Rafael Alberti (1902-1999)

Born in Cadiz, Andalusia, and a member of what is known as the Generation of ‘27, Rafael Alberti started his career as an avant-garde painter. He began to paint when his family moved to Madrid in 1917, and later in his life, he would often admit to think of himself as a painter before a poet. He started writing poetry in 1920, publishing some of his early works in the *ultraista* literary review *Horizontes*. His first book of poems, *Marinero en tierra* [*Sailor in Land*], won the prestigious Premio Nacional de Literatura [National Prize for Literature] in 1925. Soon would follow *La amante* [*The mistress*] in 1926, and *El alba del alhel*í [*Dawn of the Wallflower*], published in 1927. All three of these works were inspired by *neo-popularismo*, one of the various literary trends that influenced the Generation of ‘27.

The arrival of Alberti at the Residencia de Estudiantes [Student Residence] in 1924 marks a crucial moment in his life; it was at the Residencia that he would meet most of the members that would later form the Generation of ‘27: Federico García Lorca, Salvador Dalí, Luis Buñuel, Jorge Guillén, Gerardo Diego, Pedro Salinas, Vicente Aleixandre and Dámaso Alonso among others.

In 1929 Alberti published *Cal y Canto* [*Quicklime and Song*] influenced by *neo-Gongorismo*, a literary style characteristic of the Generation of ‘27, inspired by the works of the Spanish poet Luis de Góngora y Argote (1561 – 1627). In the same year appeared his next book of poems, the surrealist *Sobre los ángeles* [*Concerning the angels*], generally considered his best work.

The work of Alberti undergoes a profound transformation when he becomes politically engaged in the 1930s, after the proclamation of the Spanish II Republic in 1931. He joined the Spanish Communist party, and then repudiated his poetic work before 1931 as utterly bourgeois. Together with his wife, María Teresa León, whom he married in 1929, they founded the revolutionary magazine *Octubre* In 1934. After the breakout of the Spanish Civil War in 1936, Alberti devoted himself to work for the Spanish Republic and remained in Spain up until the fall of Madrid in March 1939. He was then evacuated to France with his wife, where they stayed briefly. The couple then exiled to Argentina, where they remained until 1964, the year of their arrival to Italy. During his exile in Rome he dedicated himself almost exclusively to painting and drawing, and his written work during this period integrates both poetry and the art of painting, with works like *A la pintura* [*To painting*] (1947-1967), and *Los ocho nombres de Picasso* [*The Eight Names of Picasso*] (1970).

Alberti would not return to Spain until two years after Franco’s death. Upon his return in 1977, he was elected representative for the Communist Party in the Spanish legislature, a position that he would hold briefly, only to return to his work. He was awarded the Premio Nacional Miguel de Cervantes [Miguel de Cervantes award] in 1983, and he raised enormous controversy when he formally renounced the Premio Nacional Príncipe de Asturias [Prince of Asturias Award] in 1983, due to his Republican beliefs. He died in Puerto de Santa María in 1999.

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