

Robert Burton. *Una república poética*.

Trans. Ana Sáez Hidalgo. Colección Utopías. Madrid: Círculo de Bellas Artes, 2011. 126 pp. €10. ISBN: 978-84-87619-84-7.

This is a Spanish version of an extract from “Democritus Junior to the Reader” in Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* (73–107 of H. Jackson’s edition for Dent’s Everyman’s Library, 1932). Three previous versions, entitled *Anatomía de la melancolía*, exist in Spanish: a complete three-volume edition, published in Madrid by the Spanish Association for Neuropsychiatry (1997–2002), and two partial translations: a short one (151 pages) by Antonio Portnoy in Buenos Aires (Espasa-Calpe, 1947), and a wider selection (496 pages), with a prologue by Alberto Manguel, in Madrid (Alianza Editorial, 2006), which reproduces the translation from the previous three-volume edition.

Una república poética contains a preface by Fernando R. de la Flor — an expert in Baroque Spanish literature — entitled “Políticas del (en)sueño” (“Policies of a Dream,” 9–29), in which he describes the book as “a little gem of Baroque politology” (13) and discusses Burton’s utopian vision in relation to his contemporaries, making special reference to More, Bacon, and the *Leviathan*, but also (very

succinctly) to other English and European authors, such as John Barclay, James Harrington, Francisco de Quevedo, Trajano Boccalini, Valentin de Andrae, or Gabriel Naudé. He also alludes to Burton as prefiguring Offray de la Mettrie's *L'Homme Machine* (1745) in his conception of the human organism as a symbiosis of the body and an accurate mechanical artifact.

R. de la Flor's main contention is, however, that Burton's discourse of Utopia is tintured with a dreamlike quality and consists of two main issues or "movements." One is his negative view of human nature, which accounts for the frailties of the social and political body (23). He says that the only way out left for Burton is a sort of "Neverland" (26). In interpreting Burton's work like this, as well as in his final description of Burton as a sort of magical Prospero (he closes his preface with the quotation "we are such stuff as dreams are made on"), de la Flor misrepresents, to my mind, Burton's peculiarly realistic Utopia. Burton, in fact, rejects More's and Bacon's fantasy models and, fully aware of the condition of human nature, conforms himself to what is possible: "If it were possible, I would have such priests as should imitate Christ, charitable lawyers should love their neighbours as themselves, temperate and modest physicians, politicians contemn the world, philosophers should know themselves, noblemen live honestly, tradesmen leave lying and cozening, magistrates corruption, etc.; but this is imposible, I must get such as I may" (104–05). Other critics have certainly made particular reference to Burton's sense of practicality and realism (for instance, Ruth A. Fox, *The Tangled Chain: The Structure of Disorder in The Anatomy of Melancholy* [1976], 259–60; or Angus Gowland, *The Worlds of Renaissance Melancholy: Robert Burton in Context* [2006], 262–64). In a similar vein, the second "movement" de la Flor sees as crucial in Burton's *respublica literaria* is his refusal to contemplate the coup d'état or a revolution as a viable solution to the corruption of the state. For this critic, Burton takes refuge in his "dream metaphor" (27), a sort of imaginary and fantastic vision of his Utopia, and thus avoids getting into the early seventeenth-century debate on "real politics" (28).

Even if the reader would not fully agree with those remarks by R. de la Flor, this Spanish edition of Burton's *respublica poetica* is a work worthy of much praise and admiration, particularly for the faithful rendering of the complex original text. The translator, Ana Sáez Hidalgo, has made an excellent and thorough revision of her earlier version for the three-volume edition mentioned above, restituting all the Latin and Greek quotations, and providing detailed translations for all the references used by Burton (both in the text and in his notes), including those that he forgot to give. This makes the book a faithful, scholarly, and lively text to read, very elegantly edited (with very few misprints) and written in a clear and beautiful Spanish. A splendid introduction indeed, for those who read Spanish, to Robert Burton's utopian thought!

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