

Candelas Gala. *Clara Janés: La poética cuántica o la física de la poesía*. CSIC, 2021. 203 pp.

Clara Janés is a prolific and award-winning author, poet, critic, and translator, yet she is best known for her diverse poetry, which covers everything from existentialism, mysticism, and spiritualism to love, music, and nature. There is, however, a major theme in her poetry that does not receive a great deal of attention in contemporary criticism: the role quantum physics plays in problematizing the fundamental epistemological question of life and what constitutes knowledge about our place in the universe. In *Clara Janés: La poética cuántica o la física de la poesía* ('Clara Janés: Quantum Poetics or the Physics of Poetry'), Candelas Gala addresses these topics, offering readers one of the most comprehensive readings of the poet's engagement with quantum theory thus far. As Gala explains in her preliminary remarks, Janés's interest in physics runs deep in her thought, being reflected in her probing of the subject/object divide and the subjective experience of observation.

Gala's perceptive and erudite monograph is not for the faint of heart. Its scientific and philosophical arguments will prove most useful to readers not only well acquainted with Janés's extensive poetry, but also conversant with Erwin Schrödinger's and Niels Bohr's revolutionary contributions to modern physics and the changes they instigated in the classical-to-quantum transition. Throughout the four chapters of the monograph, Gala interweaves Janés's poetry with Schrödinger's and Bohr's insights demonstrating how she has consistently sought inspiration in a wide range of concepts in quantum theory. In the first chapter, for instance, Gala explains the ways in which Bohr's complementarity principle and Schrödinger's wave function establish the groundwork for much of Janés's recent work. Collections like *La indetenible quietud* ('The Unstoppable Stillness') (2008) and *La blanca forma de la fuga* ('The White Form of Escape') (2015) explore Bohr's complementarity principle through the fundamental interconnectedness of existence, while *Ψ o El jardín de las delicias* ('Ψ or The Garden of Delights') (2014) delves into the epistemological complexities associated with Schrödinger's wave function and its implications on the act of observation. Ultimately, this opening chapter effectively examines how Schrödinger's and Bohr's pioneering theories inspire Janés to ponder the dialectic between certitude and doubt, and determinism and indeterminism, from a subjectivist and intimist perspective.

The second chapter, which is the longest chapter in the book, tackles Janés's various methods of approaching the thorny question of epistemology and subjectivity. Gala proposes that Basarab Nicolescu's concept of transdisciplinarity serves as a key inspiration for not only the poet's understanding of knowledge as emergent and fluid, but also her approach to reasoning itself. By clarifying the stakes of defining the nature of knowledge and its limits, Janés appears to advocate

for a type of reasoning that aspires to move beyond classical dualism and establish a “tertiary” logic as it were, one capable of accommodating multiple perspectives thereby offering a solution to the closedness and finality of binary thinking. In a series of close readings of *Los números oscuros* (‘Dark Numbers’) (2006), *Variables ocultas* (‘Hidden Variables’) (2010), *Orbes del sueño* (‘Dream Realms’) (2013), and *Estructuras disipativas* (‘Dissipative Structures’) (2017), Gala exposes the poet’s innovative ways of celebrating multiplicity—be it of thought, perception, feeling—through her interests in mathematics, mysticism, philosophy, linguistics, and thermodynamics. Gala covers tremendous ground (perhaps too much ground) in this chapter, highlighting the ways in which a range of scientific and mathematical theories, especially fundamental ones such as those advanced by Albert Einstein, Gottlob Frege, Ormeny Francisc-Norbert, Basarab Nicolescu, Ilya Prigogine, and Andrei Pleșu, resonate throughout her poetry. As Gala puts it: “Janés comparte con científicos como Einstein los deseos de certezas de la física clásica, la creencia en la ‘absurdidad’ de la física cuántica” (133) ‘As with scientists like Einstein, Janés yearns for the certainties of classical physics, as well as the belief in the “absurdity” of quantum physics.’ While the juxtaposition of science and poetry can be jarring at times in this chapter, Gala offers a persuasive reading of the fundamental role that scientific formulas, mathematical quandaries, number theory, variable asymmetry, and entropy play in Janés’s poetic logic of uncertainty and epistemological pluralism.

The third and fourth chapters expand upon core topics addressed earlier, yet through different lenses. For Gala, Janés’s autobiographical *Jardín y laberinto* (‘Garden and Labyrinth’) (1990) offers another point of entry into the primary question of epistemology and subjectivity. The autobiographical self and its concept of corporeality brings into view the complex structural differences between exteriority and interiority, which invariably condition (and sometimes constrain) how we understand nature and its manifold phenomena. Gala tackles *La palabra y el secreto* (‘The Word and the Secret’) (1999) and *Paralajes* (‘Parallaxes’) (2002) to underscore the fundamental point of the book, which is repeated with important variations in each chapter: “Los libros de Janés relatan la aventura en busca del conocimiento, de hallar sentido a lo que nos rodea y a la vida y que, en última instancia, se revela en un saber exento del requisito de completitud en la tradición occidental” (162) ‘Janés’ books articulate the adventure of pursuing knowledge and of making sense of our world and our life. All told, this adventure reveals itself in an understanding freed from any requirement of totality as understood in the western tradition.’ In the fourth chapter, Gala brings the book to a close by drawing our attention to Janés’s “escritura fluctuante” (165) ‘open writing’, a form of poeticizing and writing that remains open-ended and yet also structured and even consistent.

Gala's book is compelling and one that must be reckoned with to gain a deeper understanding of Janés's oeuvre. Through a tightly focused argument, she urges us to reflect upon the benefits of approaching Janés's poetics from the perspective of quantum physics and its arguments concerning certainty, knowledge, and discovery. Some readers may find Gala's insistence on quantum physics too sharp and limiting, particularly given its many references to concrete scientific practices, but her stress on the poet's larger quest for knowledge within this framework in fact offers us a refreshingly unique and encompassing approach to bridging two great species of imagination: the poetic and the scientific. This alone makes this book well worth reading.

Nicolás Fernández-Medina
Pennsylvania State University