

Michela Canepari / Alba Pessini (eds/éds.)

FOOD IN POSTCOLONIAL AND MIGRANT LITERATURES

LA NOURRITURE DANS LES LITTÉRATURES POSTCOLONIALES ET MIGRANTES

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PETER LANG



Giulia de Sarlo

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ITALA VIVAN

Preface – The Food of Elsewhere: from Western Exoticism to Postcolonial Search for Identity

The widening of European horizons brought about by the geographical explorations, the expansions of commercial transactions and finally, the colonial conquests of modern age, clearly had many consequences on the cultural habits of continental people. Amongst these, we can mention the radical change of culinary habits entailed by the contribution of all sorts of exotic novelties. When describing the abundance of the Eighteenth Century, Piero Camporesi referred to the richness of a cornucopia:

Vascelli olandesi e inglesi, spagnoli e francesi provenienti dall'estremo Occidente o dal lontano Oriente scaricano sui moli della vecchia Europa balle e casse di prodotti nuovi ed eccitanti: erbe indiane, polveri subtropicali, fiori inquietanti, carni impensabili, frutti imprevedibili, tuberi sconosciuti, semi ignoti, legumi strani, tabacco e cacao, vainiglia e china-china, peperoni e nidi di rondine, caffè e tè, tulipani e gelsomini di Goa, armadilli e tacchini, araticù e terra catù¹.

Among the deluge of uncommon goods, some items changed European taste and habits considerably, as with sugar, coffee, tea and chocolate. On the one hand, they became a delight for the well off, on the other, they brought into being the establishment of colonial plantations and helped spread the African slave trade, thereby creating the possibility of profiting enormously from these exotic and exclusive cultivations. After all, a renowned English historian specialised in the history of slavery,

¹ Camporesi, Piero, *Il brodo indiano. Edonismo ed esotismo nel Settecento*, 1990 Milano, Garzanti, p. 56. "Dutch, English, Spanish and French vessels, returning from the extreme West or from the distant East, unloaded on to the docks of old Europe bales and crates of new and exciting products: Indian herbs, subtropical powders, disconcerting flowers, unthinkable meats, unpredictable fruits, unknown or barely known tubers, peculiar vegetables, tobacco and cocoa, vanilla and quinquina, peppers and swallows' nests, coffee and tea, tulips and jasmines from Goa, armadillos and turkeys, areca nut and catechu" (my translation).

GIULIA DE SARLO

Pablo de Rokha's *Epopeya de las comidas y las bebidas de Chile*: a Defence of Culinary Tradition at the Beginning of Globalisation

Nulla placere diu nec vivere carmina possunt,
quae scribuntur aquae potioribus.
Horace, *Epistulae*.

The binomial *literature and cuisine* represents an equation that critics have associated for too long with the female world. We all know about the re-appropriation of woman's identity from reading various works such as *Como Agua para Chocolate*¹ by the Mexican author Laura Esquivel, or about the daily *guisar* as the woman's domain of freedom, from Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz to *Eva Luna*², by Isabel Allende. And yet, today, now that equality of the sexes is something more than utopia, today, now that the so-called Third Feminist Wave has reclaimed man's femininity as well as the masculine side of every woman, today more than ever it is right to remember that the kitchen is not just a feminine environment. Certainly, when we associate cooking with the word "power," and I mean official power, recognised above and beyond those secret potions that are able to conquer the indulgence of a partner, cooking is and has always been a masculine field: how many female chefs have become known throughout history alongside the numerous Louis de Béchameil, Jean Brillat-Savarin or Pellegrino Artusi? But when dealing with a "lower", more elementary, daily level of cuisine – grocery shopping, for example – men suddenly disappear. And if this is still true, in too many cases, for Saturday morning groceries, in literature the situation is definitely not much different – because literature is life, and

1 Esquivel, Laura, *Como Agua para Chocolate*, 1990 Barcelona, Grijalbo Mondadori.
2 Allende, Isabel, *Eva Luna*, 1987 Barcelona, Plaza & Janés.

life, alas, is a constant struggle of positions to defend and myths to explode.

Until now, male authors who spoke about daily cooking, about weekly grocery shopping, about this vegetable or that cut of meat, have not only been practically nonexistent, but have been almost completely ignored by the literary canon. According to prevailing criticism, one sole exception is worth mentioning – even though it is considered partial: that is *Odas elementales*³, by Pablo Neruda, a revolutionary work, according to many, which is filled with tomatoes, artichokes and broths that give a new flavour to the poem that would win him Chile's second Nobel prize.

But Neruda, whose work was peacefully received by canonical criticism, did not actually invent anything new. There was another Chilean author (and it is not by chance that he would come from the same place of our Nobel Winner) who grasped the wooden spoon before him and who was able to go well beyond Neruda's graceful posturing: he transformed cooking into a weapon of defence, to resist the globalising politics that his country was already beginning to suffer from, in order to leave to posterity the cross-section of a world that would soon cease to exist. We are talking about Pablo de Rokha, baptised as Carlos Díaz Loyola, a revolutionary author, fundamental for the history of both Chilean and Hispanic American literature, yet absent from most continental poetic anthologies. How is that possible? Let's follow the order of events.

Pablo de Rokha was born in Licantén⁴, a small provincial town in the central region of Chile, in 1894. Even with his first major work⁵, *Los Gemidos*, self-published in 1922, de Rokha set forth the tenets of what would become his poetic trajectory. This, at the level of content, with a rifting language, an avant-garde metre, and themes of collective and, at

3 Neruda, Pablo, *Odas elementales*, 1954 Buenos Aires, Losada.

4 According to Manuel Peña Muñoz, the name of this town, which in *mapuche* means "place where stone men are born", was what convinced the poet to adopt the pseudonym "de Rokha": a double claim to his identity, since on the one hand the word "roca", "rock" in Spanish, was written in his surname using the spelling of indigenous Mapuche people, exterminated by European colonists. On the other hand, besides this claim to collective identity, this nickname constantly stated the strength of his own nature, due to the meaning of the word "roca".

5 Even though significant, I consider *Versos de la infancia* (1916) and *Sátira* (1918), from his earliest works in previous collections, as his juvenile production.

the same time profoundly individual, inspiration. And at a formal level too: self-publishing and then distributing his own work by personally travelling up and down Chile, selling the book door-to-door, would be one of the most original traits of de Rokha's production and, at the same time, a disgrace for contemporary criticism. As Faride Zerán underlined,

[...] se da el hecho curioso de que la obra de Pablo de Rokha, desconocida y difícil de encontrar en el país, esté diseminada por todo Chile, adornando más de una biblioteca de alguien que nunca en su vida leyó sus poemas⁶.

If today, the difficulty in finding de Rokha's volumes becomes the main excuse to justify a historically unjustifiable silence regarding the poet, the true reason for this silence resides in a literary aspect of de Rokha's life that was misunderstood but which, however, was politically well exploited: his decades-long and difficult disagreement with Pablo Neruda, in a moment when it was quite hard to disagree with such a star writer. De Rokha's was almost the only voice to distance itself from the choir of praise and he even dared to challenge Neruda not only in the field of politics (attacking him from the left, something that very few people did), but also from a strictly literary perspective. The echoes of the de Rokha-Neruda controversy reach us even today (indeed, the products of criticism have never stopped selling under such titles), but these often reverberate with labels that are contemporaneous to this diatribe and which have very little to do with literature. It is true that de Rokha, harsh and contentious not only toward Nefthalí Reyes⁷, on more than one occasion unleashed his furious criticisms against Neruda himself ("tremendo piojo del sur"⁸ was one of the nicknames he most often reprimanded the Nobel with). It is also true that the two poets were

6 Zerán, Faride, *La guerrilla literaria: Huidobro, de Rokha, Neruda*, 2005 México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, p. 132. "It is funny that Pablo de Rokha's work, almost unknown and hard to find in the country, is actually spread around Chile, decorating more than a library of private citizens who have never read his poems" (my translation).

7 His literary disputes with Vicente Huidobro, amongst others, were also famous, and are testified by the witty exchange that the two poets published on the pages of the newspaper *La Opinión*, between 13th June and 3rd July 1935.

8 Peña Muñoz, Manuel, "Comidas y bebidas en la poesía de Pablo de Rokha", in *Herencia. Estudios literarios, lingüísticos y creación artística*, vol. 1, 2009, p. 81-92.

definitely separated by personal disagreements⁹. Yet, I believe that today it would be only fair to review the accusations de Rokha made against Neruda, above and beyond the most obvious controversy, given that these could probably help us read the work of the Nobel prize winner from a different perspective.

The accusations made by de Rokha, and to which Neruda never directly responded¹⁰, were primarily two: first of all, the bourgeoisisation of Neruda's poetry, hidden behind a façade of service to the people; secondly, plain and simple plagiarism, to the expense of various poets¹¹ and especially of de Rokha himself, from whom Neruda would even copy the pseudonym Pablo. Certainly, it seems natural to question the example of de Rokha's *Poemas continentales*, published in 1945, and Neruda's collection, *Canto General*¹² (1950), that was equally dedicated to South America. However, the two works are very different, and in the long run the continental debate was a hot topic even before Independence. However, a few perplexities arise further to another theme that was developed by de Rokha and, immediately afterwards, by Neruda, especially because it deals with an even less common theme: precisely, that of cuisine.

In 1949, de Rokha self-published a revolutionary poem entitled *Epopéya de las comidas y bebidas de Chile*, comprised of 246 long and irregular verses, in an epic yet popular style, with which the poet chose

- 9 As stated by Faride Zerán, it is true that de Rokha welcomed young Neruda under his own protective wing as soon as he arrived in Santiago from the countryside, and it is probably true that the future Nobel winner fell in love with and almost married de Rokha's youngest sister, shattering this idyllic picture in a matter of months; but I believe that the critic chose to give excessive credit to gossip, considering that episodes from youth do not justify punctual criticisms of one's worth lasting through the years such as that of Neruda by de Rokha (Zerán, Faride, *op. cit.*, p. 48 and following).
- 10 Nevertheless, his works are full of indirect attacks to de Rokha: see the poems *Oda a la envidia* (*Odas elementales*, 1954), *Tráiganlo pronto* (*Extravagario*, 1958), or the many references to De Rokha in his autobiography *Confieso que he vivido* (1974).
- 11 Among others, we mention the accusation of plagiarism relating to *The Gardener* by Rabindranath Tagore regarding poem 16 from the collection *Veinte poemas de amor y una canción desesperada* (Zerán, Faride, *op. cit.*, p. 86 and following).
- 12 Neruda, Pablo, *Canto General*, 1950 México, Talleres Gráficos de la Nación.

to depict Chilean geography (region by region, city by city), as marked by the most traditional culinary delicacies.

By contrast, in 1954 the by then famous Neruda published, with the renowned Argentinean publishing house Losada, his first edition of *Odas elementales*. This was a turning point in his poetic production and in comparison to his previous publications, which were solemn and highly subjective, here the metre resumes, lyricism becomes dry, the themes get to be universal and simple. Throughout the pages of *Odas* a thread unwinds, singing the praises of the little things that make life great. Among these, significant culinary elements stand out: thus, the reader encounters the *Oda al tomate*, the *Oda a la alcachofa*, the *Oda al caldillo de congrio*, the *Oda a la cebolla*, the *Oda al pan* and the *Oda al vino*.

Pure thematic coincidence? Certainly, in this case, as well as in the continental poems, the subject could not have been developed more differently. And yet, at least according to the voices of the authors, the basic motivations that drove them both to write about food would not seem so different. De Rokha, as we shall see shortly, creates his ode to the Chilean culinary tradition as a testimony of struggle and an affirmation of the people against the pre-globalising extravagances of a national elite too intent on projecting abroad. Neruda too claims a kind of universal mission for the *Odas*, in order to give the people the joy of everyone's common simplicities. As Neruda himself wrote,

Estas Odas, por una provocación exterior, se transformaron otra vez en ese elemento que yo ambicioné siempre: el de un poema de extensión y totalidad. [...] Logré publicar una larga historia de este tiempo, de las cosas, de los oficios, de las gentes, de las frutas, de las flores, de la vida, de mi visión, de la lucha, en fin, de todo lo que podía englobar de nuevo en un vasto impulso cíclico de mi creación¹³.

- 13 Concha, Jaime, "Introducción" to Neruda, Pablo, *Odas elementales*, 1994 Madrid, Cátedra, p. 23. "These Odes, as an external provocation, turned into the element I have always looked for: a poem of extension and entirety. [...] I managed to publish a large story about these times, things, jobs, people, fruits, life, my vision, my fight, finally, about everything new I could include in a vast cyclic impulse of my creation" (my translation).

And he explained, always in 1953:

El mayor problema de estos años en la poesía, y naturalmente, en mi poesía, ha sido el de la oscuridad y la claridad. Yo pienso que escribimos para un Continente en que todas las cosas están haciéndose, y sobre todo, en el que queremos hacer todas las cosas. Nuestras gentes están recién aprendiendo profesiones, artesanías, artes y oficios. Por lo menos, recobrándolos [...] Somos naciones compuestas por gentes sencillas, que están aprendiendo a construir y a leer. Para esas gentes sencillas escribimos¹⁴.

It is de Rokha who decides to respond to him. He does so in his controversial essay *Neruda y yo*, published in 1955, where he carries on accusing the future Nobel prize winner of bourgeoisism and false intentions, this time criticising his *Odas elementales*:

El epifenómeno del marxioide-existencialista lo arroja a balbucir historia de hechos, no hechos, y el poeta se convierte en demente fácil y en *adolescente-cincuentón* de contornos *elementales* y escribe *Odas Elementales*, que dan lástima y asco. [...] Pablo Neruda, *el poeta del pueblo* (?) no se enfrenta a Yanquilandia, que pretende envenenarnos a todos los chilenos, haciendo estallar la bomba atómica en la Antártida, no, *balbuce como un demente* la égloga pastoril de la *vida sencilla de los sencillos, sencillamente*, en un arte sencillo, que no es sencillo, sino imbécil. [...] La poesía de Pablo Neruda no es poesía *sencilla*, es poesía *fallida*, lo cual es completamente distinto, y es oscura, *como lo es todo lo no logrado*. Además, es personal y es personalística y es lírica y decadentista, es lírica y no épica, es decir, subjetivo-íntima, aunque se disfraza de épica, y él no entendió jamás lo épico, que él sostiene que se refiere al tema del poema y no al estilo: es formalista y no realista¹⁵.

14 From the *Discurso ante el Congreso Continental de la Cultura* (Santiago de Chile, 1953) cited in Concha, Jaime, *op. cit.*, p. 51. "The main problem during these years in poetry, and, of course, in my poetry, has been obscurity and clarity. I think that we are writing for a Continent where everything is building itself, and above all, where we want to build everything. Our people are still learning professions, handicrafts, arts and jobs. Or at least, they are still recovering them. [...] We are nations made of simple people, who are still learning how to build and read. It's for these people that we write" (my translation).

15 De Rokha, Pablo, "Neruda y yo", 1955, in Arenas, Diego, *Pablo de Rokha contra Neruda*, 1978 Buenos Aires, Galerna, p. 68, 71, 88 *et al.* Italics in De Rokha's text. "The epiphenomenon of the Existentialist Marxist forces him to stammer stories of facts, not facts, and the poet turns himself easily into an idiot and an adolescent in his fifties with elementary outlines, and he writes *Elementary Odes*,

Even at a first reading, one immediately realises that in *Odas* there is very little that is authentically popular, beginning with language: de Rokha, in his *Epopeya*, uses a language that might result difficult for the layman, as it is obviously dialectical and blatantly oral in its epicness (in this way, he actually returns to the origins of the epic, when this genre was a live narration of common ancestors' traditions). The following might be a valid example:

[...] no, la codorniz asada a la parrilla se come lo mismo que se oye "el Martirio", en las laderas aconcagüinas, y la lisa frita en el Maule, en el que el pejerrey salta a la paila sagrada de gozo, completamente rico del río, enriquecido en la lancha maulina, mientras las niñas Carreño, como sufriendo, le hacen empeño a "lo humano" y a "lo divino", en la de gran antigüedad familiar vihuela¹⁶.

On the contrary, Neruda tells of artichokes and tomatoes in a flat, comprehensible, standard language: bourgeois, in the fullest sense of the term:

En diciembre
se desata
el tomate,
invade
las cocinas,

that give you shame and repugnance. [...] Pablo Neruda, the poet of the people (?), does not face Yankeeland, which is trying to poison every Chilean person exploding the atomic bomb in the Antarctic; no, he stammers like an idiot the pastoral eclogue about the simple life of simple people, simply, using a simple art, which is not actually simple: it is stupid. [...] Pablo Neruda's poetry is not simple poetry, it is failed poetry, which is completely different; and it is obscure, as every failed thing is. Moreover, it is personal and personalistic, and it is lyric and decadent; it is lyric, not epic, I mean, it is subjective-intimate although it is disguised as epic. He has never understood what epic is, because he thinks it refers to the subject of the poem, not to its style: it is formalistic, not realistic" (my translation).

16 De Rokha, Pablo, *Epopeya de las comidas y las bebidas de Chile*, in *Canto del Macho anciano y otros poemas*, 2003 Madrid, Biblioteca Nueva, p. 8. "No, the quail roasted on the grill is eaten just like "El Martirio" is listened to through the mountainside of Aconcagua, and the *lisa* fried in Maule, where the *pejerrey* jumps to the sacred pan with pleasure, full of the richness of the river, enriched by the mauline stone, and while Carreño girls, as if suffering, attend to human and divine things, with the *vihuela* of the great familiar antiquity" (my translation).

entra por los almuerzos
se sienta
reposado
en los aparadores,
entre los vasos,
las mantequilleras,
los saleros azules¹⁷.

And the images Neruda depicts, what do they say about Chile? The only food that speaks of Chilean tradition is the *caldillo de congrio*, from the homonym *Oda*; but even in this case the people are not present. The word "Chile" recurs twice, at the beginning and at the end of the ode, just like in a *ringkomposition*, as if to justify himself. In reality, there is never a "we", but always a "tú", an "ustedes", an Other to whom the recipe is dictated:

[...] lleven a la cocina; recoges; acaricia primero; huele; deja el ajo picado; tú conozcas el cielo¹⁸.

Furthermore, it is a recipe that represents only a part of the traditional recipe: as Rocío Lineros recounts, the recipe for the *caldillo* proposed by Neruda in this ode is his family's version, re-adapted by his last wife, Matilde Urrutia, a test-tube cook¹⁹. In any case, it is a private version. Subjective. Once again.

To this end, it is worth considering for a moment the different relationship that Neruda and de Rokha have had with food during their lives, a relationship that especially their biographies paint as individualist and pleasure-seeking for the first, and collective and communal (even to the extreme) for the latter. Neruda is described by his biographers, and he describes himself, as a gourmet with a taste for French wines and for international cuisine, preferably sophisticated,

17 Neruda, Pablo, *Oda al tomate*, v. 13-24, in *Odas elementales*, cit., p. 246. "In December / Tomato / frees itself, / it invades / kitchens, / it breaks in for lunch, / it sits down / unhurried / on the sideboards, / between glasses, / butter dishes, / blue saltcellars" (my translation).

18 Neruda, Pablo, *Odas elementales*, cit., respectively p. 13, 26, 28, 31, 34, 73. "Bring to the kitchen; recollect; first, caress; smell; leave the garlic chopped; you will know Heaven" (my translation).

19 Lineros, Rocío, "Neruda, Neruda, la mesa te saluda", *El Mercurio*, 2nd July, 2004.

without however disdaining revisited themes of Chilean tradition. The culinary report of a trip taken in 1965 in Hungary with his friend Miguel Ángel Asturias, also a Nobel prize winner, is famous: a summary written by the two of them, signed with fork and spoon²⁰, which makes the discovery of Hungarian cuisine an *ante litteram* hymn to exotic gastronomy.

De Rokha's case is completely different, and not only because he undoubtedly had less possibilities of travelling than Neruda²¹: de Rokha's passion for the traditional cuisine of his country, which he tastes first-hand during his exhausting journeys for the promotion of his own literature, becomes an almost maniacal experience, that he completely pours into the *Epopeya*. De Rokha knows where to find the best *longaniza*, where to taste the most flavourful *caldillo*; and he does not miss any occasion:

Porque, si es preciso hartarse con longaniza chillaneja antes de morir, en día lluvioso, acariciada con vino áspero, de Quirihue o Coihueco, en arpa, guitarra y acordeón bañándose, dando terribles saltos a carcajadas, también lo es saborear la prieta tuncana en agosto [...] ²².

For de Rokha, food is a Dionysian form of community life: the abundance, or better, the excess, must be the rule, and must be shared. Peña Muñoz tells for example of how the monetary award from the Premio Nacional de Literatura de Chile, de Rokha was awarded in 1965, was entirely spent the same evening of the ceremony for a banquet to which he invited anyone who passed nearby; Enrique Lafourcade describes a lavish dinner, almost a literary dispute, in which the poet engaged with the writer Armando Cassigoli and which lasted for the

20 Literally: in the original edition (1969 Barcelona, Lumen) the names of the two authors appear only on the cover; for the rest, the written selections by the Chilean author are signed with a fork, those of Asturias with a spoon.

21 Nonetheless, de Rokha travelled a lot throughout all of Latin America as the cultural ambassador for his country (from 1944) and even further, to China in 1963.

22 De Rokha, Pablo, *Epopeya de las comidas y las bebidas de Chile*, cit., p. 31-32. "Because, if you must stuff yourself with *longaniza* from Chillán before you die, on a rainy day, caressing it with sharp wine from Quirihue or Coihueco, bathing with harp, guitar and accordion, leaping about with laughter, / you must also savour the dark *tuncana* in August [...]" (my translation).

entire night²³. The culinary anecdotes of de Rokha's life could continue infinitely.

The different relations of the two poets to the culinary experience assume significant proportions if they are read in the light of the sociological theories about globalisation. The gastronomic realm is one of the fields that was most devastated by the wave of global mainstream uniformity, and it is above all an aspect that culinary anthropology has taken into consideration: the passage from a collective cuisine to an individual fruition, or rather, perhaps more simply, from the immense tray to single-serving McDonald's dishes. In the globalised context of modernity, food culture, from a community phenomenon, has become the embodiment of contemporary individualism. As Jaume Fàbrega writes,

El fast food es un rito individual: nos enfrentamos al pequeño "sarcófago" que contiene la hamburguesa, que derrama salsas delicuescentes y con aspecto putrefacto, en soledad, pese a que en la mesa se siente alguien más. No compartimos, y, en cierto modo, deshacemos el aspecto social y socializador del rito de comer tal y como se ha ejercido durante milenios²⁴.

By re-reading de Rokha's and Neruda's "gastronomic" *corpus* from this point of view, the true difference between the two appears definitively marked: the former, the successor of a poetic and culinary tradition that is approaching its end, sings the praises of cuisine as a collective experience related to national-popular identity; the latter projects himself into modernity, and praises a universal artichoke, in its absolute totality, devoid of any form of identity, and, for this, common to all (what seems to be an affectionate personalisation, the naming of María in verse 58 of *Oda a la alcachofa*, must not fool us: we must in fact remember that María is the most common female name in the Hispanic world, that means, the most *global* name of all).

23 Cited in Peña, Muñoz, *op. cit.*

24 Fàbrega, Jaume, "Comida rápida, comida lenta: ¿cultura o barbarie?", *Métode: anuario*, 2004, p. 208. "Fast food is an individual rite: we face the small 'sarcophagus' containing the hamburger, which spills criminal and putrid-looking sauces, although there is someone else sitting with us at the same table. We are not sharing and, somehow, we are breaking up the social and socialising aspect of the rite of eating as it has been practiced for thousands of years" (my translation).

Different details benefit from this reading. Let us consider for example the titles the authors single out for their poems. De Rokha chooses the word "epopeya", which is a classical appeal to tradition; but this is related to the tradition of the epic, the collective genre *par excellence*, popular in its oral origins, and at the same time noble, because it praises the roots of a community. And this choice does not certainly concern just the title, as the text effectively disseminates metric clauses and typical rhetorical figures from epic expression – among others, enumeration and accumulation, as in this example:

Hacia la rayuela del domingo van el Juez y el Alcalde, el Cura, el Oficial Civil, el Gobernador, don Custodio, don José Tomás, don Clorindo, don Anacleto, don Rosauero, las Peralta, las Díaz, las Correa, las González, las Montero, las Ramírez, las Pacheco, las Mardones y las Loyola²⁵.

By including the word "epopeya" in the title, de Rokha immediately makes evident his intentions for the entire poem: to reclaim and thus, in a certain sense, to construct – from the bottom, from the humble, from the simple – the cultural traditions of an entire population, not just culinary traditions. Neruda re-captures the culinary theme (at least in part) from de Rokha and also uses a classical appeal in his title: but he speaks of *Odas*, not of *Epopéya*, and this is not by chance. The kind of ode Neruda refers to is clearly Horace's ode (neither the Greek choral ode – with the magniloquence of, for example, Pindar – nor the monodic one, with the pathos we find for instance in Sappho or Alcaeus): the taste for simplicity, the pretext of universal teaching, and above all, the placid contemplation of himself (we can notice the serene self-mockery from the first composition, *El hombre invisible*) are constant throughout the entire collection. This is our equation: modern individuality (which was also that of Horace) that is contrasted with archaic collectivity, typical of de Rokha. The collective exaltation of the latter, that certainly finds inspiration in the palingenesis of the Russian epic from the Soviet

25 De Rokha, Pablo, *Epopéya de las comidas y las bebidas de Chile*, cit., v. 164-165. "To the *rayuela* the Judge and the Mayor go, / the Priest, the Civil Officer, the Governor, don Custodio, don José Tomás, don Clorindo, don Anacleto, don Rosauero, the Peralta girls, the Díaz girls, the Correa girls, the González girls, the Montero girls, the Ramírez girls, the Pacheco girls, the Mardones girls and the Loyola girls" (my translation).

Union²⁶, does not however lead to the poet's exclusively political interest²⁷. The entire de Rokhian *corpus* is pervaded by an authentic anxiety to give a voice to the people, to the margins, to those sections of the population forever confined to silence. Yet, the *Epopeya* is not a sort of long self-referencing monologue. Sanzana Inzunza²⁸ maintains that the ideal reader of the *Epopeya* is the people itself, but I believe that this is a limiting vision. It is true that de Rokha uses popular culinary traditions to speak about Chilean marginality (the image of the *roto* stands out in this sense), to depict rural parties, to document an identity; and it is true that he does so by using the language of the people, their dialects, their idioms, that might be difficult to understand not only for a bourgeois, but also for the urban proletariat from Santiago. Nonetheless, de Rokha does not only write for the people that he describes (furthermore, we should bear in mind that in 1949 Chilean population was still mostly illiterate): his intention, his hope, is to write for the whole of Chile. For this reason, he did not distribute his books only to workers, but he sold them also to provincial lawyers, to doctors, to teachers: his utopia was that Chile could recognise itself in its own roots before selling itself short to foreigners, that it could seek within itself the answers for the future, without looking for them in the new North American empire that during de Rokha's time was making an attempt on Chilean culinary traditions and soon would help Pinochet in his coup.

But literary history (amongst others) has demonstrated that de Rokha's utopia has inevitably lost, while the universalising modernity of Neruda has won. De Rokha is a poet remembered only (and rarely) for having opposed the Nobel prize winner: only recently has their diatribe been re-read in a non-sectarian fashion. In spite of this, de Rokha is

26 Especially in his essays, de Rokha often refers to the Sovietic cultural context, both literary and not (see *Neruda y yo*, where he holds against Neruda the fact that he bragged about the impossible reading of Maiakowskij, since it would have been prior to the Castilian translation of the work by the Sovietic poet (Arenas, Diego, *op. cit.*, p. 89). The literary relationship between de Rokha and the USSR has not yet been examined, and would without doubt deserve a specific study.

27 De Rokha was never faithful to the line, and in 1940 he was actually expelled from the Chilean Communist Party.

28 Sanzana, Inzunza; Isaac, Hernán, "*Chilenidad y encomio en "Epopeya de las comidas y las bebidas de Chile"*" de Pablo de Rokha", graduation dissertation, 2007 Universidad Austral de Chile, p. 34.

almost never discussed for his intrinsic literary value. Even from a culinary and anthropological point of view, de Rokha's battle was lost: at best, when traditions are not totally wiped out by the simplification required by new values such as efficiency and rapidity, the culinary uses that can be saved undergo transformations that are sometimes substantial and that are often mixed with quite different traditions, giving life to that typical postmodern and global phenomenon that is *fusion cuisine*²⁹. This, in reality, is not necessarily negative: culture, as an anthropological concept, is inevitably a parameter in constant evolution, well alive, especially because it is capable of encompassing different elements and of adapting itself to new necessities; in no case should saving traditions mean hiding behind one's own positions and closing oneself off from the world. Perhaps this was actually de Rokha's mistake and Neruda's incredible intuition: Reyes knew how to give voice to the new values of a changing world, whereas de Rokha desperately tried to lock it in an unreal eternity. What remains for us from the work of the poet from Licantén, is its incredible documental value, its exceptional poetic force made of nostalgia and profound affection, its desperate struggle against a changing world. A battle most likely lost from the very beginning; but one which, more than any other, was worth fighting.

29 Fusion in culinary usage often occurs for turistic reasons: see Magaña Carillo, Irma, "¿Conduce la globalización a la pérdida de constumbres gastronómicas?", *Teoría y praxis*, n. 5, 2008, p. 213-226.