Between Nature and History: An Ecocritical Approach to the Poetry of Juan Antonio Corretjer

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Juan Antonio Corretjer (1908-1985) is well known in Puerto Rico as a fighter for the island’s independence who spent several years in prison for his revolutionary activities, and as a major poet whose works celebrate and affirm Puerto Rico’s national identity and sovereignty. In this paper, I examine Corretjer’s poetry through the lens of contemporary ecocritical concerns. Puerto Rico’s nature and topography are dominant themes in Corretjer’s works, and critics have correctly linked them to his nationalist ideals. However, Corretjer’s emphasis on the materiality of the land and its non-human inhabitants problematizes a view of “nature” as merely a symbol, or even as the stage, for primordially human concerns. By opening itself to a perspective that we might call biocentric (as opposed to exclusively anthropocentric), Corretjer’s poetry poses wider questions with regard to the rights of non-human natural beings, and an equitable relation between humans and their environment. What all of these struggles share in a Caribbean context is that they must challenge a colonial order that commodifies human and non-human agents in the interests of global capitalism.

Victor Figueroa teaches Latin American and Caribbean literatures in the department of Classical and Modern Languages. In addition to journal articles, he is the author of two books on Caribbean literature: Not at Home in One’s Home: Caribbean Self-Fashioning in the Poetry of Luis Palés Matos, Aimé Césaire, and Derek Walcott (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2009), and Prophetic Visions of the Past: Pan-Caribbean Representations of the Haitian Revolution (Ohio State University Press, 2015), and three poetry collections, El regicida y su sombra (Terranova Editores, 2011) and Devenir de los arcanos (Casa de los Poetas, 2013), and Alquimia del desasosiego (Casa de los Poetas, 2016).

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