

Musik in totalitären Staaten

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Constructions of Manuel de Falla's *Atlántida* in Franco's Spain

The 1930s saw both Manuel de Falla's creative reorientation in the process of composing his scenic cantata *Atlántida* and shifting perceptions of his nationalism. Constructions of nationalism in Spanish culture, which provided the framework through which Falla's music was interpreted, were linked to questions of modernity, Catholicism and concepts of tradition. The realignments brought about by the successive governments of the Second Republic and then by the ensuing Civil War heightened the politicisation of the cultural sphere. In this context, Falla's political reactions and his involvement with the cultural institutions of different regimes were often in the public domain. His peculiar mixture of pro-French liberal ideology and radical Catholicism facilitated his adoption by openly conflicting sides, and contradictory readings of his music, aesthetics and politics arose and continued well beyond the 1930s.

Falla's neoclassical hispanicism and construction of musical nationalism in works such as *El retablo de Maese Pedro* (1918–1923) and the *Concerto* (1923–1926) had shaped the aesthetic outlook and sound of the younger composers of the Generation of 1927,¹ and especially Madrid's *Grupo de los ocho*. The modernist critic Adolfo Salazar and most of the composers of the *Grupo de los ocho* clearly identified themselves with the leftist governments of the Republic, while some of the more established composers of the so-called *Generación de los maestros* became associated with institutions of the republican right and subsequently with the Franco regime. These divisions heightened competing concepts of musical nationalism, especially in relation to notions of modernism, regionalism and musical style.

Falla's close association with the liberal intelligentsia during World War I meant that he initially welcomed the proclamation of the Republic on 14 April 1931 and collaborated with its cultural institutions such as the Junta Nacional de Música y Teatros. However, his

1 The principal members of this generation in music were Madrid's *Grupo de los ocho*: Salvador Bacarisse, Julián Bautista, Rosa García Ascot, Ernesto and Rodolfo Halffter, Gustavo Pittaluga and Fernando Remacha. Other contemporary figures, like Barcelona's Roberto Gerhard, Manuel Blancafort and Eduardo Toldrá are also usually included in this classification. For further information see: Emilio Casares, »Manuel de Falla y los músicos de la generación del 27«, in: *Manuel de Falla tra la Spagna e l'Europe*, ed. by Paolo Pinamonti, Florence 1989, p. 49–63.

attitude towards the Republic changed with the burning of churches and monasteries by anarchic elements in May 1931, an event which Falla thought was encouraged by the anti-clerical stance of the new government.² Although a devout Catholic, he had felt that the Church and its structures had become decadent and believed in the separation of Church and the State. His formulation of these ideas and his understanding of the relation between Catholicism and aesthetics were influenced by the writings of French Catholic intellectuals, in particular Jacques Maritain.³

Despite Falla's prominent standing, he somewhat naively refused to view his actions and declarations as being overtly political. In a 1936 letter to Manuel Azaña, a longstanding acquaintance and then president of the Spanish Republic, Falla insisted that his remarks on the anti-religious sentiment of the government, an overwhelmingly partisan issue of the time, were made »solely as a Catholic, free from any political interest [...] which I have never had and which I have always considered reprehensible«⁴. Prompted by his religious concerns, Falla voted for the right wing parties in the 1933 general elections, which was the only time he exercised his right to vote. He was, however, quickly disillusioned by the repressive measures taken by the Catholic democrats against the Catalan and Asturian workers in 1934, the year which marked his increased religious piety and withdrawal from public life.

Religious convictions also led Falla to participate in journals established by Spanish Catholic intellectuals, such as *Cruz y Raya*, because of their estrangement from the initial Republican government. By early 1936, Falla was even being courted by Ramiro de Maetzu in his attempts to form a Spanish counterpart to Charles Maurras's Action française. Falla refused to collaborate, as had Maritain in France, and his reply was couched in terms that rejected conservative notions of nationalism based on traditionalism:

[The] solution is not a conservative counter-revolution, which would certainly retain the execrable, but rather another deeper and more noble revolution, guided by the love of God [...]. Until this comes about it is useless to resort to tradition, a word which exercises an almost magical effect on some sections of the Spanish population and with which they try to explain and justify everything. [...] Every age demands new solutions and more generosity and love for our fellows. What does not conform to this represents nationalist traditionalism which will finish, like any exaggerated nationalism, by opposing Christ's genuine teachings.⁵

Falla believed that Maetzu's idea of nationalism opposed Maritain's reconciliation of modernity and Catholicism in his seminal work of 1919, *Art et Scolastique*.

2 The measures taken by the government included the closure of monasteries and the removal of icons from schools on the grounds of public hygiene.

3 For further details on Falla's association with Maritain see Federico Sopena, »La espiritualidad de Manuel de Falla«, in: *Manuel de Falla tra la Spagna e l'Europe*, ed. by Paolo Pinamonti, Florence 1989, p. 73–85.

4 Manuel de Falla, letter to Manuel Azaña 23 May 1936, copy held at Archivo Manuel de Falla, Granada, Spain (henceforth AMF). English transl. in: *Manuel de Falla: His Life and Works*, ed. by Gonzalo Armero, Madrid 1996, p. 232.

5 María del Carmen de Falla, writing on behalf of her brother Manuel, letter to Ramiro de Maetzu 8 July 1936, copy held at AMF. English transl. in: *ibid.*, p. 232.

Despondent at the unrest following the election of the leftist popular front in early 1936, Falla initially believed that the Nationalist uprising on 17 July of that year might provide Spain with some stability and viewed it as a possible short-term remedy. His hopes of stability were soon dashed by the Civil War, and in particular by the brutal extermination of leftist elements in Granada by Nationalist forces and their sympathisers, commencing with the assassination of Federico García Lorca on 18 August 1936.⁶

The Nationalists headed by Francisco Franco repeatedly sought Falla's involvement with their cause and the main interlocutor in this exercise was José María Pemán, a prominent author from Cádiz. On 1 January 1938, without his prior consent, Falla was declared president of the regime's newly formed peak cultural body, the Instituto de España. Falla's appointment and the creation of the Instituto de España was widely reported in the Nationalist press. In the ensuing months he engaged the assistance of prominent Nationalist figures to tactfully withdraw from the position, even though he had been assured that his role would be an honorary one. He was pressured to make a public declaration of adhesion to the Nationalist cause and eventually issued a statement of support which stressed his eschewal of all political activity and his intense suffering at any act of war, claiming that he hailed »the National Rising in the hope that we shall no longer hear blasphemies shouted in our streets, see our churches and our cemeteries profaned and wrecked, our libraries looted, our treasures of art collected in the course of centuries rifled«⁷. Falla's statement, widely disseminated in the Nationalist press, incited responses from Republican commentators. Writing from Barcelona in March 1938, Enrique Casal Chapí claimed: »A statement can reveal a much about man, but it can also damn him. Manuel de Falla has pronounced one of the latter.«⁸

The events of the 1930s had a marked impact on Falla's creative output and the stylistic evolution of his music. The political climate contributed towards his creative impasse throughout much of 1932 to 1935 and during the Civil War. Falla's comments in a letter to *El Ideal* dated 4 November 1937 hinted at his creative frustrations and the evolving concept of his final work *Atlántida*: »If Providence allows me to practice my craft again, I should dedicate it entirely to completing this work, with which my good will aspires to pay homage to God and our Fatherland.«⁹

Falla had begun work on *Atlántida* in 1927 although it was still incomplete at his death in Argentina in 1946. Based on a vast 19th-century poem by Mosén Jacinto Verdaguer, it departs significantly from the myth of Atlantis. Verdaguer's poem and Falla's setting combine the classical sources on Atlantis with the discovery of America. Never a rapid worker, by 1932 Falla had still managed to draft significant passages of the prologue and first two

6 Falla had attempted to intercede on García Lorca's behalf. See Ian Gibson, *Federico García Lorca*, London 1990, p. 468.

7 Manuel de Falla, »My Hope«, in: *Spain* 18, 1 February 1938, p. 3. This magazine was published by the Spanish Press Services in London, as part of the Nationalists' propaganda campaign, and Falla's statement was given prominent exposure.

8 Enrique Casal Chapí, »Música en la guerra: Manuel de Falla«, in: *La hora de España* (March 1938), p. 95. English transl. by the author.

9 Manuel de Falla, »Una carta de Falla«, in: *El Ideal*, 4 November 1937. Transl. by the author.

acts, which depicted the pagan scenes of Heracles and Pyrene, the founders of Iberia, ending with the destruction of the pagan order.¹⁰

After a break from composition during several months of 1932, precipitated by his religious convictions, Falla set the scenes depicting the destruction of the blasphemous Atlantes and reworked passages of the libretto to end the second part of the cantata with Heracles' symbolic conversion to monotheism. It was at this time that Falla arranged his own *Interpretaciones expresivas* of works by Tomás Luis de Victoria, which marked a redirection in the style of *Atlántida*, especially its third act which depicts an evangelical Columbus and the discovery of the New World. Falla concentrated on renaissance polyphonic sources to inform the music of this act, and there is a tendency to progress from the earlier three-part homophonic writing for male or female chorus to a four-part imitative style for mixed choir. Reconciling the plethora of sources which inspired *Atlántida* and the shift in stylistic emphasis from 1932 created doubts for Falla about the coherence of the work and further hampered its completion.

The text of *Atlántida* not only projected his deeply felt Catholicism but was also employed by Falla as a homage to Catalan culture and language, which had been repressed by the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera in the 1920s. Falla's disenchantment with Madrid had led him to focus his energies on establishing ties with other Spanish cities during this decade. His growing affinity with Barcelona led Falla to program the first performances of *Psyché* and the *Concerto* in that city and inspired his choice of subject and language in *Atlántida*. The centralist tendencies of the Franco regime contradicted Falla's idea of regionalism and the way that it could be made universal. In the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War Falla marked the following passage by the eminent 19th-century historian Menéndez Pelayo:

One cannot love his country if he does not love his region and use this love as the basis for a broader patriotism. A selfish form of regionalism is both odious and sterile, but a benevolent and fraternal regionalism can be an important element for progress and perhaps the only salvation for Spain.¹¹

Falla's concern at being manipulated politically contributed towards his departure from Spain in the aftermath of the Civil War, although he had begun planning his exit from the country as early as May 1938. The Franco regime made every effort to secure his prompt return by offering a generous pension of 25,000 pesetas a year, payable upon his return to Spain, and numerous honours were bestowed on him in his absence.¹² During his last years in Argentina Falla maintained good relations with both Spanish officials and exiles, although he did not want to be identified with either cause. He wished to dissociate himself from the turmoil in Spain, and left instructions that he should be buried in South America. While Falla publicly cited his health as the reason for not returning to Spain, in-

10 For a detailed study of *Atlántida* and the chronology of Falla's work on the project, see Andrew Budwig, *Manuel de Falla's Atlántida: An Historical and Analytical Study*, PhD Diss. University of Chicago 1984.

11 Alvaro de las Casas, *Horas de España*, Buenos Aires 1940, (Inventory nr. 2060, AMF), p. 134.

12 For details of Falla's activities in Argentina see Jorge de Persia, *Los últimos años de Manuel de Falla*, Madrid 1993.

formation gleaned from the composer's private papers suggests that his reticence was due to the divisions created in Spanish society.

Falla's unexpected death in Argentina in 1946 led to frantic efforts by the Franco regime to reclaim his body and the incomplete manuscripts, which included *Atlántida*. Although both Spanish and Argentine governments claimed his body and papers, his siblings, Maria del Carmen and Germán, decided on the return to Spain and Ricordi was chosen as publisher for *Atlántida*. The regime's attempt to appropriate Falla's legacy was reinforced through various means, such as the State funeral and inclusion of a likeness of the composer on the one hundred peseta note. Great emphasis was placed on the completion of *Atlántida*.

Germán de Falla, who took responsibility for the manuscripts, was cautious and attempted to resist pressures of publishers and government. Copies of the *Atlántida* manuscripts were demanded by several government officials and the Falla family was at the mercy of the State as Falla had left most of his estate to charity and it took several years for the family to be declared his legal heirs. By the early 1950s it was agreed that Falla's pupil, Ernesto Halffter, be appointed to complete the cantata.¹³

The State insisted that the work be premiered in Spain. According to contemporary commentators: »It was no accident that the work received, fittingly, its first hearing on Spanish soil, since the Spanish government has taken pains to reach an agreement with the publisher for three concert performances to be given in Spain prior to the scheduled premiere of the complete work at Milan's La Scala in 1962.«¹⁴ The first concert performance had been scheduled for 1955 to coincide with the 3000th anniversary of the foundation of Cadiz, Falla's birthplace and final resting place. In 1954, General Franco met with the Cadiz 3000 committee and promised to build an amphitheatre in Cadiz for the centrepiece of the celebrations, *Atlántida*. This did not eventuate because the work would not be completed for a further seven years. Despite Franco's personal interest in the cantata's completion there was still internal rivalry among the ministries of the regime and even between various Spanish cities surrounding the premiere. In the end a falsified dedication was concocted in order to end the struggle between the cities. It was stated that Manuel de Falla had dedicated *Atlántida*:

To Cadiz my native city
To Barcelona, Seville and Granada
For whom I have the deepest gratitude.¹⁵

This dedication and the work's concert premiere in Barcelona in 1961 were converted into a symbolic event meant to reinforce the indivisible unity of the nation.

The issue of Catalan separatism formed the background to this stance and also worked its way into the politics of the Barcelona performance. Catalan was not officially recognized under Franco, who had wasted no time in banning the language and flooding the region with impoverished immigrants from Andalucía in an attempt to suppress move-

13 Budwig, *Manuel de Falla's Atlántida*, p. 251–319.

14 Enrique Franco, »Current Chronicle, Spain«, in: *Musical Quarterly* 48 (1962), p. 244–251.

15 Budwig, *Manuel de Falla's Atlántida*, p. 309–310.

ments for Catalan independence. The regime wished to translate the work from Catalan to Castilian for the first performance, although this did not occur due to respect for Falla's express wishes and the insistence of his family. However, every other aspect of the premiere was communicated in Castilian. Care was taken to appoint Catalan artists who were sympathetic to the regime. The conductor Eduardo Toldrá, despite being seriously ill, was chosen because of his conservative politics and opposition to Catalan separatism, and he had a difficult time with the fiercely regionalistic choir, the Orfeo Catalá.¹⁶ Problems with the performance did not prevent critics such as Enrique Franco claiming that:

Atlántida takes its sure place as the only Spanish work of such great magnitude, duration, quality, and depth of conception [...]. One may even say that the religious – or mystical – aspects of *Atlántida*, as musical entities, are among the most attractive and moving to be found in European music.¹⁷

The premiere also stimulated interpretations of the work through the prism of Catholicism. Another leading Spanish cultural commentator of the day, Federico Sopena, wrote an explication of *Atlántida* to coincide with its premiere. This focuses on Falla's spirituality and the artist as Christian in his faith, life and religiosity. Sopena puts forward an interpretation of *Atlántida* as sacred music, calling it »the most beautiful ecclesiastical music of our time«¹⁸. He argues that while musically irrelevant to the avant-garde of the 1960s, it could be of great relevance to the world of ecclesiastical music – providing a new vision of what a Catholic Mass could be.

Since Falla's death his music had been given the imprimatur of being authentically Spanish by the Franco regime, and this resulted in divergent musical movements laying claim to the Falla inheritance, either through genuine interest or political expediency. On the one hand the traditional *casticista* nationalists, ranging from zarzuela to symphonic composers such as Federico Moreno Tórroba and Joaquín Rodrigo, and on the other, the emerging avant-garde of the late 1940s and 1950s, including the Madrid-based *Generación de 1951* and the aptly named *Círculo Manuel de Falla* of Barcelona. The premiere of *Atlántida* proved to be disappointing for the avant-garde composers and the work's relevance was also questioned in subsequent years in the light of changing constructions of Spain and the evolving Spanish political situation. The opening up of Spanish State under the technocrats in the early 1960s marked the beginnings of a shift from the strident traditionalism (*casticismo*) and Catholic rhetoric of the regime. Despite the failings of *Atlántida*, Falla and his music continued to find favour with the regime: one of the last budgetary items approved by Franco before his death was for the extensive Falla centenary celebrations in 1976. The ambivalence surrounding Falla's political leanings facilitated his »reconstruction« during Spain's transition to democracy; having fared better than most of the cultural icons of the Franco era, he continues to be viewed by commentators from the full range of the political spectrum as a seminal figure in Hispanic culture.

16 Ibid., p. 310–316.

17 Franco, »Current Chronicle, Spain«, p. 244–251.

18 Federico Sopena, *Atlántida: Introducción a Manuel de Falla*, Madrid 1962, p. 33–34.