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**TITLE:** Rafael Alberti's *Coplas de Juan Panadero*: Communist Propaganda, Valuable Poetry, or Both?

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**ABSTRACT:** Rafael Alberti's *Coplas de Juan Panadero* exemplifies both a Communist ideology and a search for a sublime aesthetic. Until recently, however, criticism of Alberti's poetry in general has separated both elements as if they opposed one another. The purpose of this paper is to analyze *Coplas de Juan Panadero* in order to value the work's simultaneous dual commitment to both Communist politics and aesthetic poetics. First, this paper engages with the literary criticism of Alberti's poetic project and focuses on the lack of emphasis on the political-poetic synthesis in *Coplas*. Second, it centers on the relationship between politics and aesthetics in the poems of the collection and how they shed light on the author's careful maneuvers between aesthetics and *littérature engagée*.

**KEYWORDS:** Rafael Alberti, political poetry, Communism, poetics, *Juan Panadero's Couplets*

**RESUMEN:** *Coplas de Juan Panadero* de Rafael Alberti ejemplifica tanto una ideología comunista como una búsqueda de una estética sublime. Hasta hace poco, sin embargo, la crítica de la poesía de Alberti en general ha separado los dos elementos como si se opusiesen el uno al otro. El propósito de este ensayo es analizar *Coplas de Juan Panadero* a fin de valorar el doble compromiso simultáneo hacia la política comunista y la poética estética dentro de la obra. Primero, este ensayo entabla con las críticas literarias del proyecto poético de Alberti y se enfoca en la ausencia de énfasis en la síntesis política-poética en *Coplas*. Segundo, se centra en la relación entre la política y la estética en los poemas de la colección y cómo nos iluminan sobre la maniobras cuidadosas del autor entre la estética y *littérature engagée*.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Rafael Alberti, poesía política, comunismo, poética, *Coplas de Juan Panadero*

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## Rafael Alberti's *Coplas de Juan Panadero*: Communist Propaganda, Valuable Poetry, or Both?

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Critics have often condemned or openly avoided Rafael Alberti's poetic project during the 1930s either because it appears to be too propagandistic or because it might not provide the aesthetic pleasure of the poet's earlier works.<sup>1</sup> Others have claimed that a focus on aesthetics returns to his poetry during the late 1940s and early 1950s only to leave committed poetry behind.<sup>2</sup> Among Alberti's collections, *Coplas de Juan Panadero* (1949) has been nearly forgotten despite the fact that the collection reflects a synthesis between aesthetics and politics.<sup>3</sup> One reason that might account for the lack of a focus on *Coplas* could be simply that Alberti wrote and published the collection about the same time that he produced other more popular texts.<sup>4</sup> Although many of Alberti's collections either side with aesthetics (*Pleamar* (1944), *A la pintura* (1948) or *Retornos de lo vivo lejano* (1952)) or with politics (*El poeta en la calle* (1935), *De un momento a otro* (1937) or *Signos del día* (1961)), others such as *Entre el clavel y la espada* (1941) and *Coplas de Juan Panadero* offer glimpses of Alberti's dual commitment to both. Although his life's work did not open the debate between "art for art's sake" and "committed art," *Coplas* exemplified Alberti's connection with both sides of that controversial battle. In fact, the poems found in *Coplas* undoubtedly are committed to a political purpose, yet at the same time, the poems embrace aesthetic pleasure throughout the *poemario* (very nearly rubbing shoulders with an art-for-art's-sake ideal). The purpose of this paper is to show the value of the *Coplas* both as Communist political commentary and inspirational, aesthetically pleasing poetry at the same time. While each poem has a political stance, a

poetic stance, or both, the collection as a whole emphasizes the struggles and truces between the two supposed contradictory roles. Furthermore, the roles go beyond the poet himself or his poetry to the increasingly global society of the 1940s and 1950s. On the one hand, the collection's political function emphasized the contradictions in socialism and capitalism at the beginning of the cold war. On the other hand, *Coplas'* aesthetics demarcate the battles between bestsellers and bohemia. This paper first looks at the criticism of Alberti's poetry and the lack of focus on *Coplas de Juan Panadero*. Because *albertiano* studies have overlooked one of the key moments of Alberti's worldview and lifetime poetic project, the first part of this analysis also contains a brief description of the collection as a whole. The second part focuses on the poems of the collection as they propagate both Communist ideals and at the same time the artistic, aesthetic ability of the author. The reader will notice *Coplas'* careful balance between Communist and art-for-art's-sake ideals. By looking at Alberti's poetical development during his life as a synthesis of both his politics and his poetics, one might argue that on a universal level the majority of effective poets have always combined both elements; in fact, I would argue that Alberti's project represents a wider view of poetics in general and openly reproduces a dilemma of other poets who either follow suit openly or who slyly and quietly do the same.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, we can see the greater implications of a study of *Coplas de Juan Panadero*.

If a reader were to agree with Terry Eagleton in *After Theory* that our society has become enamored with pluralism and that our

current focus on the marginalized sectors of society pushes us toward an all-inclusive network (18), Alberti's *Coplas de Juan Panadero* fits that pluralistic endeavor in dual fashion. First of all, aesthetes might consider the collection as overtly political and consequently unaesthetic; they would wish to discourage any political implications in any text in order to uphold a purist art-for-art's-sake view. Second, members of the Communist Party might denote this work as overly aesthetic and self-serving in that the work does not solely promote the Party. The aforementioned double-marginalization would then qualify the work for study in the twenty-first century and would show that both elements contribute to and place it on the forefront of the trend to praise that which fell by the wayside in the 1950s.

Despite the importance of a study of *Coplas*, criticism up to this point has primarily focused either on Alberti's poetry before the 1930s or his political conversion during the Spanish Republic. Felipe B. Pedraza Jiménez and Milagros Rodríguez Cáceres point out the diverging interpretations of Alberti's shift toward political poetry in the 1930s:

No faltan quienes censuren este giro que, a su juicio, desvía al autor de sus objetivos estéticos. Otros [...] valoran más positivamente esta poesía revolucionaria liberada de las cadenas del purismo. (Pedraza Jiménez and Rodríguez Cáceres 608)

Since the majority of the criticisms of Alberti's poetry focus on either the political or the aesthetic properties in his poetry, the two camps strive to prove his purist rhetoric among his political poetry on one hand or his communistic rhetoric among his aesthetics on the other.

Many of Alberti's critics claim that his shift to a more politicized poetry during the Republic either degraded his poetics or gave him the necessary tools to survive as a poet. Until relatively recently, most criticism responded negatively to this politicized poetry.

Robert G. Havard's "Rafael Alberti's *De un momento a otro*: The Matter of Poetry, Politics and War" describes that stance:

The quality of Alberti's 1930s poetry is a matter of some debate. Many critics take the view that after the peak of *Sobre los ángeles* in 1929 the poet went into sharp decline when he adopted the role of political agitator and that, essentially, in this period, he sacrificed his art for the sake of voicing trite communist propaganda. (81)

To argue that Alberti's poetry up until 1930 demonstrated solely an art-for-art's-sake poetic vision or that after 1930 his adherence to Communism forfeited his aesthetic quality seems to undermine his lifetime poetic project. As we will see in his *Coplas de Juan Panadero* almost two decades later, the poet had not given up one aspect of his poetry in favor of the other.<sup>6</sup> However, despite his fervor for his political beliefs, authors such as Ricardo Gullón and C. B. Morris respond negatively to Alberti's so-called political poetry.<sup>7</sup> More recently, however, other works look to find value in the political poetry as part of Alberti's lifetime project.<sup>8</sup> Despite the excellent research on Alberti's poetry to date, both of these *acercamientos* lack an interlocking way to analyze Alberti's *Coplas de Juan Panadero* where aesthetic pleasure and political awareness complement each another.

In the very titles of *Coplas de Juan Panadero*'s nineteen sections the reader will notice how politics and aesthetics mesh together.<sup>9</sup> Each of these sections has between six and thirty-two poems; the majority of the poems has three lines, an imperfect couplet; each three-line poem supports the topic of the section where it is housed.<sup>10</sup> What stands out from the titles of these subdivisions within the collection is that six of them refer specifically to Juan Panadero's poetics (or the artistic illumination that occurs within or because of it). Undoubtedly the collection contains a political bent that strives to influence the reader through a representation of a

poor, uneducated Juan who produces imperfect couplets. At the same time, the feigned ingenuity, the feigned lack of understanding of forms (couplets as two-lined rhetorical devices that Juan recites as three-lined morphs of the poetic tradition) in fact contributes to the aesthetic power of the collection because of its fight against traditional forms.

With reference to the collection's aesthetic power, many of the global analyses of Alberti's entire life's work claim that in reality Alberti's poetry had always simply been "art for its own sake." For example, José Ramón López's "Exilio, metapoesía y compromiso en Rafael Alberti" points out that "Alberti, leída su producción *globalmente*, es un perseguidor de paraísos y con ello de una idea de armonía final plena que es negada por las circunstancias de la existencia" (12, my italics). López then defines Alberti's work as a poetics that had a ten year hiccup in the 1930s. By focusing solely on the ideal, utopian bourgeois idea of poetics, many of Alberti's political interventions may appear to have no contribution to his overall poetic goal that includes his politics. López's assertion does not reflect the poet's political poetics in *Coplas*.

In a similar fashion, other critics have tried to value the political aspect in Alberti's poetry. Antonio Jiménez Millán's article, "El compromiso en la poesía de Alberti (República, guerra, exilio)," practically cancels out Alberti's political commitment by claiming that:

A pesar de que se haya querido devaluar la poesía comprometida de Alberti con el término despectivo de 'propaganda,' lo cierto es que la literatura 'de consignas' ocupa un espacio muy reducido en el conjunto de su obra. El compromiso albertiano es lucidez y, al mismo tiempo, entusiasmo por la poesía. (161)

However, Millán's focus excuses Alberti's political commitment, as if his only commitment in reality were his commitment to poetry. Millán's theory is useful because he points out the duality in Alberti's poetry; his

text, although valuable, offers an incomplete analysis of the poet's poetics especially in his post-1940 work.<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand, we cannot reduce Alberti's poetry to simple socialist-realist rhetoric either. In other words, his political commitment did not completely subsume his poetics. In Benjamín Prado's essay on *De un momento a otro*, he writes that Alberti "deserta de sus orígenes burgueses e intenta convencer a los oprimidos trabajadores de que él es ahora uno de ellos, nunca más otro de sus explotadores" (299). By focusing solely on Alberti's politically-driven poetry written for the *trabajadores* during the Second Spanish Republic (when he published *De un momento a otro*), a reader may lose sight of the deeper connection in Alberti's poetry: his complete dedication to that Party did not overshadow his poetics after the fall of the Republic in 1939. Undoubtedly, as we will see in *Coplas de Juan Panadero*, Alberti also strived for Lenin's maxim that literature should be party literature (Lenin 44-49), yet the claim in this paper is to emphasize that his politics worked with his poetics to create a synthesis long after the Republic had fallen. Also, the fusion between his politics and his poetics goes beyond explanations that the poet's double-speak ability or his geographical location allowed him to only partially commit to the Communist Party;<sup>12</sup> so maybe he could somehow stay aloof of the Party. Yet he remained a committed, card-carrying Communist even after Stalin made his notorious Molotov-Ribbentrop pact with Hitler in 1939.<sup>13</sup> Alberti's political program through his poetry cannot be forgotten despite its supposed reduced space throughout his work or the fact that he did not live in the Soviet Union. In fact, it begs the question. The poet did maintain his allegiance to the party despite his distance from it, and that is a factor in his political poetic fusion after that famed pact in 1939 and even beyond the end of the Second World War in 1945.

The critic Salvador Jiménez Fajardo does not deny that a focus on both politics and aesthetics is necessary for a complete

study of Alberti's collections. He writes that from the time that Alberti published *El poeta en la calle* (1934) until the time he published *De un momento a otro* (1937) Alberti "[...] finds again his personal idiom, and abstractions give way to immediate contact with the real [...]", but later in the 1940s "[...] Alberti returns to lyrical resources" (159). Jiménez also concludes that in the poet's *Entre el clavel y la espada* (published in 1940) "[...] the double symbol of its title already hints at the unitary mainspring of *all* his work" (160, my italics). The carnation/sword double symbol of his poetic/political synthesis defines his later work. It is important to note that in the first prologue of *Entre el clavel y la espada*, Alberti states the following:

Después de este desorden impuesto, de esta prisa, de esta urgente gramática necesaria en que vivo, vuelva a mí toda virgen la palabra precisa, virgen el verbo exacto con el justo adjetivo. (*Poesías completas*, 445)

If he had returned to entirely "lyrical resources" after 1940, his revolutionary bent would have disappeared completely before he had published the first edition of *Coplas* in 1949. Furthermore, he would have no reason to combine the "urgent grammar in which he lives" (a reference to his politics) with "precise words" and "perfect adjectives" (a reference to his poetics). More specifically, in reference to *Coplas de Juan Panadero*, Alberti's political poetry after the war and his exile in Argentina, far from "queda[n]do al otro lado del mar, amordazada" as Concha Zardoya writes (166), continued to work for an equilibrium between political and poetic elements. In her introduction to her own 1987 anthology *Poética de Juan Panadero* Concha Zardoya writes:

Su vida y su poesía se 'comprometen' con el transcurrir histórico español: éste—casi siempre—es el trasfondo de sus poemas. La Guerra Civil, el éxodo de la «España peregrina», el destierro, el retorno a la patria en democracia, se entretajan con su propia

vida, con su acción incesante: amor, amistad, viajes, nostalgia, y esperanza impregnan su poesía. (9)

The fact that both his focus on aesthetics and his politics shape his poetry, Zardoya's collection contains less than half of the poems from the original *Coplas de Juan Panadero*.<sup>14</sup> I will now explore that possible equilibrium in *Coplas de Juan Panadero*.

In the first poems of *Coplas* (written between 1949 and 1953), Juan Panadero cries out against various enemies of Communism ten years after the fall of the Republic:

[...] puntapiés para el inglés  
y los norteamericanos [...]  
¡Mueran los imperialistas! [...]  
¡Franco, fuego! ¡Franco, muerte! [...]  
Ayer con Hitler, y ahora,  
con los que se están llevando  
hasta la luz de la aurora. (870-871)<sup>15</sup>

His politics appear clearly in these lines, but his poetics appears as well:

[...] 'Prefiero la rima pobre',  
esa que casi no suena [...]  
Canto, si quiero cantar,  
sencillamente, y si quiero  
lloro sin dificultad [...]  
Mi canto, si se propone,  
puede hacer del agua clara  
un mar de complicaciones. (872-873)<sup>16</sup>

Therefore, this collection demonstrates a search for aesthetic beauty and communist rhetoric simultaneously and this combination does not end with the end of the Civil War in Spain.

Now, the ideal political and aesthetic bond in *Coplas de Juan Panadero* appears at first to heavily favor a propagandistic, Communist view. The first section of the collection ("Autorretrato de Juan Panadero") gives a self-portrait of the speaker; his focus appears to be that of his politics. For example, in the first poem he claims that "[e]l pan que amaso es de harina / que nadie puede comprar" (869). The line shows an obvious, open reference to a

communal existence where mankind should not buy bread but should share it equally. Although the previous quote may appear to be a simple reference to a communal existence without the troubles of capitalism, another interpretation reflects how the poet cannot be bought out; his poetry (bread) is shaped by ideas and ideals that reflect artistic freedom and not a bestseller attitude (the first publication of *Coplas* was in 1949). Yet the communistic ideals found in the first portion of the collection abound and give the impression that politics outweighs poetics in the collection. For example, in the fourth poem the speaker evokes an anti-capitalistic sentiment: “Lo que mi molino muele, / lo dice Juan Panadero, / se reparte y no se vende” (869). Alberti realizes that some of his readers might consider the lyrical declarations as simple anti-Franco rhetoric, so after Juan talks of specific Spanish geographical references such as Puerto, Jerez, and Cádiz, he carefully reminds the reader that “Juan Panadero es del viento / que muele por todas partes” (870). Therefore, we can see that the speaker desires that political representations in the collection not be seen as solely references to the dilemmas in Spain but to a more universal political cause. The reference to *viento* implies the winds of change, but also the fact that Juan is a poet and a *molinero* at the same time who can share his poetry and his political plight with those from all over the world implies explicitly the unification of the masses from Lenin’s rhetoric.

That universal political cause then delineates Juan Panadero’s enemies. Earlier this paper referred to poem ten of the first section; it gives examples of those who have tried to overthrow Juan politically: “Tengo dientes, tengo manos, / y en la punta de los pies, / puntapiés para el inglés / y los norteamericanos” (870). His foes are the capitalist forces that strive to buy him out: the British and the North Americans. But the denouncement does not end there: “¡Mueran los imperialistas!” (870). The poem identifies capitalistic and imperialistic opposition as its aim. Yet, as the poem

reproduces an anti-capitalistic worldview, it even attacks the old Spanish nemesis: “Repito esas tres señales: ¡Franco, fuego! ¡Franco, muerte! / ¡Franco, muerte, fuego y sangre!” (871). Similar to Alberti’s collections from the 1930s, *Coplas* begins with direct and open political criticisms, yet they are not limited to Spain; Juan, the speaker in these poems, finds ways to tie the Franco regime with *yanquis* and Germans. In fact, when Juan offers a specific reference to the Yankees and the Germans and that he will not give them bread, we see that the political project from the beginning of the collection denotes Franco’s Spain, the North American Yankees, the Germans, and even the British as the enemy with common traits. This Communist rhetoric which strives to demonize any opposition is clear in the first section of *Coplas*.

Juan Panadero explicitly denounces the Franco regime in the third section of the compilation “Juan Panadero en la guerra española;” he refers to himself as a soldier who fought ideologically through words and physically with the rifle against the spread of ultraconservative values during the Spanish Civil War. The speaker aligns himself with the people of Spain; the intellectuals that supported the Spanish Republic during the Spanish Civil War used the same rhetoric to side with the people and build their claim to be one of masses.<sup>17</sup> Throughout the poems in the section on *la guerra civil española*, the reader will note the various references to key battles or areas from the war: Guadarrama, Alto del León, Peguerinos, El Escorial, and Madrid. The poet brings to life the war in Spain in the 1930s through the words that define his ideological background, that is, words and phrases that evoke the greatness of leftist rhetoric lace the poems in this section: *pueblo*, *militiano*, *fusil en la mano*, *balas*, *cartuchera*, and *batallón*. The revolutionary language of the poems abounds and provides an ample vision of the speaker’s ideology through Communist vocabulary. Yet, in this section, the speaker not only juxtaposes *muerte* and *luz*, but he alludes to death as the dawn of man, a

rhetoric that suggested that the Spanish Civil War had imparted light and life on the future because of its fall: “¡Primeros muertos de España, / no de la que lleva sombra / sino luz en las entrañas!” (875). Therefore, the death of the Republic created an illuminating political presence that the enemy could not extinguish. But the hint of the new man or the new communistic world alludes to ties with the Party and to deny such would take away from the politics of the collection. For example, I would agree to a certain extent with Concha Zardoya when she writes that

[e]s indudable el carácter ‘popular’ de estas Coplas [...] se insertan en esa corriente popularista que fluye en la poesía española desde la más antigua Edad Media y sin la cual no sería hoy lo que representa. (19-20)

However, her focus solely on the poetic side of the *Coplas* turns *lo popular* from *lo comunista* and undermines the explicit mentions of Communist ideals in the poems, and that focus only gives the reader half of the story.

The focus on the politics of the poem through the political exile that Juan Panadero suffers (an allusion to Alberti’s own exile from Spain in 1939) both personalizes and politicizes the text further. The Spanish Republic’s demise in 1939 and the speaker’s exile to the Americas are played out in the section “Juan Panadero in América;” this part epitomizes the politics held by the speaker and also personalizes the difficulties and promise of political exile. First, the various moments when Juan Panadero describes himself in the Americas illustrate the ideals of his politics. He is *campesino*, *marinero*, *molinero*, *trabajador*; each represents something that he took with him from Spain.<sup>18</sup> Although the politics of the working class are universal, Juan Panadero insists that when he arrived in the Americas he became *chacarero* which refers to his experience in exile and also his assimilation into the blue collar ranks in Argentina. A universalized political stance through exile exemplifies Juan Panadero’s

global view and shows his allegiance with the workers, the mariners, and the farmhands of both Europe and the Americas.

After the obvious political references I have noted so far, the second section of the collection titled, “Poética de Juan Panadero,” turns openly to aesthetics; in fact, this is where Juan refers specifically to the idea that “[p]refier[e] la rima pobre, / esa que casi no suena” (872). The satirical nature of the poems supplies ample evidence for the aesthetic possibilities of the speaker and his humble, yet self-declared, imprecise voice. Although the orator’s self-proclamation of humility could undermine the aesthetic quality of the work, I would argue that the finality of the poetry ascribes to an aesthetics which challenges the traditional couplet and enhances the definition of such. Indeed, Alberti looks to reconcile intellectual knowledge and savvy with simple imperfect form that reproduces the *voz del pueblo*. His beliefs, reflected in *Coplas*, stemmed from more than two decades before when he strove for reconciliation between aesthetic intellectualism and social reform; he provided accessibility for the masses without any sacrifice of scholarly stimulation.<sup>19</sup> As mentioned above, Alberti confronted the *copla* tradition in Spain. The forms of Alberti’s *coplas* (his *rima pobre*) do not share the similar traditional four lines (paired couplets) that Manrique and others followed from the fifteenth century. The couplets in Spain have a long and arduous tradition, anchored in sets of couplets by authors from Jorge Manrique to Federico García Lorca; in Alberti’s collection the reader immediately can notice that the author has knowledge of the forms and also differs from them. Yet, his familiarity with and control of the poetic forms is what causes such awe in students of his work because of (or in spite of) his allegiance to a specific political stance.

To support the justification of a marriage between simple forms and deep aesthetic connections with the reader, in 1949 Juan Panadero declares: “no digo como los tontos: ‘que hay que hablar en tonto al pueblo’” (872).

The speaker complains that one of the challenges for the poet is the fact that he must represent current issues aesthetically through his verse and not simplify it for the people. In fact, to exemplify the dynamics of his own aesthetics, Alberti reflected on his role as poet and his commitment to the people in his acceptance speech after he won the Lenin International Peace Prize in 1965: “[...] los poetas hemos de ser, como quería Antonio Machado, poetas del tiempo. Ese es nuestro compromiso: ser, estar, existir, dar universalidad a un momento [...]” (Alberti in Concha Zardoya 19). Nevertheless, although Juan Panadero understands that his commitment reflects his moment in time, in the section “Poética de Juan Panadero” he states that his verses are *sencillos* but at the same time they produce a profound effect in the reader. As mentioned earlier, he points out that “[m]i canto, si se propone, / puede hacer del agua clara / un mar de complicaciones” (873); in other words, the simplicity of the couplets should not lull the reader into thinking that the simple manner of the poems does not mean that they cannot contain aesthetic complexities. Moreover, a reader must note that Juan Panadero’s straightforward (in many cases political) manner does not demean the intricacies of his aesthetic project. For example, in the next poem (poem 7), Juan writes: “Yo soy como la saeta, / que antes de haberlo pensado / ya está clavada en la meta” (873). Juan explains his view in a clear, concise manner as Alberti had done in the second prologue of *Entre el clavel y la espada* almost a decade earlier:

[...] si mi nombre no fuera un compromiso, una palabra dada, un cuello constante, tú, libro que ahora vas a abrirte, lo harías solamente bajo un signo de flor, lejos de él la fija espada que lo alerta. (*Poesías completas*, 445)

Therefore, Alberti proved that his political and aesthetic thought had given life to his accessible, uncomplicated poetry. Juan Panadero expanded that notion.

In fact, later on in *Coplas*, Juan Panadero writes the fifth section, “Coplas de Juan

Panadero” for those who contend that his poetry only focuses on obscure political issues in Spain. He is quick to remind us of the contrary: “Pero que nadie se engañe. / Aunque andaluz, yo soy copla, / soy viento de cualquier parte” (882, my italics). Because the speaker defines himself as a couplet, his declaration could suggest that he is the only couplet (or couplet-maker) of any worth and therefore establishes himself as the authority in the field. The statement refers to the fact that his *copla de rima pobre* gives life and meaning to his worldview; he is not a *molinero* but a universal poet that speaks for the masses. In the end, Juan Panadero insisted that he was not only the speaker but the verse itself. The simple statement, *yo soy copla*, encompasses the poetic vision of the *Coplas de Juan Panadero* in that Alberti had redefined couplets and political poetry: simplicity that ties aesthetic inspiration to political commitment.

Up to this point this paper has looked at the *Coplas*’ characteristics as both a political statement and an aesthetically pleasing document; the differentiation between the two stances are barely possible since the synthesis of politics and poetics in this work acts as a culmination of the poet’s life work and worldview. Although both tendencies run throughout the *Coplas*, one might argue that this collection simply reflects a modernist point of view found in the *Generación del 27*, a view that Andrew Debicki claims Alberti had shared with his fellow poets during his younger years (22). It is clear from the explicit Communist commentary in the collection that this could be the case because the *Coplas*, like Alberti’s earlier works, in fact “[...] uses the balance between popular and learned traditions in Spain to defend the universality of Spanish poetry” (Debicki 22). If *popular* refers to “the people” then a bourgeois-trained poet could find equilibrium between academic and common principles, as many have argued of Alberti’s pre-1930 poetry. This view does not give the complete picture of the poet, and with reference to Alberti’s poetry of the 1940s and 1950s, actually denies his blatant political jabs in the *Coplas*.



One of the key allusions to Juan Panadero's political poetics appears in "Poética de Juan Panadero." Despite his marginalized view, either rejected as bourgeois by the Party or as biased and opinionated rubbish by searchers of purity, Juan sees both sides of his duality as unavoidable and necessary components of his writings:

9  
Si no hubiera tantos males  
yo de mis coplas haría  
torres de pavos reales.  
10  
Pero a aquél lo están matando,  
a éste lo están consumiendo  
y a otro lo están enterrando. (873)

Juan carefully claims that if there were not so much evil he would focus solely on aesthetic pleasure, but if he were to do so he would deny his call to be *poeta del tiempo*. The above lines denounce injustices found in the world in the 1950s. But at the same time, there is a dreamlike post-surrealist view ("torres de pavos reales") that thrives in these verses. The strength of the collection stems from how the speaker crafts what is real and personal with what is intangible and universal. Therefore, *Coplas* acts as Communist political commentary (the real) and inspirational aesthetically pleasing poetry (universal).

Political poetics is the focus of a later section in the collection called "Otras coplas sobre la poética de Juan Panadero." First we see that "Mas la sola condición / es que la estrella y el barro / dejen de ser lo que son" (883). Juan upholds the argument that only through him, a political being, can things become poetic. That is, anything can have an aesthetic side, if the speaker wills it, politics included. Later Juan clarifies his thoughts: "El barro, si es puro barro / tan solo, no es poesía [...] Y le sucede a la estrella, / si es pura estrella, ser fuego / que todavía no sueña" (883). Here a simple metaphor shows how a focus on politics without the help of a poet is in fact not aesthetic. Juan continues to justify his political poetics tie as he calls out to all of the poets

in the world: "Poetas: en *todo* está / lo bello. Pero lo bello, / si no se ve, no se da" (884, my italics). Therefore, his thesis remains that poetry is in everything (in politics, too) and the purpose of the poet is to make everything into poetry. Moreover, his thesis appears to imply that those who find a synthesis between poetry and politics are true poets. In the very next poem he says "Soy pueblo" (884). Juan Panadero has declared up to this point two parts of his being that complement one another: *yo soy copla* and *yo soy pueblo*. The synthesis of both the couplet and the people define the poetic endeavor that Alberti proposes in his work: political poets value both visions and therefore set the bar at a high level for the aspirations of all poets.

Later, in another section of *coplas* called "Juan Panadero insiste sobre su poética," the poet focuses on what his poetics has become in order to look to the future. In these couplets, there is not one reference to the past; there is not one verb in past tense. At the same time, the speaker points out that his poetics is not simple, despite the simple set up of couplets. The lines of the 3rd, 4th, and 5th *coplas* show this perspective:

[3] Nadie de Juan Panadero  
piense que es simple. Si soy  
simple es porque así lo quiero.  
[4] Sencillo, porque disparo  
contra lo oscuro, sabiendo  
que el aire ha de ser muy claro.  
[5] Para oscuro, un calabozo,  
y para claro, la luna  
llena en el fondo de un pozo. (916)

Although *sencillos*, these poems are far from *simples*. *Coplas de Juan Panadero* is overlooked by criticism because of its supposed simplicity and its political references. Although it may appear that Alberti simply created a ping-pong effect between Juan Panadero's politics and his poetics, the collection also reflects once again, that Alberti analyzed the legitimacy of his political-poetic synthesis through nostalgia, hence the reason for "Poética de Juan Panadero," "Otras coplas

sobre la poética de Juan Panadero,” and “Juan Panadero insiste sobre su poética.”

The longest section (and most relevant for this study) is “Coplas de Juan Panadero a Pablo Neruda (Serie I)”. I maintain that by mentioning the name of Pablo Neruda, the Chilean National Poet, Juan Panadero identifies the ideal political poet of all time and idolizes him. He also reminisces of a time when the Spanish Republic was a place of progressive politics and aggressive poetics. Juan refers to Neruda as “una luz en la tempestad” on both fronts (888). Neruda acted as a light both in politics and poetry; Juan talks of the time that they shared in Spain, of their common friends (Miguel Hernández, Federico García Lorca, and Raúl González Tuñón for example), and of their mutual political stance. He versifies: “Y empiezo al fin mi canción / por quien tú, Chile, hoy ya tienes / a España en el corazón” (889). Because politics and poetry became intertwined during the Second Spanish Republic (1931-1936), Juan Panadero refers to that time period and also to Neruda’s collection *España en el corazón*.<sup>20</sup> Because the reference to *España en el corazón* has political and poetic references with ties to another political poet, Juan Panadero can prove that his political poetry combination is both valid and valuable.

The question is not necessarily why criticism has avoided Rafael Alberti’s collection, *Coplas de Juan Panadero*, which seems clear considering the political implications of the text and the political context of the 1950s Cold War. Through these simple tercets (irregular *coplas*), the poet slyly presents his powerful support and commitment to both his politics and his aesthetics approximately ten years after Franco’s victory in the Civil War. He achieves that goal by using a simple method, one that some readers may find too simple and archaic to be real poetry, hence the limited research on this collection. In its majority, his method is to write tercets, where the first and the third verses rhyme: *rima pobre*. By trying to show the feigned simplicity of his make-believe poet, Juan Panadero, Alberti

challenged the norm of years of tradition that claimed that poetic forms had to be regimented in order to have aesthetic value and at the same time he simultaneously captured the voice of the people. Yet, upon examining these three-verse poems, I hoped to have argued that they display similar nostalgic and self-analyzing elements that reflect Rafael Alberti’s political poetics through a simple poet of the people, who says much without saying much at all.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Some of these authors include: Ricardo Gullón, C. B. Morris, and Solita Salinas de Marichal.

<sup>2</sup>Some of these authors include: Felipe B. Pedraza Jiménez, Milagros Rodríguez Cáceres, José Ramón López, and Concha Zardoya. Robert G. Havard’s article “Rafael Alberti’s *De un momento a otro*: The Matter of Poetry, Politics and War” provides an excellent synthesis of both sides of the debate during the 1930s and focuses primarily on *De un momento a otro* as the title indicates.

<sup>3</sup>*La Fundación Rafael Alberti* does not list any work of criticism that focuses directly on *Coplas*.

<sup>4</sup>*Retornos de lo vivo lejano* (1948-1956), *Poemas de Punta del este* (1945-1956), *Signos del día* (1945-1955), *A la pintura* (1945-1952), *Baladas y canciones del Paraná* (1953-1954), *Ora marítima* (1953).

<sup>5</sup>Although debatable, the observation that aesthetics and committed politics can coexist in poetry is not new; critics of poetry in the Spanish language could look for evidence in other nineteenth and twentieth century canonized poets such as: Vicente Aleixandre, Manuel Altolaguirre, Ernesto Cardenal, Rubén Darío, Rosario Ferré, Federico García Lorca, Nicolás Guillén, Miguel Hernández, Vicente Huidobro, Antonio Machado, José Martí, Gabriela Mistral, Pablo Neruda, Octavio Paz, Emilio Prados, and César Vallejo, to name a few.

<sup>6</sup>Alberti published *Coplas de Juan Panadero* in 1949. After he obtained his official Communist Party card in 1930, he supported the Republic where he fought a war of words against the Franco regime from 1936-1939. In 1940 he fled to Argentina as a political refugee.

<sup>7</sup>See Gullón’s *Alegrías y sombras de Rafael Alberti* and Morris’s *Rafael Alberti’s ‘Sobre los Ángeles’: Four Major Themes*.

<sup>8</sup>Examples of these studies are: Judith Nantell’s, *Rafael Alberti’s Poetry of the Thirties: The Poet’s*

*Public Voice*, Antonio Jiménez Millán's, *La poesía de Rafael Alberti (1930-39)*, Salvador Jiménez Fajardo's *Multiple Spaces: The Poetry of Rafael Alberti*, and Peter Wesseling's *Revolution and Tradition: The Poetry of Rafael Alberti*.

<sup>9</sup>The titles of the nineteen sections are: "Autorretrato de Juan Panadero," "Poética de Juan Panadero," "Juan Panadero en la guerra española (serie I)," "Juan Panadero en América," "Coplas de Juan Panadero," "Otras Coplas sobre la poética de Juan Panadero," "Coplas de Juan Panadero por los que mueren desterrados," "Revelaciones de Juan Panadero," "Coplas de Juan Panadero a Pablo Neruda (serie I)," "Visión de Juan Panadero," "Juan Panadero Orienta a los turistas," "Coplas varias de Juan Panadero sobre el terror," "Mensaje de Juan Panadero al Congreso Mundial por la Paz (París, abril de 1949)," "Juan Panadero envía su saludo a Pasionaria," "Juan Panadero pide ayuda para el pueblo español," "Juan Panadero ensalza en la memoria de José Gómez Gayoso y Antonio Seoane a los héroes caídos en la resistencia española," "Juan Panadero insiste sobre su poética," "Juan Panadero pide por la libertad de López Raimundo y el pueblo español," and "Juan Panadero contra los vendedores y compradores de España."

<sup>10</sup>Alberti referred to this technique as *rima pobre* in the prologue of the third edition of *Coplas* published in 1984; he quotes one of Antonio Machado's heteronyms, Juan de Mairena. Mairena claimed that he preferred the rima pobre ("Prefiero la rima pobre"). See Machado's *Juan de Mairena: sentencias, donaires y apuntes de un profesor apócrifo* (first published in 1936).

<sup>11</sup>Alberti's dual commitment reflects Walter Benjamin's views in his article "Left-Wing Melancholy" and Benjamin would have accused the exiled Spanish poet of such spinelessness in his poetry despite his active political agenda in life. Wendy Brown in her article "Resisting Left Melancholy" only solidifies Alberti's dilemma:

Left melancholy, in short, is Benjamin's name for a mournful, conservative, backward-looking attachment to a feeling, analysis, or relationship that has been rendered thing-like and frozen in the heart of the putative leftist. If Freud is helpful here, then this condition presumably issues from some unaccountable loss, some unavoidably [sic] crushed ideal, contemporarily signified by the terms left, socialism, Marx, or movement. (Brown 20-21)

<sup>12</sup>Millán writes for example that "Alberti no se encuentra, como ocurría con los escritores soviéticos, con una serie de líneas ya marcadas de antemano, con un programa más o menos elaborado [...]" (97).

<sup>13</sup>The Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, named for the two men who negotiated on behalf of Stalin and Hitler respectively, stated that Hitler would not attack the Soviet Union and vice-versa. Both planned to break the pact but it was eventually Hitler who made the first move and suffered greatly for it. Many card-carrying communists who had fought against the fascists and Nazis left the party because they did not agree with Stalin; they considered an agreement with the Nazis to go against their political beliefs.

<sup>14</sup>Concha Zardoya's edition includes the sections "Poética de Juan Panadero," "Otras coplas sobre la poética de Juan Panadero," "Juan Panadero insiste sobre su poética" y "Juan Panadero se aclara." In Zardoya's anthology, Juan Panadero appears to lose his political side, since the author focuses on the aesthetic poetry from the collection. Zardoya's idea has merit; it appears that she also realized that if a reader could somehow overcome some of the Communist rhetoric then they could see that Alberti's poetry represented much more than committed political commentary. However, some might argue that her anthology could deny the communist side of the poetry which suggests a possible apologetic ideal that *Coplas* does not contain.

<sup>15</sup>The references appear in Alberti's *Poesías completas* (1961). All of the quoted material in this paper from *Coplas de Juan Panadero* comes from that collection.

<sup>16</sup>Alberti cites Antonio Machado's *profesor apócrifo*, Juan de Mairena when he uses the phrase "Prefiero la rima pobre." See note 10.

<sup>17</sup>Manuel Aznar Soler's three volume study, *II Congreso Internacional de Escritores para la Defensa de la Cultura*, and Federico Suárez's book, *Intelectuales antifascistas*, shed light on how the Communist apparatus worked to attract intellectuals to their cause so that the authors would use their talents for the defense and promotion of Communistic principles. Some maintained their adherence to the party after World War II, such as the Chilean National Poet, Pablo Neruda, the Cuban National Poet, Nicolás Guillén, and the Spanish poet in exile, Rafael Alberti.

<sup>18</sup>See Alberti's memoirs *La arboleda perdida* for a detailed look at how Alberti uses these definitions to create his own nostalgic, ideal view of

himself. Hermann's study analyzes the memoirs and his self-perceptions in her chapter "Exile and Left Melancholia" (128-165).

<sup>19</sup>In Víctor García de la Concha's *Antología comentada de la Generación del 27* the dynamic and diverse aspects of the supposedly unified literary "generation" appear as five varying trends where some of the poets wrote poetry in one or more of them. The five trends among the poets according to García de la Concha were: *La poesía vanguardista, la poesía pura, el neopopularismo, el surrealismo, el neorromanticismo, and la poesía social*. The author places Alberti in three of the five areas: *el neopopularismo, el surrealismo, and la poesía social*.

<sup>20</sup>In his memoirs, *Confieso que he vivido*, Pablo Neruda writes this of his collection, *España en el corazón*:

Manuel Altoaguirre seguía con sus imprentas. Instaló una en pleno frente del Este, cerca de Gerona, en un viejo monasterio. Allí se imprimió de manera singular mi libro *España en el corazón* [...] Pero entonces faltó el papel. Encontraron un viejo molino y allí decidieron fabricarlo [...] De todo le echaban al molino, desde una bandera del enemigo hasta la túnica ensangrentada de un soldado moro. A pesar de los insólitos materiales, y de la total inexperiencia de los fabricantes, el papel quedó muy hermoso. Los pocos ejemplares que de ese libro se conservan, asombran por la tipografía y por los pliegos de misteriosa manufactura. Años después vi un ejemplar de esta edición en Washington, en la biblioteca del Congreso, colocado en una vitrina como uno de los libros más raros de nuestro tiempo (Neruda 144-145).

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