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**Nicanor Parra: The Physicist Who
Made a Significant Contribution to the
Literary World**

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An outsider can be said to be one who views the world differently and so lives life according to different rules. Nicanor Parra trained as a physicist and spent 51 years teaching physics and math in a Chilean university. Yet, throughout his entire life, Parra had poetic stirrings that traditional methods of writing poetry would not satisfy. Parra created the antipoetry movement as he rewrote the rules on producing poetry. This poet mocked his readers, he used vulgarity, sarcasm, irony, black humor, comedy, carnivalesque elements, and he made fun of God, religion, and societal institutions. He loved coining new words, throwing in capital letters in the middle of a poem, using nonsense words to rename common objects, and most of all he loved contradiction in terms as he delighted in creating confusion. Nicanor Parra read his poetry at a circus once and even had his poems printed up on postcards for public use. He also used sketches and illustrations as a backdrop for his poems. Many may have labeled him a genius, while others probably think him a madman. Nicanor Parra is alive today and is likely crackling with glee over the furor his antipoetry movement is still causing.

A Departure from Romantic Poetry in Tone and Presentation

Sonnet 116 by William Shakespeare is considered to be one of the most beautiful sonnets of all times. It is a poem of love and this composition set the standard for future poetry writers as it is considered to be the key example that every writer ought to follow.¹ Yet, it can be said that this poem has its challenges as love is illustrated, as being an undying element that does not change and that cannot be removed. The beauty and eloquence of the poem and the promise of unbreakable love is what every young soul wants to hear in words such as in the following lines:

¹ Parra sought to break all the standards of poetry and because of this he continues to receive much criticism today.

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove:
O no! It is an ever-fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken. (Shakespeare 245)

Yet, it is just this type of poetry from which Nicanor Parra chose to deviate completely as he rejected this style of writing and this notion of love. The dictionary states that a deviation is a form of, “conflict, depart, contradict and to differentiate” (Thesaurus 175). In order to be different, Parra committed every possible poetic sin in order to move away from the traditional form of writing poetry. He broke patterns of traditional poetry writing and he did so with relish. In the following verses from *Poemas y antipoemas* found in “Algo por el estilo,” Parra wrote, “PARRA SE RÍE como condenado/ ¡cuándo no se rieron los poetas!/ a lo menos declara que se ríe” (133). According to his caprice, Parra used capital letters, vulgarity, and humor to sustain the reader’s interest. In these lines Parra says he laughs like someone condemned and that all poets should at least say they are laughing even if it is not true.

According to Frank MacShane, Nicanor Parra has made enormous contributions to the antipoetry movement with his writing style and in the diverse ways by which the poet chose to present his work. MacShane indicated that when it was time for Nicanor Parra to present his work entitled, *Hojas de Parra*, the antipoet selected the most unusual place to present it, as it was exhibited as a collage of poems at a circus where he chose to read his poetry. He did not choose to read in an auditorium or classroom but in an unusual place, a setting that was more appropriate for carnivalesque performances and not for a literary reading (35). Analyzing the work of Nicanor Parra, Marjorie Agosín noted that Nicanor Parra has been a key poet who has influenced writers not only in Latin America, but also throughout the world and he even extended his influence to the Nobel Prize winner, Pablo Neruda (125). In analyzing the significance of Parra’s work, the editors of *Publisher Weekly* have pointed out that part of the importance of this antipoet’s work consists of the application of contradiction of terms as well as the demystification of poetry and that in some instances it comes very close to be graffiti-like such as the work presented in *Ecopoemas* (45). When Dave Oliphant studied the work of Nicanor Parra and of Vicente Huidobro he discovered the relationship that exists between these two poets, as this literary critic revealed that Parra created poetry by mocking some aspect of his society while employing elements of the quotidian life, and at the same time bringing the poet down from the lofty clouds to the common people (137).

The name of Nicanor Parra is well-known in literary circles not only for his iconoclastic style of writing but for his contributions to the field of poetry which in general created an atmosphere that was simplistic, yet controversial in nature. For instance, the speech that he wrote for the occasion of his acceptance of the Juan Rulfo Prize in 1991, started out with the bold statement, “I did not come prepared” and he pointed out that such a prize should have been awarded to the Mexican writer Juan Rulfo and not to him (Taylor). Studying the poetry of Chile, Hector Peña Díaz charges that the poetry of

Nicanor Parra along with that of Pablo Neruda, Gabriela Mistral, and Vicente Huidobro represent one of the highest pinnacles in literature, not only in Chile, but also throughout the world. He also adds that these poetic voices have been the fountain of inspiration for many new writers in Chile.² The book *Poemas y antipoemas* published in 1954 set the tone for postmodernism which sought to bring poetry to the masses, and so Parra filled it with the absurd, mockery, and black humor. The new verses that he created expressed the irony found in everyday life, the life of the underdog, and of the simple person. For instance, in the poem below it can be seen that the lyric voice describes the classroom in a grotesque manner; furthermore the reader can see the scars that are left on the face of the professor as time passes, 'How do you like my ragged face?' asks the lyric voice. The reader sees a negative picture, the mordancy and the cynicism of the world as the lyric voice states, 'Truly to see me inspires sadness!'. There are no happy moments in these verses as stark reality is what an antipoem highlights.

I teach in an obscure school,
I've lost my voice giving classes.
(After all or nothing
I put in 40 hours a week.)
How do you like my ragged face?
Truly to see me inspires sadness!
And what do you say of this rose rotting
From the dust of the flaking chalk. (157)

Many are the contributions that can be credited to Parra especially in his birth of antipoetry. Lawrence Olszewski has indicated that Parra has been the key proponent of the structurally innovative and thematically controversial poem thus, bringing new blood to this area of creative poetry and making this literary component a pivotal element in literature. This poet has encouraged readers to explore with words and to fear, 'la página en blanco' energizing the young to create, to think outside the box, and to write about the quotidian elements that surround the individual (145). The impact of Parra's work is pointed out in the article of William Rose Benet who saw the elements in *Poems and Antipoems* as clever devices used by Parra as he moved away from a traditional form of poetry which embraced a limp lyric voice to a more dynamic voice. Parra sought to create poetry that was non-grandiloquent and which moved away from the romantic to the realm of the anti-romantic in which he painted surreal portraits as he did in "Yo pecador/ I am a sinner" below.

I am born delinquent
Caught infraganti
Stealing flowers by the light of the moon
I beg the whole world's pardon
But I do not admit that I am guilty. (120)

² Chile has been the birthplace of many poets and famous writers who have made significant contributions to literature.

The images that the antipoet portrayed are not of tender love or of a muse in a paradise, on the contrary we see a 'delinquent child' who is caught doing mischievous acts which no angelical being would be caught doing. Instead, we contemplate an ironic setting full of comedy, mockery, and scorn. The antipoet is happy to live in a world in which the lyric voice uses mordancy and incongruity to boldly reveal its deviant actions. One of the works that has shed light on the poetry of Nicanor Parra is the extensive writing of Edith Grossman. She has dissected the work of this poet and analyzed the different elements that this writer used in his poetry. She has pointed out that Parra is a genius when it comes to this type of sarcastic writing as he was creating antipoetry from elements that are common to us such as telephones, his shoes, classroom objects, and elements of the society. Yet Nicanor Parra managed to create new literary works by giving his poetic elements new significance and new meaning as can be seen in the passage from the book of poems *Poems and Antipoems* below, particularly in "Rompecabezas."³

I give no one the right.
I worship a piece of rag.
I transport coffins.
I give no one the right.
I look ridiculous.
In the sunlight,
Scourge of the soda fountains
I am dying of fury. (126)

Here the lyric voice ventures out into the uncommon world. In a religious vein, it is common for a Catholic person to worship the image of Christ which happens to be on a tapestry. In this poem, the poet is more of a demented individual than a person of character and that is the tone that Parra likes to take to express his poetic ideas. He ridiculed everybody around him including himself. 'I look ridiculous.' Miguel Ángel Zapata has studied the work of Parra, and he saw the chaos that the antipoet created as these verses do not strive to make sense of the surrounding world; in fact they confuse the reader as such work presents a world full of ironic images.

The Techniques of the Antipoet

Humor is used to draw the reader into Parra's web of nonsense as he even mocks the reader and anyone or anything that comes to the imagination of this writer. A classic example of an antipoem is the work entitled, 'Warning' which describes the actions of the lyric voice and the regulated world in which we live.

In case of fire
Do not use elevators
Use stairways

³ It is important to note that the Noble Prize in Literature was given to the Chilean Pablo Neruda for writing poems in which the main thematic element were quotidian elements combined with modernist elements and yet romantic notions of love were precisely an element that Parra avoided in his poems.

Unless otherwise instructed

No smoking

No littering

No shitting

No radio playing

Unless otherwise instructed

Please Flush Toilet

After Each Use. (*Poems and Antipoems* 301)

The tool that the antipoet uses in this poem is absurdity as no one is likely to start smoking in case of fire. The illogic is present in these verses and the poem flows from verse to verse in an agitated manner, as can be noted when the lyric voice says, 'No smoking/ no littering/ No shitting.' In this type of composition, the main element that keeps the flow of the poem moving is the sequencing of cynical ideas that forms the corpus of the poetic composition. Adelaida Lopez Mejia has written extensively about the work of Nicanor Parra and she maintains that the satirical world of Parra is difficult to decipher. It is especially difficult when attempting to translate Parra's work and trying to find the words to express the meanings that the poet wanted to convey to the reader.⁴ For example, the lyric voice might say, 'yo digo una cosa por otra, 'I say one thing for another.' Yet the translator does not know exactly what the writer wants to express and this confusion is just what Parra enjoys creating. According to Adelaida López Mejía, one of Parra's favorite techniques is to allow the lyric voice to change the proper name of things, as we know them. In his poetry, Nicanor Parra sought to confuse the reader by calling the sun something else; he calls it 'Micifuz' (78). One aspect that is clear is the fact that the antipoet is the Lord of his creative world and as such he can coin new nonsensical words as he chooses as in the following lines from the book *Poems and Antipoems*.

Cambios de nombre

...

Voy a cambiar de nombre a algunas cosas.

Mi posición es ésta:

El poeta no cumple su palabra

Si no cambia los nombres de las cosas.

¿Con qué razón el sol

Ha de seguir llamándose sol?

¡Pido que se llame Micifuz

El de las botas de cuarenta leguas!

¿Mis zapatos parecen ataúdes?

Sepan que desde hoy en adelante

Los zapatos se llaman ataúdes. (176)

⁴ Nicanor Parra was a physicist by trade and his poetry was not typical so that it is understandable that "antipoetry" is loved by some and disliked by others.

In this poem, the writer explained some of the new techniques that he would be implementing in his compositions. He looked for venues and sources that would inspire his writing and one of these techniques is renaming his descriptive elements and coining new words that no dictionary would accept. Parra saw new poetic elements in common items. For instance, for a scientist a body of water can be the source of “oxygen” which sustains all life, and water also contains the nuclear element “hydrogen” which can be used to make a powerful atomic bomb to destroy life. Nicanor Parra used the same incongruous notion as he renamed common items that surround us. Parra saw comedy in his poetic elements, he exercised his comedic talents in his derision and causticity as he cut up old compositions and created something new as when he announced that from now on, the word for ‘zapatos’ would be, ‘ataúdes.’

One of the works that has helped a great deal to shed light on the work of Nicanor Parra, has been the translations and editions that Miller Williams produced to bring the Spanish works to American audiences. Miller Williams took Parra’s first book of *Poemas y antipoemas* and translated it to the English language.⁵ Williams’ edition has been well accepted in the English-speaking world, and especially in the United States has brought the attention to the poetry of Nicanor Parra and his antipoetic elements. People all over the world came to be exposed to antipoetry. The following poem comes from *Poems and Antipoems* and it was translated by Miller Williams.

Young Poets
Write as you will
in whatever style you like
too much blood has run under the bridge
to go on believing
that only one road is right.
In poetry everything is permitted
with only this condition of course
you have to improve the blank page. (35)

In this poem, Parra demonstrated a new direction that he had taken as lyricism disappeared from his verses. In the poem addressed to “Young Poets” the lyric voice is that of a master giving advice to new writers, it offers the suggestion to write without using the previous forms of poetic elements. The lyric voice says, ‘Write as you will/ In whatever style you like.’ This is a call to take bold action in undertaking new poetic production. Yet, according to the lyric voice all forms of poetry are permissible. One important aspect that should be highlighted is that Parra never recommended following any particular style of writing, or using any particular elements from a literary movement, nor did he recommend imitating any particular writer or set of writers. Parra’s heart was set on not producing poetry in the traditional style as he sought to accommodate his absurd view of the world and he knew he needed a writing style which would be flexible enough to contain his new ideas and so he created ‘antipoesía.’⁶

⁵ The work of Miller Williams has been credited with expanding the popularity of Parra’s work.

⁶ Parra imitated some well-known poets for a short time but in the end he broke out to create a new genre of poetry that he believed would both shock and delight readers.

Parra has written around twenty books of poetry and in each of them he has employed poetic elements that have distinguished them from one another. His works purposely are much in the same tone of voice, a poetic world that comes from an individual that does not seek to imitate any other writer. It seems that Parra had one particular goal in mind; he sought to be different from the rest, and to create a new genre of poetry by which he would be known to the literary world. The antipoetic elements that Parra introduced were many and varied and Nick Hill notes that the main core of Parra's antipoetry work comes from three main works, *Poemas y antipoemas*, *Versos de salon*, and *Canciones rusas y Otros poemas*. Furthermore, Nick Hill points out that the series of poems that Parra wrote, for the occasion when he was going to receive the Juan Rulfo Literary Prize in Mexico, are an outstanding representative sample of the antipoetry movement. Below is one of those poems.

¿ESPERABA ESTE PREMIO?

No
Los premios son
Como las Dulcineas del Toboso
Mientras + pensamos en ellas
+ lejanas
+ sordas
.....+ enigmáticas
Los premios son para los espíritus libres
Y para los amigos del jurado
Chanfle
No contaban con mi astucia. (7)

In this poem the poet is applying sarcasm, as this was one of his most powerful weapons to create an antagonistic setting and to dig a dagger into the heart of his enemies as he stated that poetry prizes are for free spirits and for the friends of the judges. Yet, Parra was very intent on his quest to utilize new elements to create his antipoetry movement. Reviewing the work of this antipoet, Thom Tammaro insists that writing in an environment full of oppression and social instability produces writers in those regions of the world who use black humor, irreverence, and irony as in the following lines of 'Padre nuestro.'

Padre nuestro que estás en el cielo
Lleno de toda clase de problemas
Con el ceño fruncido
Como si fueras un hombre vulgar y corriente
No piense más en nosotros.
Comprendemos que sufres
Porque no puedes arreglar las cosas.
Sabemos que el Demonio no te deja tranquilo
Desconstruyendo lo que tú construyes.

Él se ríe de ti
Pero nosotros lloramos contigo. (*Obra gruesa* 123)⁷

Making fun of religion and religious icons is nothing new yet this type of poem finds a home in antipoetry as it attacks well-established clichés used in the Catholic Church. A second element that is detected in this poem is the use of prosaic language to create poetry as Parra borrows the tones of prose more than the lyric voice. It seems that the antipoet has a mission to educate the reader about his style of writing and Nicanor Parra takes pride in delineating his definition of antipoetry so that there can be no mistake as to what antipoetry consists of as he provides some guidelines in the lines below.

¿Qué es la antipoesía?
¿Un temporal en una taza de té?
¿Una mancha de nieve en una roca?
¿Un ataúd a gas de parafino?
¿Una capilla ardiente sin difunto?
Marque con una cruz
La definición, que considere correcta. (*Obra gruesa* 114)

Parra supplies vague definitions of antipoetry but leaves it to the reader to select the best definition of the term. The reader is then an active participant in solving the conundrum. Parra wants the reader to interact with the poem and its writer, as he does not like passive readers. Ignacio Valente is a renown and prolific writer who has studied the work of Nicanor Parra since its early inception and he sees the vanguard influences in Parra's writing as a desire to flee from sublime feelings and lyricism and in doing so he bathes his verses in a shower of ironic elements. This technique is evident in the following verses from *Obra gruesa* below.

Una noche me quise suicidar
El ruiseñor se ríe de sí mismo
La perfección es un tonel sin fondo
Todo lo transparente nos seduce
Estornudar es el placer mayor
Y la fucsia parece bailarina. (243)

In this poem as in many others, irony is clearly evident as Parra seeks to cause surprise and even shock with the use of his imagery. Thoughts of suicide will not arouse laughter in anyone much less a nightingale yet this is the type of imagery that delights the writer. The caricaturesque phrases are there to poke fun at pain, to create an ironic effect, and to puzzle the reader. Normally, there is no pleasure in sneezing, yet the lyric voice seems to find great satisfaction when it achieves this act proclaiming that sneezing is one of life's major pleasures. The work of Nicanor Parra can be said to be in debt to the great undertaking that Marlene Gottlieb achieved in bringing antipoetry to

⁷ The anticlerical message likely did not sit well with some of his readers, but the political environment in which Parra was living did not allow him to attack the government so he attacked God instead.

readers in the United States.⁸ In her book, *Nunca se termina de nacer*, Gottlieb noted that one of the big contributions of Parra to the area of antipoetry was the work that he published in 1972, when he came out with the idea to write short poems of one to four lines and commissioned a third party to illustrate his ideas. Parra published his poems as a group of postcards which came packaged in a box ready to be mailed. The idea to visualize the poetry and share it was important as this venue allowed poems to be passed from person-to-person in everyday life. The technique that Parra utilized is what he termed “an explosion of the antipoem” as his work could then be disseminated quickly and would affect many people. Parra saw these his poems, which he called ‘artefactos’ as representing a lighted grenade, that it was passed on and it exploded dispersing the ideas the poet contained in the bomb. The content of the antipoem varies, but such poems always make fun of major institutions maintains Gottlieb. An example of an ‘artefacto’ is the picture of a waste basket marked with the label, ‘DEPOSITE AQUÍ SUS OBRAS DE ARTE/ Deposit here your work of art’ which Parra joyfully produced. In poetic terms, this is an incongruity, but that is just what Parra loves to produce in order to make his reader think and search for that kernel of truth. A classic ‘artefacto’ that is widely cited in many anthologies, is one with the symbol of the cross and the words stamped on to top of it, ‘Voy y vuelvo’/ ‘I go and I return’ as can be seen in a similar ‘artefacto’ posted below.



Fig. 1. This ‘artefacto’ illustrates the idea of the poet exploding a poem into simple verses and then presenting them with an image (*Artefactos*).

It is common knowledge that most poetry has been usually written and published in the format of books but in taking a closer look at the origins of books we discover that poetry has often been written on loose pieces of paper before they were ever sent to the publisher. The technique of the ‘artefacto’ revives the idea that a poem is a living entity by itself and it captures the attention of the reader not only for its content but for the forms that are chosen to deliver it.⁹ One idea that Parra wanted to capture with the

⁸ The book, *Nunca se termina de nacer*, has aided many poets and readers in the analysis of the poetry of Nicanor Parra.

⁹ The value of the illustrations that appear in *Artefactos* is complex and might be best left to psychiatrists to explain.

creation of the 'artefacto' was the notion of using unconventional writing as symbolism. For instance, the lyric voice says, 'USA/ donde la libertad es una estatua' as it is amusing and ironic if liberty can be found in a statute. Some of the illustrations in *Artefactos* are rather provocative and probably might be said to be in poor taste as in the illustration showing two splayed legs with poetry lines on top and below the figure. Clearly, Parra deliberately choose this suggestive design to illustrate his poem and his message. Nevertheless, this poem or artefacto clearly is a bold call to action to revive poetry as in an age of new electronic technology not too many persons are interested in reading books, much less reading old boring poetic verses. This poem also highlights the fact that poetry in general is dying and that not too many people get excited about going to the bookstore to buy a new book on poetry. Therefore, it can be argued that Nicanor Parra is correct in his challenge to employ new poetic devices to excite interest in an old art form. Furthermore, those legs in his 'artefacto' can arguably be said to depict something monstrous rather than something sexual. These verses enunciate the writer's position regarding the future of poetry as he feels that something drastic must be done in order for poetry to be revived. The lyric voice challenges those who love poetry to use any means possible to change poetry even if the new methods entertain vulgarity. To truly possess poetry, one must offend and do it publicly believes Parra.



Fig. 2. The poet did not illustrate the images in *Artefactos* but he wrote the poems and supervised and authorized the final work (*Artefactos*).

It can be said that Parra's writing was a reaction to the modernist movement as he wanted no part of it yet he did associate his writings with avant-garde techniques and forms of writing. In spite of his refusal to follow modernist models such as Rubén Darío and José Martí, Parra managed to depart even from traditional modernistic forms of poetic writing. For instance, the work presented in, *La cieca larga*, published in 1958 is much in the same style of writing as employed by Martí in his *Versos sencillos*, which were written back in the 1890s. In both types of compositions there is the tendency to be poetic and inspiring, sweet and sentimental, and these comparisons are mentioned by Cathy Login when she analyzed the elements of modernism and the development of

Spanish American literature. Login acknowledged the diverse branches that modernism took in this part of the world (148).

Table 1. The influence of modernism is very strong in the Latin American poetry and it is difficult to totally depart from it as it can be seen in the similarities of the two poems as analyzed by the authors of this article.

<i>La cueca larga</i> , Nicanor Parra	<i>Versos sencillos</i> , José Martí
... Los bailarines dicen Por armar boche Que si les cantan, bailan Toda la noche.	Yo soy un hombre sincero De donde crece la palma. Y antes de morirme quiero Echar mis versos del alma.
Toda la noche, sí Flor de zapallo En la cancha es adonde Se ven los gallos.	Yo vengo de todas partes, Y hacia todas partes voy: Arte soy entre las artes, En los montes, monte soy.

In literature, the road that Parra took was to apply techniques that were causing great commotion in the creative world and so he borrowed elements from the avant-garde movement as he experimented with innovation in his writing. The avant-grade components can be seen in the following sample from the poem, ‘Manifest.’

We repudiate
The poetry of dark glasses
The poetry of the cape and sword
The poetry of the plumed hat
We propose instead
The poetry of the naked eye
The poetry of the hairy chest
The poetry of the bare head.
We don't believe in nymphs or tritons.
Poetry has to be this:
A girl in a wheat field -
Or it's absolutely nothing. (*Emergency Poems*)

In the poem above, the reader can clearly see the intent of the poet is to break away from traditional paradigms of poetry, that he is opposed to old forms of poetry, and that he takes a bohemian approach in his writing style. Making fun of the establishment is one technique that the antipoet employs to conquer a new poetic expression that is contemporary and his unique writing serves to distance himself from canonistic elements of poetry. This is a non-conventional form of poetry and one that has been applauded as the lyric voice is challenging the poetry of the past and using satire as Parra instigates new and different poetic forms of writing. The concept of irony as a tool that gives life to poetry is a technique that Nicanor Parra has used to visualize his verses and to create controversy as he made fun of the incongruity of this world as can be seen in the “artefacto” below. Here the poet uses colloquial language to express his

black humor and at the same time he acknowledges the fact that the few who are rich live on the backs of the poor. In this instance, the poet uses prosaic language to create his poetry and he expresses an image that is antagonistic, but it also contains an ugly truth.

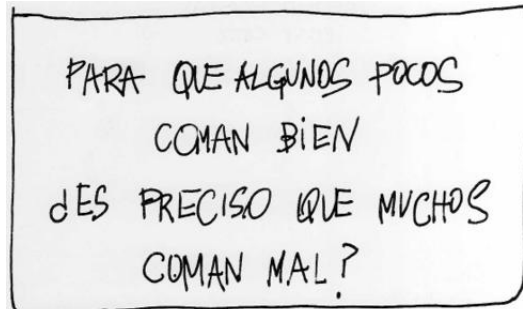


Fig. 3. Poetry does not have to be refined any longer as it can be handwritten and published in a simple format. (Artefactos).

Roa de la Carrera is a writer that has analyzed Parra's poetry and he concluded that Parra was "a wizard creating new poetic scenarios by just simply applying and combining different literary resources such as the carnivalesque elements and hybridizing them with common and popular elements" (63-64). Parra created poetry by applying "what is considered unrefined language which lacks charismatic overtones as his creative techniques consists in manipulating the metaphor and the images so that his verses call attention mainly by the contrast of elements that he utilizes in his poetry" (de la Carrera 66). What follows is a sample of Parra's writings from the poem, 'Young Poets.'

Write as you will
In whatever style you like
Too much blood has run under the bridge
To go on believing
That only one road is right.
In poetry everything is permitted.
With only this condition of course,
You have to improve the blank page. (*Poems and Antipoems* 89)

The poet is calling upon the reader to become an active participant in creating new forms of poetry. He does not mention one particular genre or source such as surrealism, avant-garde or modernism as it is left for the reader to decipher the poetic elements that the writer employed in his compositions and to create his own. Parra's lyric voice does not advocate one particular form of writing as in the field of poetry he considers all types of writing worthwhile. The lyric voice is directing the novice poet to create and to write with one condition that, 'the blank page' is the enemy to avoid. In an article written by Niall Binns, he analyzed the means of communication in the poetry of Nicanor Parra and he pointed out that, "the dialogue that Parra utilizes is what makes his poetry stand out as he employs the popular discourse to incorporate it in his poetic writing" (81). In his article Binns sees "the relationship that exists between Parra's work and the writings of Fredric Jameson in the way that he connects the natural elements to

create a relationship between postmodernism and antipoetry” (83). Parra’s poems created literary work from aspects of society in which he lived yet he incorporated what he saw and felt in his poetry in unique ways.¹⁰ Poets use poetry as a means of express so this is nothing new. What is new is the innovation that comes from the strategic way that the antipoet twists language and uses poetic devices to give birth to something not seen before. The typical elements of rhythm and rhyme in poetry are set aside for sarcasm, vulgar illustrations, and nonsense words that grab and hold the reader’s interest. Parra’s poems may not be considered works of beautiful art, yet they stand up by themselves, in their own category called “antipoetry.” The poem below, “¿Qué es antipoesía?” from the collection of, *Poemas y antipoemas* reveals that an antipoet is one who is dancing way too close to an abyss.

¿Qué es un anti poeta?
Un comerciante en urnas y ataúdes
Un sacerdote que no cree en nada
Un general que duda de sí mismo
Un vagabundo que se ríe de todo
Hasta de la vejez y de la muerte
Un interlocutor de mal carácter
Un bailarín al borde del abismo. (45)

This ‘antipoema’ is a great example of the poetry that distinguished Nicanor Parra from the rest, as the lyric voice reveals that only an antipoet risks all in his work without fear. This type of poetry is controversial in nature as it sets the tone of disparity and incongruity. Can a man be both a poet and businessman? Society has been trained to accept religious people such as priests, nuns, ministers and persons of that ilk yet to find a priest who is a nonbeliever is something unusual. Finding the unusual in the usual is the core of writing antipoetry. A general is usually a man of conviction and such a person never doubts himself or his actions. Yet, in this poem we see the opposite, ‘un general que duda de sí mismo.’ These contradictions delighted Nicanor Parra and formed the heart of his writing.

Yet, not all the work of Nicanor Parra consisted of a constant fight for new creativity. Nicanor Parra wrote the book of poems, *Cueca larga* which is a type of dance in his native Chile. In this book, the writer simply used material which was a part of his culture and his upbringing. In this book of poems, Parra incorporated rhythm and melody to compose his verses. In the article by Mario Rodríguez, he proposes that this particular book was written at a time when Parra was influenced by the style of his countryman, Pablo Neruda. Rodríguez compared the rhythm and the melody of these two writers as *La cueca larga* de Nicanor Parra and *Veinte Poemas de amor y una canción desesperada* of Pablo Neruda have many similarities (145-146). Nicanor Parra

¹⁰Fame comes to those who venture into uncharted territory and are willing to do things differently even though they receive criticism and scorn for taking roads that are less traveled. Parra was always an “outsider” since a young age even though he managed to stay within conventional lines in his work as a university professor.

came from a family of musicians as both his father and his sister Violeta Parra were well-known musicians in Chile so for Parra music was always a part of his creative spirit. *La cueca larga*, is a work that distinguishes itself not for its sarcasm, or for the satire of the verses, but for the intonation employed by the lyric voice.¹¹ The main purpose of the poet seems to be to have a good time and so get away from the ugliness that surrounds him. In the poem, “Coplas del vino” it appears that the poet reverts to a style of poetry used in the Middle Ages, in which a shepherd commonly sang sweet ballads to his sweetheart. This is the tone used in the poem ‘Coplas del vino’ below is a fragment to illustrate the lyric voice’s rhythmic melody.

El vino es todo, es el mar
Las botas de veinte leguas
La alfombra mágica, el sol
El loro de siete lenguas.
Algunos toman por sed
Otros por olvidar deudas
Y yo por ver lagartijas
Y sapos en las estrellas. (48)

Nicanor Parra: The Outsider

The work of Nicanor Parra and his antipoetry movement did not take solid root until the 1970s when his work began to be translated for English speaking audiences. One of these works came from Edith Grossman who turned her Ph.D. dissertation into a well-known book, *The Antipoetry of Nicanor Parra*. Parra was not mindful of the fuss over his work yet back in his home country at the University of Chile he created a new Department of Humanities Studies in the College of Engineering and Sciences. The startlingly uniqueness of Parra’s ideas are what have made him incomparable. Parra kept busy earning a living teaching Physics and Mathematics while his literary work was being produced and very slowly was ascending in popularity. This writer was a radical individual who fought to promote his style of writing and introduce his ideas to the literary world. Melanie Nicholson wrote *Surrealism in Latin American Literature: Searching for Breton's Ghost*, in which she dedicated an entire chapter to the work of Nicanor Parra and the influence that the surrealism movement had on this particular poet (187). She indicated that Parra eventually embraced Breton’s principle of absolute freedom of expression in artistic work. The element of creative freedom became the main tool employed by the antipoet as Parra constantly presented a lyric voice that is in a frequent state of revolt against everything that surrounds him (187). The work of Nicanor Parra is mired in mordacity, antagonism, and irony. In the area of poetry, it can be said that Parra has been an outsider. The *Merriam Webster* dictionary describes an “outcast” as “a person who is not involved with a particular group of people or organization or who does not live in a particular place, also a person or animal with only a slight chance of winning (59). Clearly, from his roots Parra had only a slight chance of

¹¹ A ‘cueca’ is a type of song which is much like the style found in *Martín Fierro* or similar types of compositions.

becoming successful and being labeled a “winner”, and yet he won worldwide acclaim. Parra chose to be a scientist, not a professor of literature at a major university, and the world recognized his uniqueness as acknowledgment eventually came that being a “poet” could be whatever you want it to be. Nicanor Parra gave new meaning to the words “poetry” and “poet” and this is clear from his impact on the present literary world. The newspaper *El Universal* pointed out that this professor who taught Physics and Mathematics for 51 years won no major awards in his field of specialty, but that he became known primarily for his poetic writings, which opened the eyes of many individuals in his country as well as outside South America. Parra has received more criticism for his publishing than any poet of his time, and it is important to point out that the style of writing that Nicanor Parra created stirred a lot of controversy in the literary world, and it still continues today. Parra was an outsider who deliberately chose a new form of poetry, he was not just interested in pleasing the typical lovers of poetry but he wanted to draw in new audiences.¹² Not content with the road already traveled, Parra hacked away at the underbrush to discover new uncharted terrain in the world of poetry as he developed literary devices and techniques that young poets today emulate. Although flowery language is still widely popular, the stark and realistic and at times brutal language of Parra’s poetry continues to attract new readers. Audiences today still marvel at the skill with which he draws us into the world he so masterfully creates with his imagery and poetic devices that make us laugh, cringe, scowl, and inhale sharply.

It is difficult for a writer to create in isolation without incorporating elements that surround his life. Nicanor Parra lived in a country governed by a dictator general named Pinochet and so Chile was not a place to write freely as persecution from the government was widespread. In Chile, any writer that voiced opposition against the government would simply disappear or that individual would be forced to leave the country before his literary work was published, or he would risk incarceration or death. It is for this reason that in the works of Nicanor Parra there are no poems that delve deeply into political issues.¹³ Parra knew that his livelihood could not be put on the line and yet he was still able to create a new type of poetry in this restrictive environment. He could not be critical of the government and still go on earning a living as a college professor in Santiago de Chile during one of the most repressive governments ever seen in Latin America. To be an “outsider” means to take things to the extreme in order to stand out and create something that has not been seen before in order to tickle the funny bone or raise the ire of readers, but Parra could not go against the government that ruled Chile during Pinochet’s regime as literate individuals that wrote against his government disappeared, were thrown in jail, or they left the country. In the case of Parra, he could have taught at several universities in the United States, as any one of those institutions would have been very happy to hire him. Nevertheless, he chose to

¹² Not all the work of Parra used sarcasm, vulgarities, and controversial topics as in *La cueca larga* Parra demonstrated that he could write ‘standard’ poetry following the traditional rules of poetry. Yet, this book was not well-received in the literary world.

¹³ Augusto Pinochet, a military dictator, ruled Chile from 1973 to 1990 during a period of repression as thousands of ‘desaparecidos’ that opposed his government simply disappeared.

stay in his native country and to write satirical poetry as a sideline. His writing might have offended many groups, but he did not write against the government and that is a key part of why his poetry was allowed to flourish quietly.

When one examines the meaning of irony, the *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theory*, holds that this element usually signals a difference between the appearance of things and reality and in a largely Catholic society, Parra crossed boundaries between the religious and sacrilegious. Parra's work does not appear to have had boundaries or limits beyond which he would not go as he pursued the use of humorous and sardonic elements in his poetry to bring his point across to a reader. Nicanor Parra did much more than to produce a pretty poem as he sought to stir emotions and make people think. This was the goal that Parra set forth in his writing, as he presented scenarios without regard to the reader's reactions, be they positive or negative. Parra seemed to be immune to attacks or he seemed to not care what other people would think or say about his poetry. He truly viewed himself as breaking the mold of the poet as it had once been known. His vocabulary was not refined and his work was not for innocents as the lyric voice boldly asserted, "No respondo si bajan/ Echando sangre por boca y narices" as he did not mind spilling his readers' blood through the mouth or nose (*Antipoemas* 25).¹⁴ This attitude is what makes an "outsider" as just such a person is willing to take chances and to challenge other individuals to be creative and to speculate on what new routes to take. This type of writing is what makes Parra's work so very different from the rest. Nicanor Parra actually goes out of his way to insult his readers and he especially likes to torment novice writers. The poem below from *Poemas y Antipoemas* finds the author proclaiming himself the lord of all poetry as his lyric voice states with mirth that prior to his arrival, poetry was the paradise of idiots but that he has, singlehandedly, changed all that. Parra playfully states that he has installed himself on so high a mountain that few will dare to try to reach him and that he will not take any responsibility when someone tries to reach his heights only to come down the mountain with both a bloody nose and mouth. Parra clearly knew that in creating antipoetry he had scaled new heights in the literary world and yet he challenged other poets to scale the Russian Mountain and continue to expand the use of poetic devices and imagery. He warned his readers that the ride would be wild and perhaps even dangerous enough to draw blood, but he believes that a poet should be willing to take on that challenge if he really desires to create something unique that touches raw nerves. Parra is an "outsider" whose work deviated from traditional poetry in a powerful and wondrous style. The poem below bellows his challenge to future poets:

Durante medio siglo
La poesía fue
El paraíso del tonto solemne.
Hasta que vine yo
Y me instalé con mi montaña rusa.

¹⁴ Parra has been criticized by his creation of a chaotic world without offering solutions to the problems of mankind.

Suban, si les parece.
Claro que yo no respondo si bajan
Echando sangre por boca y narices. (*La montaña rusa* 87).

Conclusion

When an individual is presented not with one, but two of the highest awards in literature for his work, as was the case with Nicanor Parra then the poet must be doing something right in order to achieve such a place of distinction. In 2011 the jury that awarded the Juan Rulfo Award to Nicanor Parra bestowed the award in recognition for his body of outstanding work which included the books *Poemas y antipoemas*, *Versos de salon*, *Canciones rusas*, and *Otros poemas*, as well as *Prédicas del Cristo de Elqui*, *Nuevos sermones*, and *Artefactos* and *Ecopoemas*. In December of 2012 Parra received the Cervantes Prize, the Spanish-speaking world's highest literary honor that a writer can receive. On this occasion, the Royal Highness Prince of Asturias said the following words of praise for the antipoet, "We salute and recognize in the anti-poet Nicanor Parra the alter ego and all that has been built up over the years, Don Quixote de Chile, Nicanor Parra. His voice is universally enriching. Nicanor Parra is Cervantes's twin, the two share the achievement of gripping free literature standards sharing a noble act, temperate, worthy of the Prize awarded, worthy of winning" (Fundación de la Lengua Española). Parra won many other literary awards over the years and he was even nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature twice; therefore, it can be said that Nicanor Parra is an accomplished poet. This unique individual has been able to live a dual life as he was a stern professor of math and physics at a large university in Chile while he was also the creator of antipoetry whose works amazed and rendered his readers speechless because of his vulgarity and the brutally honest treatment given all his subjects. Nicanor Parra continues the duality of his life as he is still sought out as the ultimate outsider in poetry who managed to turn the tables on the literary world. Nicanor Parra is the poet who ventures to say what everyone is thinking and says what no one else will dare say. The life work of this outsider in poetry circles has certainly been deserving of acclaim for going where no poet had ventured before into the realm of antipoetry. Bravo, Parra!

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