicated to the visual properties of painting. Alberti's key for achieving these effects is the *Prado*. The museum is presented in "1917" as the empirical reality in which the poems are referentially grounded, where language's "comas" and "puntos" give voice to painting's "flores" and "hojas" (689, 690).¹³ As we shall see in the first stage of our analysis, the museum is our prime tool for perceiving *A la pintura*'s unity as *metaphor*, that is, as a picture gallery of poems.¹⁴

Equally important is the fact that, in ekphrasis, words aspire to imitate what they are not and cannot be. As such, ekphrasis may be viewed as the textual correlative of a hope of "overcoming what cannot be overcome," as W.J.T. Mitchell contends,¹⁵ of the author's desire to bridge the insurmountable distance between two poles, as Alberti would have it, of an "amor interrumpido." This notion will govern the second stage of our analysis, where we shift focus from the so-called "gallery" to its relationship with the artist, the latter made patent through his self-proclaimed "ilusión" and "alegría." In this shift we pass "from the mimesis level" of poetry, that of the *metaphoric* conception of Alberti's book as a Prado in poems, "into the higher level of significance"¹⁶ where the "paintings," taken as a poetic mask, represent through *metonymy* the artist himself. We thereby come to envision the interplay of the tropes that are fundamental to the artistic unity of *A la pintura*.

II. Metaphor

One of the most striking features of *A la pintura* concerns the way in which its poems coalesce as a unit. Their unity results from an intricate network of visual and acoustic links that elicits our perception of the book as a well-wrought "substantive entity," a picture gallery in words. The network also reveals the profound importance of such formal principles as contiguity, order, and frequency for our seeing the book as metaphor.

The following chart will help to clarify this point. As can be seen, three types of poems appear in *A la pintura* and recur at more or less regular intervals. They are sonnets, color poems, and poems dedicated to specific painters. The first group treats the tools and properties of painting and defines a thematic progression that leads from the concrete to the abstract.

The second renders this progression chromatically, the third chronologically. Poems in the last group are keyed to those of the first two by various means. "Leonardo" and "Azul" are linked through the use of celestial imagery, for instance, "Rojo" recalls the scarlet imagery in "Tiziano" and anticipates the alliterative [rr] in "Tintoretto," whereas linearity is emphasized in "El Bosco," a poem that is paired with "A la línea."

Rafael Alberti, *A la pintura (poema del color y la línea)*¹⁷

number	color sonnet	painter	edition	thematic progression
["1917"]			2	[Introduction]
	"A la pintura"		1	The totality of painting
1.		"Giotto" (1276-1337)	2	
II	"A la retina"		2	
3.		"Piero de la Francesca" (1420-1492)	2	The artist
IV	"A la mano"		2	
5.		"Botticelli" (1444-1510)	2	
VI	"A la paleta"		2	
7.		"Leonardo" (1452-1519)	1	
	"AZUL"		2	
8.		"Miguel Angel" (1475-1564)	2	
IX	"A la pintura mural"		2	The materials of painting
10.		"Rafael" (1483-1520)	2	
XI	"Al lienzo"		2	
12.		"Tiziano" (1477-1576)	2	
	"ROJO"		2	
13.		"Tintoretto" (1518-1594)	2	
XIV	"Al pincel"		1	
15.		"Veronés" (1528-88)	1	
XVI	"A la línea"		1	
17.		"El Bosco" (1453-1516)	2	
XVIII	"A la perspectiva"		1	
19.		"Durero" (1471-1528)	2	
	"AMARILLO"		2	The techniques of painting
20.		"Rubens" (1577-1640)	1	
XXI	"Al claroscuro"		2	
22.		"Rembrandt" (1606-1669)	2	
XXIII	"A la composición"		2	
24.		"Poussin" (1594-1665)	2	
	"VERDE"		2	
25.		"Pedro Berruguete" (1450-1503)	2	
XXVI	"Al color"		1	
27.		"El Greco" (1548-1614)	1	
XXVIII	"Al ropaje"		2	
29.		"Zurbarán" (1598-1660)	2	
XXX	"A la luz"		1	The painted image: from the concrete . . .
31.		"Velázquez" (1599-1660)	2	
XXXII	"A la sombra"		2	
33.		"Valdés Leal" (1622-1690)	2	
	"NEGRO"		2	
34.		"Goya" (1746-1828)	1	
35.		"Corot" (1796-1875)	3	
XXXVI	"Al movimiento"		2	

37.		"Delacroix" (1779-1863)	2	
XXXVIII	"Al desnudo"		2	
39.		"Cezanne" (1839-1906)	2	
XL	"A la gracia"		2	. . . to the abstract
41.		"Renoir" (1841-1919)	2	
	"BLANCO"		2	
42.		"Gauguin" (1849-1903)	3	
43.		"Van Gogh" (1853-1890)	2	
XLIV	"A la acuarela"		2	
45.		"Gutiérrez Solana" (1886-1945)	2	
46.		"Miró" (1893-1983)	4	
XLVII	"A la divina proporción"		2	The totality of painting
48.		"Picasso" (1881-1976)	1	

Within each group of poems a degree of uniformity may be defined that contributes further to the metaphoric unity of the collection. The uniformity of the sonnets is primarily structural and corresponds to the pattern visible in "A la paleta":

A ti, infinita *haz*, *campo* sembrado
 donde siega el pincel, *gavilla*, amasa
 y, entre color, luces y sombras, pasa
 de mar radiante a tiempo anubarrado.

A ti, *pozo* y *brocal*, donde asomado
 medita, viene y va, mide, acompasa;
frente asida a la mano que traspasa
 tu ojo de Polifemo enamorado.

A ti, *abanico*, *ala* redonda, *escudo*,
espejo que al vestir queda desnudo
 y nuevamente superficie pura.

En ti se cuece la visión que nace.
 Tu firmamento el arcoiris pace.
 A ti, lecho y crisol de la Pintura. (701; italics mine)

A tripartite organization may be observed here that is standard in the sonnets of *A la pintura*. The first section (vv. 1-11) is defined by the anaphora "A ti" and by its attendant metaphors (italicized) that refer to the subject named in the title (in this case, the palette). The suppression of the predicate evokes a sense of plasticity in contrast to the conceptual tone of the second part, which is formed by complete sentences (vv. 12-13).

Rhythmically, this part creates a reflective pause that yields ultimately to the third (v. 14), where the rhetorical force of the first section (apostrophe, personification, periphrasis, metaphor) is condensed into a one-line envoy.

By adhering to this internal pattern, the sonnets exemplify one of the major precepts of *A la pintura*'s formal design, that of the correlation of the part to the whole. As the envoy shows, this correlation is fundamental for Alberti's ekphrastic scheme. In what constitutes a singularly important moment in the book, elements like the palette, refracted in the first section of each sonnet into a multiplicity of images, are unified under the generic aegis of painting ("A ti . . . Pintura"), much as the language of each specific sonnet is made to conform to a standard literary mold. Language and imagery are thus aligned as parallel hierarchies conjoined by their common metaphor: poetry equals painting.

A similar pattern may be identified in the poems dedicated to painters since in them Alberti employs a variety of techniques for one purpose: that of eliciting a sense of plasticity in language. Repetition creates a "simétrico orden" that imitates Giotto's "recta arquitectura" (696), dialogue reminds us of the dialectical interplay of art and life in paintings by Velázquez, short lines that seem to "arremolinarse" effect the "demencia en amarillo" of Van Gogh's "pincel cuchillo" (786). Perhaps most interesting is the line of words that

. . . se dispara
 recta
 curva
 zig-zag

reflecting playfully the linear imagery in paintings by Miro (791). Whereas these examples demonstrate Alberti's understanding of the poems as iconographic artifacts, they also recall the "liricografías" that he designed while writing *A la pintura*.¹⁸ Like those prints, Alberti's poetry documents his belief in literature's capacity to transcend the semantic or referential level of discourse (description, connotation, or denotation) and thereby overlap with painting on the semiotic plane of artistic communication.

If such formal elements as order, contiguity, and repetition contribute to the book's metaphoric impact as icon, the same may be said of rhyme and rhythm. The examples here resemble synesthesia for their effect—audible schemes are intended to evoke a visual impression—and are noteworthy in that they literally give "voice and language to the mute art object" (Hag-

strum). Hence, the liquid and sibilant phonemes in "Botticelli" combine with enjambment to express Venus's "gracia que vuela" (701). A "descompasado orden" is reinforced by numerous cases of antithesis and oxymoron in "El Greco" ("líquido/rayo," 'vaho [que] achicharra,' 'lumbre [que] hiela,' 'bellos feos,' 'horribles hermosísimos') to intensify our sense of the painter's "lagrimal torcido" (752-54). "El Bosco" is cast appropriately in a fast and playfully inventive rhythm, "Durero" in a heavy, meditative "tristeza del estilo / sin pausa que burila" (733).

Alliteration defines a special type of rhyme that is employed with unusual frequency for the same effects.¹⁹ The repetition of hard consonants ([c] and [d/t]) in "Piero della Francesca" and of the trilled [rr] in "Tintoretto," which is onomatopoeic, establishes a correlation between the painted image (the former's architectural style, the latter's "cielos rotos," 725) and the poetic discourse. Particularly important in this regard is the repetition of those phonemes keyed to the painter's name or vocation. This occurs in "Durero" ('nocturno,' 'escritura,' 733), "Goya" ('horror'-pintor,' 773), "Miró" ("Oh de la O / de MirO / Todo en el mundo es O," 791), and "Tiziano." In the latter, the pervasive [or]—"se dora," 'sonoro,' 'oro,' 'Amores,' 'flores,' 'color,' etc.—veils the poem in a chromatism that is appropriate for this painter and that culminates in a final reference to his birthplace, 'Piave di Cadore' (719-20).

"Tiziano" reveals most dramatically what is implied generally by all such examples. Our attention is directed here beyond the metaphoric dimension of the poem as painting to the underlying metonymic correlation of the work of art and its creator. The same link is implied, for example, in "Miguel Angel's" "*mármol del mar*" (715), where a sign that for Alberti is inherently autobiographic (De Melesi, 181-212) is used to suggest the persistence of the sculptor in the stone that he once carved. "Vida" and "Velázquez" are interrelated similarly by a play on the words "alma" and "almo," the "almo cuerpo diluido" (757, 763) showing the endurance on canvas of the painter's "vivified" spirit.

Given the role of hierarchies in *A la pintura*, one might ascribe the status of prototype to the phonetic link established in "1917" (689-94) between the "pintor-poeta," his "pintura-poema," and such key elements as the "Prado," "pincel," "paleta," and, by implication, the "pluma." Of similar value is the image of the poet himself, the docent who guides us through the Prado in the third section of that poem. The tour, a microcosm of what follows, begins when Alberti positions himself symbolically before the most revered sign of Western art: "Mi mano y Venus frente a frente

. . . . Mis recatados ojos agrestes y marinos / se hundieron en los blancos cuerpos grecolatinos" (692). The image of the poet in the immediate time frame is thus projected as the point of synthesis for a community of artists that spans six centuries of history. As occurs in *La arboleda perdida*, where narrative patterns suggest a confluence of past and present, a dialectic is established in *A la pintura* between the artist and his avatars that conditions the reader to view the former as a living palimpsest through which tradition—as we shall now see—is embodied and regenerated.²⁰

III. Metonymy

Poems to color are fundamental in this regard. Colors are uniformly treated according to a scale of values that is both temporal and chromatic. "Amarillo" reflects hues of green, orange, pink, or ivory, depending on the time of day, season of the year, or period of history in which it appears. "Verde" can be rendered "ojival" in relation to the Middle Ages, "flamenco" in "Breughel," "agonico," "popular," or "lavado" when treating El Greco, Goya, and the Impressionists (745-50). "Rojo's" terse statement—"Soy el primer color de la mañana / y el último del día" (720) recapitulates a precept that is implicit in the book's format: one color, all color; one moment, all history; one poem, the entire book.

History is thus subjected to the prism-like effect of the color poems, refracted into stages that we are prompted to reintegrate as a whole. As mentioned, the sonnets invite us to do so by their arrangement as a progression toward the abstract (see chart). The color poems are ordered, similarly, as an evolution toward the absolute. Hence "Negro," the penultimate poem, represents the absolute presence of all color and the absorption of all light, whereas "Blanco," the last, designates the total absence of color and complete reflection of light. Yet in the final analysis, the notions of the abstract and of the absolute are superseded in their role by that of the poet himself as the *terminus ad quem* of the book's progression.

This is primarily evident in the painter poems which are keyed thematically to the adjacent sonnets and organized into three phases. The first corresponds to Italian Medieval and Renaissance painters and is dedicated to the conception and realization of art. The sonnets "A la retina" and "A la mano," preeminent by position, designate the basis of the aesthetic experience (perception and realization); the others treat the in-

struments (the palette, the brush) and place (the canvas and mural) of painting.

We move from the extrinsic ("Al pincel") to the intrinsic ("A la línea") elements of painting in passing from the Italian primitives to Spanish and Northern European masters of the Renaissance and Baroque periods. In this second phase, the sonnets draw our attention to visual properties and are arranged in two parallel progressions: line-perspective-*chiaroscuro*-composition (Germanic); color-*ropaje*-light-shadow (Spanish). Each group proceeds from the concrete to the ethereal in anticipation of the book's third phase, which is characterized by "naked" ("Al desnudo") or abstract elements ("Al movimiento," "A la gracia," "A la divina proporción") and which corresponds to nineteenth- and twentieth-century Spanish and French painting.

The evolutionary dimension signaled by this arrangement is echoed internally in the painter poems in two key ways: by the motif of *light* and by signs of *subjectivity*. Alberti treats light as the creator of vision and the primal cause of the aesthetic experience. He introduces it as such in the second sonnet—the retina is called the "niña de luz"—and in poems to Baroque painters: in Rubens's "rayos" and "relampagos," passion incarnate (739), and in Zurbarán's creative light that "en los huesos determina / y con la sombra cómplice construye" (755). The recurrence of this motif reveals light-consciousness to be ascendant in the Western tradition, a process that culminates in a medium ("A la acuarela"), a color (white, the absolute reflection of all light), movements (French Impressionism, twentieth-century abstract art), and images that connote the dissolution of volume realized, in the modernist era, through the diffusion of light. Light appears ultimately to be autonomous from matter, foregrounded as a subject in and of itself for both painting and poetry.

Just as light displaces matter, thereby drawing our attention to the sense of vacuity signaled by modernist imagery, subjectivity moves it beyond self-consciousness toward the abstract, intrasubjective realm of interpretation. In the initial sonnets, this realm is configured by the two poles of the aesthetic experience, the creative "hand" and the interpretive "eye." In "Tintoretto," it corresponds to the first-person narrator whose voice, in "Velázquez," becomes that of the hollow spaces that "fill" the painter's canvas: "Yo me entré—soy el aire—en el cuadrado / abierto de las telas" (759). By the time we reach the modernists, subjectivity becomes all-encompassing. In "Miró," it is delineated by a "tú" and "yo" that supplant the "hand" and "eye" of earlier poems, and it is reinforced through

iconography, Alberti's means of flaunting poetry's value as semiotic artifact (a signal, a message) that bonds the sender and receiver (791-792):²¹

Signos

Persiste el OJO

Mujer

Te enamoro y escribo

con pajaros y estrellas . . .

T U

A E I O U

Y O

A E I U O

This intrasubjective realm of messages is foregrounded as well in "Picasso," where Alberti proclaims the autonomy of modernist art as *opera aperta* for the same intents. He does so by means of the bull, the self-producing art object that prevails over the subject,

Aquí el toro torea a veces al torero.

Es el toro quien teme la cogida.

Con las astas dibuja. (796)

and in the poem's (and book's) final line—" . . . Y aquí el juego del arte comienza a ser un juego explosivo" (797)—suggesting that art *begins* where the artifact ends, that is, in the response it produces.

As an ending, this statement shows our reading to have progressed toward the type of art that *A la pintura* is: modernist, sign-based, and reader-oriented. The work surveys the history of Western aesthetics as it exemplifies the consequences of that history. It models the very historical process of which it is itself a product.

Such a revelation points ultimately to important notions concerning intertextuality that are implicit in this work. Poetry is likened *metaphorically* to painting for the traditions they share, whereas painting is represented by *metonymy* as an extension of the artist. Intertextuality is thereby transferred to the human plane, where the various examples of self-representation in painting coalesce into an expression of the poet's awareness of himself as a composite of those who have gone before him. Still to be studied are Alberti's means of achieving these effects and the extent to

which his self-awareness conditions our perceiving the unitary nature of *A la pintura*.

IV. *A la pintura* as autobiography

The *hand* and *eye* appear as primary motifs in *A la pintura* and are essential for these intents. As mentioned, they are presented as synecdoches for the poet himself in "1917." Elsewhere Alberti uses them to equate his own self-consciousness with Leonardo's, whose hand and eye are his scalpel and microscope, and with Michelangelo's, whose skyward-gazing cupola is a "blanco ciclope / furioso, en el azul tendiendo arcos" (714). Yet not until "Corot" do these motifs exhibit the degree of self-consciousness that prevails in the introductory poem.

"Corot" begins with Alberti addressing the painter in the second-person singular. The pronoun "tú" is to the poem what Corot's nature scenes are to painting, a sign of the artist's "alma evaporada" that permeates his art. This becomes apparent in the final verses, where we learn that the link between art and the artist applies not only to the painter, but also to the poet, who uses Corot's art to define the scope of his own vision and desire:

Viera yo por los ojos tranquilos de tus puentes
el fluir encantado de la vida,
viera desde tus montes y valles inocentes
mi arboleda perdida. (774)

Alberti uses this reference to the "arboleda perdida" to portray artistic creativity as a harmonious "fluir encantado" that is based on the art of seeing and that conjoins the painter and his painting on the one hand, artists of different media and periods on the other.²²

Examples like these sensitize the reader to the self-consciousness implicit in an array of parallel clues. The reference "Rafael tenía alas" applies equally to the Umbrian painter, to the archangel, and to the author of *Sobre los ángeles*. The first-person narrator in "Velázquez" enters the Prado Museum "por la puerta de tus cuadros," thereby reenacting the poet's "entrance" into the same space in "1917." Yet no facet of the book conveys this frame of mind more uniformly nor with greater sensitivity than the color *blue*.

Blue is the most frequently mentioned of all colors, appearing not only in poems adjacent to “Azul” but wherever the slightest pretext exists for evoking it. Moreover, it is signaled by elements that are usually associated with the autobiographic impulse in Alberti’s poetry: namely, the *angels* that are the poet’s medium for representing the diverse phases of his own personality in *Sobre los ángles* (1928); the *sea*, a sign of the poet’s nostalgia as early as *Marinero en Tierra* (1924); and his *blue eyes* that are compared with the Mediterranean in that same book.

As mentioned, chromatics is generally important in *A la pintura*, yet it acquires special meaning with respect to *blue*. *Blue* is closely related to white, as suggested by the second line of “Picasso”—“Azul, blanco, añil” (794)—where one literally brackets the other, and as a framing device that makes our progression from the first (“Azul”) to the last (“Blanco”) seem like something of a return to origins. “Blanco” includes images of the “Blanco de Creta” which is “casi azul,” the white “arco ágil de un potro” set off against a blue sky, and the white foam on the blue sea (780-84). “Azul” opens with biblical overtones—“Llegó el azul. Y se pintó su tiempo” (704)—and includes symbols of creation—Venus, the sea, and the dove—that recur in “Blanco.”

By linking creation and self-consciousness, these colors convey to the reader the sense that Alberti’s “poema” extends between two intensely self-generative poles. This notion is reinforced by the fact that the poet names himself only at the beginning and end of the book, in “1917” and in “Blanco.” References to the “Blanco de Creta” and “Blanco Cádiz” are invoked for similar effects. These alliterative place names add a geographic and historical dimension to the poles of a textual symmetry, denoting a certain continuity between the ancient and modern, Greece and Andalucía, while suggesting a time and space correspondence based on synecdoche between the poet’s book and his world: emanating from the book is the voice of a universe in miniature.²³

In this regard, it is highly significant that Alberti should dedicate the final poem and entire book to the Spanish painter whose minotaurs reflect this very continuity. Everything in “Picasso” is designed to highlight their shared cultural heritage. The poem begins with the word “MALAGA,” the painter’s birthplace; it includes symbols of Spain, the guitar and bull, and seven lines that end in “-aña,” rhyming playfully with “todo lo que suena y consuena / contigo España, España” (794). For these compatriots in exile, Spain is the quintessential “tú” from which their “yo” derives its profile.

The *eyes* and the *sea* are equally important in this regard. As autobiog-

raphic motifs, they serve to frame the book internally and suggest, once again, the fusion of the painter and his art. Thus, an image from the first sonnet, the “mar de la paleta,” that recurs in “Azul”—“el mar invade a veces la paleta del pintor” (708)—reappears in “Picasso” in the symbolic gesture of the painter casting his *eyes* into the *sea* to form a *palette* (795).

The crucial element in this final poem, however, is Alberti’s aesthetic affinity with the painter. This affinity is based on their common goal of problematizing the relationship between the “sister arts.” It is also shown to encompass yet another Spaniard, Goya, whose *Caprichos*, which render graphically the lyrical force of Quevedo’s *Sueños*, are invoked by the line: “¡Oh monstruos, razón de la pintura, / sueño de la poesía!” (796).²⁴ The statement reenforces the cultural basis for Alberti’s sense of identification with these artists while it anticipates his treatment of Picasso’s style as inherently logocentric:

Arabescos. Revelaciones
Canta el *color* con otra ortografía
y la mano dispara una nueva *escritura*.
(797; italics mine)

We thereby return to the marriage of *color* and *línea* suggested by the book’s subtitle, as Alberti places himself at the receiving end of a cultural heritage. That heritage is characterized by a common faith in the communicative power of word-oriented painting and image-based poetry, a power that is enhanced once the artist transgresses the conventional boundaries of his medium.²⁵

A sense of closure is apparent in “Picasso” that is the subject of the final sonnet, “A la divina proporción,” and that makes the pairing of these poems at the book’s end all the more significant. The sonnet is conclusive to the extent that it draws our attention toward the cognitive and unitary value of the book, as introduced in the subtitle. Hence, “divine proportion” is a “cárcel feliz de la retina,” which takes us back to the second sonnet (“A la retina”), and a “clausura viva,” “Universo armónico,” and “dodecaedro azul.” As *metaphors*, these images elicit our perception of the work as a “substantive entity” or gallery of paintings in poetry founded on the “harmonious” interplay of its poems. They also recall the working of *metonymy* in a book that is a “universe” in miniature, in which the general is represented by the particular, the book is modeled by each poem,

and tradition is reflected as the moment in time lived by the poet who embodies his community.

Yet *A la pintura's* "clausura" is explicitly "divina" and, as we have seen, is reflected primarily by motifs that convey the poet's self-awareness. This leads us to view Alberti's commitment to ekphrasis in exile as logical and significant, motivated as it is by the "ilusión" and "alegría" that culminate in the last poems. For in praising Picasso, Alberti pays homage to life and to art simultaneously by conceiving of them as he configures his book: as a "clausura divina." As such, life and art are conjoined under the sign—the circle—shared by those objects—shields jars, and urns—that, as noted earlier, have traditionally been the subject of ekphrastic poetry. The urn seems most pertinent for concluding, since it "is especially created to celebrate the teasing doctrine of circularity" by which the empirical is transformed into archetype, movement is captured and at the same time overcome.²⁶ Through its urn-like configuration *A la pintura* liberates the poet from the monotony and confinement that typify the émigré's time-and space-consciousness.²⁷ The book is Alberti's life-affirming mask devised to hide the ashes of a "pena enterrada," to represent his self-awareness through poetic design, to "still" the poet in art.

NOTES

1. See Pascal, 56-57.
2. Some Spanish exiles who wrote about their lives after the Civil War are: Arturo Barea, *La forja de un rebelde*; Francisco Ayala, *Recuerdos y olvidos*; José Moreno Villa, *Vida en claro*; and Ramón Sender, in his pseudo-autobiography *Crónica del alba*. Pablo Neruda's treatment of the effect of the war on this generation of writers is exemplary: "No ha habido en la historia intelectual una esencia tan fértil para los poetas como la guerra española. La sangre española ejerció un magnetismo que hizo temblar la poesía de una gran época" (180); "Aunque el carnet militante lo recibí mucho más tarde en Chile, cuando ingresé oficialmente al partido, creo haberme definido ante mí mismo como un comunista durante la guerra de España" (191).
3. Section I of the "Libro primero" includes a reference to "*esta noche llovida de guerra . . . desde Madrid*" (28). In Section II Alberti states explicitly that he writes "*en París . . . Día seis de octubre. La guerra, otra vez*" (45). Later, he mentions his dismissal from his post at Radio-Mondiale (Paris), a decision made in the Spring of 1940 while Pétain was ambassador to Spain and the Nazis were advancing on Paris

(71-73). And finally, writing from Argentina, he dates the final entries in the "Libro primero" by referring to Germany's attack on the Soviet Union (84).

4. In one instance Alberti asks: "¿Qué llevo hecho en estos meses? ¿Qué he producido? Apenas nada. Sólo he visto morir de hambre y persecución a muchos buenos españoles y alejarse de las costas de Europa a muy buenos amigos" (46).

5. For lists of the various exhibits of Alberti's artwork organized in Uruguay and Argentina during his South American exile (1946-63), see: González Martín, "Alberti" 1, 12-13; "Biographical Sketch," 7-19; and "A Partial Checklist," 192. Alberti himself discusses these exhibits and his related interest in "poesía visiva" in *La arboleda perdida* 1: 176-81.

6. *Pleamar* (1942-1944), *Retornos de lo vivo lejano* (1948-1956), and *Baladas y canciones del Paraná* (1953-1954).

7. For similar conclusion, see Bellver and Salinas de Marichal ("Los paraísos de Rafael Alberti" and *El mundo poético*).

8. Citations hereafter correspond to the edition included in this volume (661-797) which is the final version of *A la pintura* prepared while Alberti was still in exile. The latest edition of the work (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1989), although slightly expanded and modified, falls beyond the historical scope of this study, that is, the period of Alberti's exile.

9. We may compare this fact with Pablo Neruda's recollection of the Andalusian poet: "Yo conocí a Rafael Alberti en las calles de Madrid con camisa azul y corbata colorada. Lo conocí militante del pueblo cuando no había muchos poetas que ejercieran ese difícil destino" (193).

10. "Cuando después de casi treinta y nueve años de exilio pude regresar a España, al llegar a Madrid lo primero que hice como lo había hecho en 1917, fue correr al Museo del Prado" (2:79); "En 1945, año en que terminó la segunda guerra mundial, sentí que me golpeaba fuertemente mi primera vocación, porque sobre todo, la nostalgia del Museo del Prado, en donde había vivido mis más jóvenes años, se me concretó en un libro de poemas titulado *A la pintura*" (2:177).

11. Alberti explains his decision to write *A la pintura* in a conversation with J.P. González: "Luego, cuando volví a las andadas, que fue cuando hice el libro *A la pintura*, entonces, para comprobar una serie de cosas y de lo que yo hablaba, porque hablo de las técnicas, hablo de los colores y de diversas cosas, pues volví a ensayar a pintar y sobre todo a ensayar los colores para hacer los poemas, etc., y, teniendo una inmensa nostalgia, se puede decir, de mi primera vocación, que siempre me ha estado golpeando a la puerta, pero consideraba que no tenía tiempo, con la guerra y la vida vagabunda casi que hemos llevado, me era imposible. . . . Entonces empecé a dibujar. Yo soy mucho más un gráfico que un pintor de cuadros, que nunca hago, ¿verdad? Entonces se me ocurrió la idea de ligar casi siempre la poesía a la gráfica y

esto me dio un gran resultado. Si a mí, cuando tenía veintidós años, veintitrés, se me hubiera ocurrido eso, hubiera podido hacer las dos cosas y no hubiera sufrido el bache tan grande del año veinticuatro casi al cuarenta y cinco o cuarenta y seis, en que volví" ("Alberti y la pintura," 12).

12. For more studies of the relationship between painting and Alberti's poetry, see Winkelmann, Zardoya, Sieber, González, Areal, and Manteiga.

13. In this sense, Alberti's treatment of ekphrasis conforms to classical norms, as stipulated by Jean Hagstrum: "I use the noun 'ekphrasis' and the adjective 'ekphrastic' in a more limited sense to refer to that special quality of giving voice and language to the otherwise mute art object.... My usage is etymologically sound since the Greek noun and adjective come from *ekphrazein*..., which means 'to speak out,' 'to tell in full' " (18, n. 34). For an objection to the limited scope of Hagstrum's interpretation, see Krieger, 108.

14. Since we are dealing with the Prado as a literary construct, the fact that some of Alberti's poems treat painters not actually represented in the museum is of no consequence.

15. See Mitchell, "Ekphrasis and the Other," and *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*, 99, where he acknowledges his debt to Steiner.

16. This is the process of "semiosis" as explained by Riffaterre, 4.

17. The "Nuevos poemas," included at the end of the 1953 edition, are not studied here since they remain marginal to the patterns and meaning of the main collection. The Arabic and Roman numerals to the left are Alberti's and correspond to the final version of *A la pintura* (Aguilar, 1968). The poet emphasizes the programmatic nature of "1917" and the first sonnet, "A la pintura," by not assigning numerals to these poems. The dates in parenthesis next to the painter's name are mine and are intended to clarify the book's chronological organization. The edition in which each poem first appears is marked in the second column from the right, as follows: (1): *A la pintura: cantata de la línea y del color* (1945); (2) *A la pintura: poema del color y la línea* (1945-1948) (1948); (3) *A la pintura: poema del color y la línea* (1945-1952) (1953); (4) *A la pintura: poema del color y la línea* (1945-1967) (1968). Other than the addition of poems, the only other changes in *A la pintura* are reflected in the subtitle: the substitution of "poema" for "cantata" in the 1948 edition; the change of dates in parenthesis, corresponding to the span of his life covered by each edition. Finally, we should note that some have taken the 1948 edition as the "organic" *A la pintura* (e.g. Luis Monguió, "Rafael Alberti: Poetry and Painting"). Their decision seems based on the perfect balance and symmetry of that edition as reflected by the regular frequency in which each type of poem recurs. In focusing on the book in relation to his autobiography, and since Alberti worked on *A la pintura* and *La ar-*

boleda perdida in intermittent stages for the duration of his exile in Argentina, I view the “organic” edition as the book in the making between 1945 and 1967.

18. González Martín mentions the following exhibits (“Alberti,” 12), all of which coincide with Alberti’s work on *A la pintura*: “la de libros y autógrafos con dibujos en el Salón ‘Arte Bella’ de Montevideo (1947), la de poemas autógrafos en la Galería ‘Plástica’ de Buenos Aires (1950), la de *Liricografías* en la Galería ‘Vian’ de Buenos Aires (1951) y la de cuadros y *Liricografías* en la misma Galería en 1952.” Of particular interest here is the book *Diez liricografías*, that contains ten plates, eight of which are sketches and two “poemas caligrafiados, en colores.” Concerning these exhibits, Alberti states the following: “Hice muchas exposiciones en la Argentina y el Uruguay, con excelentes resultados, escribiendo, a veces, brevísimos poemas, para adaptarlos a mi estilo liricográfico. Era ya, aunque yo no lo pretendiera expresamente, un autor de *poesía visiva*, que tanto se llegó a cultivar, más que nunca, en la posguerra” (*La arboleda perdida*, 2:177).

19. On this matter, see Rius.

20. For its gallery-like structure, *A la pintura* may be compared with Alberti’s *Imagen primera de...* published the same year as the first edition of the book of poems. In *Imagen primera de...*, the poet describes friends and fellow intellectuals from his past. Like *A la pintura* and *La arboleda perdida*, it suggests a correlation between the writer and his community based on remembrance.

21. Besides the “Nuevos poemas,” “Miró” (added in 1968) is the only poem added to *A la pintura* after 1953 while Alberti was still in exile. This helps to explain the poem’s unusual verse structure, undoubtedly the result of the poet’s prolonged involvement with the graphic arts. We should also note the similarities—on the iconographic/semiotic plane—between “Miró” and Alberti’s “El lirismo del alfabeto,” a collection of prints exhibited in a show called “La palabra y el signo” four years after the poem’s publication. Alberti explains in *La arboleda perdida* (2:180-81) that he attended the exhibit’s opening accompanied by the Catalan painter. His ongoing devotion to that painter is manifested by the recent publication of Alberti’s *Maravillas con variaciones acrósticas en el jardín de Miró* (1975), in the 1989 edition of *A la pintura*.

22. “Corot” also receives special status as one of the two poems added to the main part of *A la pintura* in the 1953 edition, the other being “Gauguin.”

23. In *La arboleda perdida*, references to “blanco” and “azul” abound. In 1954, Alberti began writing the “Libro segundo” by remembering the “Libro primero” as “*el de mis blancos azulados años de mi infancia andaluza*” (1:97). Even more important is the following statement, which treats explicitly the relationship between self-discovery and painting: “[Tiépolo] más que nadie, por su sentido perfilado de lo luminoso, me hizo confirmar luego, de manera definitiva, la pertenencia de mis

raíces a las civilizaciones de lo azul y lo blanco, eso que había bebido desde niño en las fachadas populares, los marcos de las puertas y ventanas de los pueblos de mi bahía, sombreados por aquel azul traslucido que nos viene de los frescos de Creta, pasando por Italia, azulando todo el litoral mediterráneo español hasta los pueblos gaditanos del Atlántico, siguiendo su viaje Huelva arriba hacia los confines de Portugal" (1:103).

24. In *La arboleda perdida*, Goya is singularly important and is treated in ways that recall *A la pintura*. He is associated with black and white: "Goya y toda la España que le tocó representar eran realmente: un inmenso ruedo taurino partido con violencia en dos colores: negro y blanco. Blanco de sol y lozanía. Negro hondo de sombra, de negra sangre coagulada" (106). He is the painter who has best understood "... esa desventurada España suya, tan semejante todavía —¡ay!— a la que ahora padecemos" (107). Most importantly, his style is described in literary terms: "La ortografía de Goya en muchas de estas mínimas leyendas era más que libérrima, teniéndose que buscar la exactitud de su lenguaje no en el de la palabra escrita, sino en el de la imagen dibujada. ¿Qué podían importarle a un hombre que poseía con el lápiz un medio de expresión tan genial los reglamentos de la gramática?" (106-07).

25. It is important to note that "Goya" and "Picasso," included in the 1945 edition, were among the first poems written for *A la pintura*. Identification with these artists thereby figures as a key factor in the conception of this work and a long-standing concern of the poet's.

26. See Krieger and Spitzer.

27. See Warner. Warner cites the study of J. Solanes, who uses the writings and letters of Spanish refugees to explain the émigré's subjective experience of time. See also Solanes.

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