

Didactic of Ruben Dario's work and life

(Essay)

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When we teach the work and life of the universal poet Ruben Dario at high schools, one end up teaching about everything but literature: biography, works, and characteristics of the modernist literary school, poetry characteristics and postmodernist short stories. It often happens that the usual sessions dedicated to the poet become into long lists of dates, works, names and literary characteristics. But the study about Dario is not that.

Why studying Dario? For Valle Castillo (1993, Pérez Cuadra, 2000) Dario was part of the ideologists of the country transformation, he became in the universal modernist literary.

Actually, Dario is a universal symbol because of his dazzling and strength in his poetry and prose, and for his creative genius, for the musicality in his verse and the modernization and enrichment of the language, which made him deserve the honorable title "Prince of the Castilian Letters".

What is didactic? For Juan Amos Comenio (Rojas, 2009) didactic has as goal the study of leading the individual to learning, coordinating the contents with student learning.

For this study some questions should be primarily asked; how many and who were the creators of the renaissance literary movement in Spain? Cervantes, Garcilaso de la Vega, Lopez de la Vega; how many and who were the authors of the classic literature? Euripides, Sofocles, Hesiod, Homer, Publio Virgil Margon; how many and who were the creators of the vanguard literary movement in Nicaragua? Jose Coronel Urtecho, Joaquin Pasos, Manolo Cuadra, Pablo Antonio Cuadra, among others; how many and who were the creators of the modernist movement? Only one: Rubén Dario.

The fact that only Dario was the creator of the modernist movement shows us his creating intellectual capacity, due to his lifelong study. It was determining; his reading of Don Quixote de la Mancha, the works of Moratin, the Thousands and One Nights, the Holy Bible, De Officiis of Cicero, the Corine of Madame Staël, a volume of three classic Spanish novels and the Cave by Strozzi; and by 18 years old he learned by heart the Dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy; and that any city he arrived, the first place he visited was its library and read all its books.

What do we learn from this? It tells us that for a vast knowledge we need to be constant on reading. But also parents have an important role in children's education. Mother Bernarda taught him since he was 3 three years old. She taught him to listen to politicians and intellectuals talks in the social gathering she promoted at home. And commonly in Nicaragua, what do parents do for

their children's education? Do they perhaps promote reading since childhood? Do they converse with their children? Do they have family gatherings so grown-ups share their knowledge with children? Do they have intellectual activities? We know what our reality is. That is why when our children become young people there is no interest about reading because parents do not teach them since children. Mother Bernarda was decisive for the poet to get instructed as self-educated.

Dario was a genius and this geniality is denoted in his literary production. In his work feelings, his experiences, capacities and even his ideology are expressed. To understand his work we should seek through his intimate world, to consider the core of it, the sources of his inspirations, his motivations, his influences, the essence, in short, of his personality. Discover why, how and what his artistic production occurs, what the ideal of his beauty and creative vitality is. It is interesting to peer what Dario state about.

What is literary beauty? For Ayllón (2012) literature is beautiful by definition. That elegance seems easy and natural when it reflects an interesting reality. He adds that magic of literary beauty emerges when the mastering of the written language is used for great questions that give light human condition: liberty, love, suffering, injustice, death. In Dario estheticism is observed in the renovation of language, more brilliant, more colorful, more resounding and musical.

In the poetry **Salutación del Optimista** (Salutation of the Optimistic), our poet shows us the use of a wide vocabulary when mentioning words like, ínclita (illustrious), ubérrimas (highly fertile and abundant), indolencia (indolence), progenie (progeny), triptolémico (adj. triptolemicus), prosapias (illustrious family), product of many years of studying. That is why it is important that our students have the habit of reading because it extends vocabulary, orthography, mind, imagination. The precious, musical lexical also the vast vocabulary, and formal elegance of the post rhetoric, is a constant search for beauty.

In **Salutation of the Optimistic** for example, he sings for Virgil, Hercules, Babylon, Niniveh, Atlantis and Minerva. In **Oda a Roosevelt** (Ode to Roosevelt) he sings for Walt Whitman, Washinton, Nemrod, Alexander, Nebuchadnezzar, Hugo, Grant, Mammon, Plato, Netzahualcóyotl, Moctezuma, Christopher Columbus and Guatemoc. In **El Rey Oscar** (the King Oscar), he sings for Sigismund, Hamlet, Cid, Becquer, Alhambra, Pyrenees, Andes, Lepanto, Peru, Flandes, Elizabeth the Catholic, Christopher Columbus, Velasquez the painter, Hernan Cortes, Heracles, Pan and Sire.

In the preface of *Cantos de Vida y Esperanza* (Songs of Life and Hope), he invites us not to be ordinary, to study, to be educated and he adds “[...] *I have tried to express the most noble and high in my understanding; I am telling my verse with a very pride modesty that only the spikes understand*”.

And in *Pegaso* (Pegasus) he exposed, that like Pegasus he became the best and with pride he stated to be the best among poets because he devoted his life to self-educated study, reading, persistence, and with it he attained “[...] *to show his triumphant head/crowned with the day's King; horse-breaker of diamond-hooves horse [...]*”. But in **the Fountain of Profane Proses**, he said that the one who can achieve with the wishes is himself and he stated: “[...] *fill the cup and drink, the fountain is in yourself*”.

In the **Poema I de Cantos de Vida y Esperanza** (Poem I of Songs of Life and Hope), he reflects about his life, love and existence. He tells us his youth was unstoppable, he made many mistakes due to a sad childhood and with no help from his parents; “*I knew about pain since my childhood, my youth [...] was it youth, mine one? Its roses still give us a fragrance of melancholy [...] colt with no bridle my instinct went. My youth rode a colt with no bridle; it was riding drunk with a dagger in his belt, if it did not fall off is because God is good*”. In this poem he stated he was a man who in his youth made many

mistakes that led him to be a dipsomaniac. His religious beliefs make him assure God's hand was always there to help him. This shows that Dario concerns young people do not follow that example, that they care about leaving vices, from drugs and that only God's word could fill the emptiness in their souls.

Dario wrote in his **biography** about the lack of love from his father Manuel Dario and says: "*he who had risen me since the youngest years, that who had died, coroner Ramirez. I don't know, why I always had some disregard, a separating vague curiosity with my «uncle Manuel». The voice of blood [...] what a placid tale story! The only fatherhood, of affection and care. The one who suffers, fights and keeps awake for the child, though that father did not beget, that is his father*". Poet explains his father's behavior, Manuel, but also that of his adoptive parents, who lied until he was 8. Of course, he does not agree with the lie. It is clear his father's addiction for alcohol did not make him a responsible man, but Mrs. Bernarda and coroner Ramirez Madregil did it as well, or they believed this did not have any relevance for the kid. Currently, it is suggested to tell children the truth about who their parents are and teach them to be responsible parents when they have a family.

Our old parents need so much of us, but insensibility and lack of care do not let us see the alterations they suffer due to old friend, the time. They are so perfect, with a bunch of experiences, wisdom, achievements, stories and values. They have everything they need to share with their beloved relatives. But most of the time we ignore them.

For all of this, in **La Anciana de Prosas Profanas** (the Elderly Woman of Profane Proses), Dario shows us a full of wisdom and philosophy old lady, who has more knowledge than a library because of experience. He says: "*in those dry petals there is more philosophy to give you can your wise library; (...)*".

In **Ama tu Ritmo** (Love Your Rhythm) of Profane Proses, he points we have to love what we do; that, before any problem we should listen to the advice of a mother, a teacher, a pastor, a priest, an elder, who has the moral authority to give us a lesson, not to somebody who rather has problems with drugs or is a delinquent. Also he tells us no to be indifferent to life, to know how to live in this world and to be sincere; "*listen to the divine rhetoric /of the bird in the air [...] the taciturn indifference kills/ and links pearl and crystalline pearl [...]*".

Starting a war involves different world powers, the First World War that lasted from 1914 to 1918 had as consequence a great destruction for the countries who were implied in it. In **Songs of Life and Hope**, Dario alluded this war because his trip to Spain made him experience these moments. He expresses; "*Men kill each other in the far east [...]. Earth is pregnant with profound grief [...]*".

And what does our country teach us? Saballos Ramírez (2014) tells that Nicaragua participated in that First World War. He added the current president then, Emiliano Chamorro decided to join United States Army because our country was invaded by them. But in taking this decision people voice was not considered. That is Dario defined as "*Executioner of ideals who has afflicted land, [...] rude Molossian of hatred and war*", and in **Ode to Roosevelt**, he calls him "*Hunter, primitive, modern, simple and complicated. The future invader of naïve America [...] you are arrogant and strong sample of your race, you are educated, you are skillful [...] the United States are powerful and big*".

History is shown in the poem **Ode to Roosevelt** in which America is depicted as naive and how Spaniards obligated our natives to learn the Castilian language; "*United States /you are the future invader/of the naïve America who has native blood who/ still prays for Jesus Christ and stills speaks Spanish*".

In the stories there is an overflow of sensuality, beauty and artistic creation.

El Fardo (The Bulk) is the only story that differs in content with the rest of the stories in **Azul...** (Blue...). What does this story teach us? There is a variety of very important topics to reflect about with students because are peculiar of our people. One of the aspects he highlights is the importance of study.

This for many parents is a priority their children must carry out. But the son of uncle Lucas did not have that right. He had to work since he was 15 to help his father because he was old and sick: *“the boy was very honest and fond of work. It was intended to send him to school until he was grown-up; but miserables do not learn when there is weeping in the clumsy little room”*.

He tells us women of poor people do not have sexual education nor have responsibility regarding to the number of children she can give birth. *“His woman carried the damnation of the wombs of the poor; fertility. There was, then, many hungry mouths requesting for bread, many dirty boys rolling around in the garbage, many lean bodies shivering of cold; [...]”*.

In **The Bulk** he talks about how sailors after working hard for a good while in the open sea, they get drunk, they spend their salary in liquor and prostitution.

He considers a sad reality in Nicaragua when he tells how the son of uncles Lucas ends up dead: *“the bulk, the heavy bulk, unfastened from the rope like from a loose collar a dog gets his head off; and fell off on the son of uncle Lucas, who between the boat edge and the huge bulk, got with the kidneys broken, the spine out of place and pouring black blood out of his mouth”*. *“That day, there was no bread nor medicines at uncle Lucas’ homes, but the smashed boy who the rheumatic would hug crying, between the uproar of the women and the boys, when they took the dead body to Playa Ancha (wide beach)”*.

In **El Palacio del Sol** (the Palace of Sun), it appears a message for mothers who should have communication with their daughters. So, what is important is not providing good materials to their daughters and to know that they (daughters) matter more about feelings. It teaches young girls not to trust in those people who promise happiness like the fairy who appears without mother’s notice and take her to the Palace of the Sun. Young girls are easy prey for unscrupulous people who deceive promising happiness and actually Berta was taken to a harem where young boys expect for girls to involve them in their *“mysterious compliments that lead to soul”*.

The fairy is not anybody else but the accomplice, the bad girlfriend, the neighbor who advises Berta wrongfully. Though Dario at the end advises mothers to have more communication with their daughters and give them a bit of freedom, to have friends their age; he also tells mothers to watch what is going around their daughters.

El Pájaro Azul (the Blue Bird) is a story with a very sad end. The lesson is for those parents who do not support their children accomplish their wishes, in this case, Garcín is a poet and his father asked him to be in charge of the store of fabrics he owns. At the end of the story, Garcín commits suicide with the purpose of punishing his father who did not allow him to freely take his decisions. But son does not understand that his father just wants the best for him, because *“it is impossible to do a living of poetry”*. But Garcín does not understand this. Did Garcín act correctly? No, he did not, he did not fight for his ideals.

Dario shows us that we have to fight for everything we want, but he also tells parents to have communication with children. That was a very hard time for young people who were obligated to do what their parents mandated.

The fairy made a reflection on Garcín expressions. He always expected his friends help him, but they never paid attention to his words: *“yes, inside my brain’s cage there is a bird prisoned that wants his liberty... some eve Garcín arrived laughing a lot and, though very sad; Friends of mine, an embrace! Embrace me you all, just like that, hard; you, bid farewell earnestly, with all your soul... the blue bird flies away... and poor Garcín cried, he embraced us, he shook our hands with all his strength and left away”*. The suicide victim always provides clues of what he is planning to do, we are the insensitive who do not intuit on his words, their decisions.

In ***El Velo de la Reina de Mab*** (the Veil of Mab’s Queen), he presents man unconformity before life he had to live. *“The four men complained. One, his fate was to be in a quarry, the other one to have the iris, the other had the rhythm and the other the blue sky”*. And we have to teach our students to accept our origins, what is important is the preparation we have. The study and work dignify us.

In ***Morbo et Umbra*** (Morbidity et Umbra), he exposes the insensitivity of some people, like the case of the owner of the funeral parlor who was not sensitive for the pain of the grandmother who had lost her grandson:

“The little kept getting worse, getting worse, and finally this morning died in her arms. How deep the grandma suffered!

- *Oh! Sir, the final thing I want to give my little boy: a coffin of those; it should not be expensive; it should be furnished with pink ribbons. Then a bouquet of flowers. I will pay you in cash. Here is the money. How much is it?*

- *Come on, do not you be miserly, grandma; seven bucks.*

- *Six.*

- *Seven, grandmother.*

- *And then! There she left the five bucks she had brought. Later she would pay off the others. She was an honest woman indeed. Though it would be necessary to fast, she would pay it. He knew her very well, she took it away”*.

In ***El Perro del Ciego*** (the Dog of the Blind), he shows a boy’s cruelty to animals, other children and a blind:

“With the animals he was not less cruel as with boys, do you like birdies? Well he found them in the nests, prisoned them, and took their feathers off, crash their eggs, took their eyes out. At home of the naughty boy there was a cat. Some day he cut the poor animal tail’s off, as he did with his dog the Greek Acibiades (...) he mocked on lames, one-eyed people, hunchbacks, beggars begging in behalf of black ridicule misery (...). Paco had found a scorpion alive; put it between two bread slices and took it to the blind to eat. The animal bit the poor thing in the mouth, who was on the verge of death”.

Dario in the story mentions the good acts children should do:

“When a child carries out a good action, pink wings angels cheer up. Eternal Father sometimes smiling moves his good beard when cherub peered through the slit of gold of the blue report of the little ones going right here down, who know their lessons, that obey father and mother, who do not wear down many shoes and show good heart and clean hands”.

In contrast, *“the Eternal Father gets mad; (...). But look, children that the good God gets angry with holy fury. Paco got smallpox that got him to the tomb after he had suffered painfully and got ugly indeed”*.

He finishes presenting a great lesson:

“Children, be good. The dog of the blind – that melancholic exile from day, nostalgic of the light country – is docile, sad, is humble; love it, kids. Do never procure it any harm, and if it walk by your house’s door, give it something to eat. And so, oh children! You will be blessed by God (...).”

In Betún y Sangre (Wax and Blood) there is an allusion to children’s work. A grandmother who has risen the grandson and whom she demands to bring money and pay her debts: *“Do not stop at the road mouth-opened! And buy the beef jerky and bring the chili for the salad”*. Then, with great harsh voice, scolding voice; *“the day before yesterday, four nickels, yesterday seven nickels. If you do not bring not even a buck, you will see what happen to you!”*

Besides there is mistreatment with the boy:

“And then the old lady: -ah rascal, stupid, animal, beast! Ah, vile! Ah, crooked! You will see! And, in fact, she grabbed a stick gave the poor thing one and another blows with it: - for being rascal, get it! Liar! Take it! Stick hits and more stick hits, until he was despaired, crying, moaning, pulling his hair off, he put his hat to the ears, he grimaced in wrath to the “mother” and left out running like a dog with a can attached to its tail, his head was possessed by this idea: not coming back home”.

La **Novela de Uno de Tantos** (*The novel of one of so many*), of **Complete Stories**, pose the education the children of rich people give their children and in the story:

“The son of the vice consul, Juan Martín, had been rise with indulgences and fancies at the luxurious home of the french-fried; he had had the first velocipede, European suits, nice and fine, gorgeous toys. (...) “That kid saw his year passed by in ostentation and grandeur. Once pubescent, still loved by his father, the good French, and by his mother, a holy woman who condoned all of his rascalities, he got used to the crazy and excited life of a young modern genteel; to waste around, to dress finely, to have beautiful lovers; if they are made of meat table, even better; play; his old father will leave the heritage, anyway”. “The young genteel, because of his vanity, of his fatal imprudence, and with “chivo” and with the baccarat, he made his uncle Rigot came down in bankruptcy. And he told Juan Martinito in Spanish: “either I break your soul to pieces under stick hits, or you go to the neighboring country, where there is a university, to have a profession”. The junior opted for the last”

And Dario kept telling:

“And my friends helped me bestrew my lodging all over. It passed one, two, three, and four. All of the sudden my fortune wheel shifted swiftly. In the same year my father and mother died. I have seen some friends of the café... they have not recognized me! One gave me a buck and did not want to touch my hand, afraid of contagious. I knew you were there, I have come to beg you to do for me what you can. It is impossible for me to walk. I am going to die, soon”.

And he ends the story with a teaching: *“Read my story, noisy younger who are with the newspaper in bed, not up yet, at eleven in the morning. Read these lines if you are rich, and if poor and student, and hope of your parents, read them twice and think over the implacable sphinx enigma”*.

I conclude with the poem **Nicaragua** in which Dario offers our Nicaraguan people all his literarian production:

*“I offer you the iron I forged my tenacity on,
the box of harmony that keeps my treasure,*

*the pedestal of diamonds of the idol I adore
and I offer you my effort, my name and my dream.*

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