Poetics of Revelation:
Communities of the Literary Oracular in Transatlantic Modernism

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

In this dissertation, *Poetics of Revelation: Communities of the Literary Oracular in Transatlantic Modernism*, I study practices of cultural mediation in "visionary" poetics from Mexico (Octavio Paz), Spain (María Zambrano), and Bolivia (Jaime Saenz). I set forth a theoretical model ("the literary oracular") which permits the conflict of poetic revelation to articulate its unity in literary modernism through a critique of instrumental reason leveled by cultural mediators who refused to accept the disintegration of tradition, which they thought had to pass through them if it was to survive. Revelation and discipleship were effects of these authors' earlier disenchantment with revolutionary platforms that relied on mass culture constructed as a people. Their new concern that "national energy" was so volatile it could turn assemblies into mobs, convinced them of the need for a conduit through which a new transcendence could be discovered and instituted, and to believe that they had to become its custodian if a new community was to be imagined in the wake of revolutionary fatigue. As these authors were poets, they set out to imagine a new language with which to name that transcendence, one which would remain unassailable by the vociferous chatter of the political rally and the marketplace. This poetics of revelation invites us to ask how these modernist mediating agents – working as they did in *vernacularizing* print cultures which threatened their elite minority status – came to imagine community as a

transhistorical colloquium among like-minded interpreters after the failure of politically left-leaning notions of communitarianism.

Dedication

To Beatriz and Uma Lucía

Contents

Acknowledgements

Works of this kind are collaborative in nature, born from intellectual exchange, dialog, disagreement, debate, recalibration, reconciliation, and other forms of generative thinking. I have enjoyed the support of many interlocuters over the past six years whose contributions to this project must not go unrecognized. Let me begin by expressing my deep gratitude to Dr. José María Rodríguez García for his generosity, collegiality, scholarly rigor, and unrelenting support of this dissertation through endless conversations, sprawling correspondence, and multiple reviews of draft materials and revisions. I thank him for his transformative guidance, collaboration, and friendship. Many thanks, in turn, are due to committee members Dr. Roberto Dainotto, Dr. Richard Rosa, and Dr. José Luis Venegas, who, through intersecting discussions on poetry, politics, and intellectual history, supported the development of what began as a mosaic and turned into the theoretical formulation it is today.

Let me also recognize my colleagues in the graduate program of the Romance Studies Department, who were intellectual companions and supportive friends: Marcelo Noah, C. J. Enloe, Ninel Valdarrama, Ofelia López, Anna Tybinko, Nicolás Sánchez, Mathew Whitehouse, Elia Romera-Figueroa, and Lucas Lopes. I also am grateful to the undergraduate students who attended my seminars on race and regionalism in the Andes and on civic engagement and education reform in Spain and Mexico. While writing, I found endless inspiration in their curiosity and enthusiasm.

An early version of chapter 4.1, published in *Revista de Estudios Boivianos/ Bolivian Studies Journal* in fall 2021 as "Mediating Andean Modernity: The Literary Oracular in *Muerte por el tacto* by Jaime Saenz," benefited from the insightful observations and suggestions of Dr. Tara Daly and Dr. Raquel Alfaro. I also would like to thank Jeremy Tambling for his editorial insights regarding the presentation of lesser-known Hispanic American poets to a broad readership of transatlantic modernism. While carrying out this research, I was awarded indispensable fellowships from the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies, and the Graduate School of Duke University, for which I am deeply grateful. I presented chapters of this dissertation at the North Carolina Conference on Latin American Studies (2021), the Conference of the Southern Council of Latin American Studies (2021), and the Annual Convention of the Modern Language Association (2022).

1. Introduction

Around the time that Mexican poet Octavio Paz was departing Valencia on his way to Paris after attending the Second International Congress of Writers in Defense of Culture, Spanish political activist and trained philosopher, María Zambrano, who had attended the same conference, exiled to Mexico as Republican Spain fell in defeat. No sooner than Zambrano arrived in the Americas, as if in a relay race, Bolivian poet and military cadet Jaime Saenz sailed to Germany during the Third Reich on a delegation to be hosted by the Hitlerian Youth. Despite their countervailing geographical and political itineraries, these writers are united by a common motivation, a discontent, really, with the predominance of instrumental reason and the social class that embodied it: the bourgeoisie. Communists, socialists, and fascists of the early 20th century shared this "revolutionary passion" (Furet), this antipathy to the values of a historical subject whose legitimacy relied exclusively on himself. Among the protagonists of this study, such a revolutionary passion, ephemeral on account of its intensity, did not survive the end of the Second World War.

In fact, it did not take long for a revolutionary fatigue to befall Octavio Paz, María Zambrano, and Jaime Saenz, respectively. That "national energy" (Fichte) which once had seemed like a veritable unitary "tradición eterna" [eternal tradition] (Unamuno) now appeared dangerously volatile, prone to convert assemblies into mobs,

which proved even more perilous in an era of mechanized warfare. Intellectuals like these who lost their revolutionary faith, observed that the category of "people" had always been a political cause in the history of national regeneration understood as sacrifice (we could even say *history as holocaust* in view of the Spanish Civil War and the treatment of indigenous peasant communities in the Americas) and that the social base had become a sacrificial offering.

Having come of age during the final wave of Hispanic liberalism, these secular modernists could not look at the institution of the Church except with distrust and irony. However, they recognized that although charismatic political leaders had successfully undermined the magic of priests and the power of the Church, the charisma shown by popular speakers and writers in the public sphere could not be ignored. These disenchanted modernists' post-revolutionary writings summon ideologists and like-minded literati to hermeneutically retool existing rituals which had once organized religious life into performances of solemnity in highly effective political theater.

Neither Zambrano nor Paz nor Saenz could face the "political oracular" except with contempt. Their nostalgia for an organicity of transcendent experience and desire for ethical clarity in an age of moral ambiguity produced a renaissance of visionary poetry and a renewed theorization of poetic revelation within the broader development of transatlantic modernism. This rebirth occurred on the pages of *vernacularizing* print

periodicals, since the literary market became gradually crowded with lay reporters whose columns spoke in everyday speech to the newly literate underclass. Modernist visionaries of the 1930s, like earlier art-for-art's-sake *modernistas* who had come of age at the fin-de-siècle, often bemoaned reporters of a more *prosaic* disposition, since those desacralized writers – and their mass readership – had transformed the literary market from a system of patronage for the few to a more equitable and inclusive market of ideas structured by the new economy.

Culturalist poetry – the darling of such publishing venues as the *Revista de Occidente* and *Cruz y Raya* imprints – could not alone sustain a poet or a poet's philosopher like Zambrano. In response to this transformation of the publishing industry and its publics, authors who disdained all career paths other than writing were to engage deeply and deftly in the discipline of periodical publishing. In Mexico, the authoritarian post-revolutionary state tried to rein in dissenting intellectuals by offering them career paths within the government bureaucracy (with Paz becoming a poet-diplomat in the manner of Jaime Torres Bodet and Alfonso Reyes) and by creating the Fondo de Cultura Económica (FCE) in 1934, Latin America's first government-run imprint to bridge the gap between elite culture and middlebrow dissemination. Along with textbooks and handbooks translated from foreign languages and intended for high school and college students in a quickly expanding educational system, FCE brought out

Zambrano's and Paz's major works of the 1950s (e.g. his *El arco y la lira*, her *El hombre y lo divino*), which are notoriously difficult and illustrate their retreat from revolutionary politics. No such opportunities existed for the writer in Spain after 1936 without that writer becoming – explicitly or implicitly – a propagandist of Franco's dictatorial and militaristic regime of terror.

The *vernacularizing* phenomenon is evident in Bolivia as well, where the newly literate underclass did not grow as quickly as in other parts of the Hispanic world, due to the brittle infrastructure of its public education system and the region's dominant Quechua and Aymara linguistic communities. Nonetheless, the threat of the new readership and the secular authors who crowded the field could already be perceived in the vociferous columns of Franz Tamayo in *El Diario* of La Paz juxtaposed with the same author's highly allegorical, culturalist poetry of *La Promotheida*. It is no wonder that a *modernista* like Tamayo was an exemplary creator in the eyes of Jaime Saenz, who found himself traversed by the need to communicate to a broad readership, as is evident in his reports for Reuters and McGraw Hill World News, and by the desire to transmit a secret knowledge in volumes of charismatic revelations that he would publish in artisanal editions with limited runs which often bore reproductions of his own drawings.

Most authors whom today we include under the interrelated monikers of *modernismo* and the Generation of 1898 had not felt compelled to actively engage in

organized politics, and thus easily could be called *literary dilettantes of national regeneration*, as the writings of José Ortega y Gasset and José Vasconcelos demonstrate. This occurred with José Enrique Rodó in Uruguay, Rubén Darío in Nicaragua and Spain, Ricardo Jaimes Freyre in Bolivia and Argentina, Amado Nervo and Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera in Mexico as well as the Spaniards Azorín, Antonio Machado, Pío Baroja, and to a degree Miguel de Unamuno. Around the year 1930 a younger generation of intellectuals emerged eager and ready, in greater numbers than ever before, to take a sincere, more meaningful stand in politics. Sometimes they supported programs of government-directed democratizing reform and cultural outreach, as did María Zambrano in Extremadura in 1932 and Octavio Paz in Yucatán in 1937. Other times they adopted a more belligerent position inspired by the Second International, as did Zambrano in articles from 1936 and Paz in 1937. Still other times their newly discovered political engagement radicalized in ways that betrayed democracy altogether, as in Jaime Saenz's 1939 military training in Germany.

The historical appearance of revelation followed closely on the climax of the optimistically expressed partisan politics which brought Zambrano and Paz together in Valencia in 1937 and which took Saenz to Berlin two years later. The proverbial litigiousness – their mutual distrust and sectarian appropriation of the "people" – helped many intellectuals effect a turn toward revelation. The younger intellectuals'

alarm at the extreme political parties of the Right and Left was compounded by their revolutionary fatigue and a new pessimism that two successive large-scale wars in Europe and pervasive strongman rule in Latin America induced in them. At slightly varying times and under different circumstances in their lives, Zambrano, Paz, and Saenz all felt a dawning nostalgia for an imagined experience of unity – what Paz later carelessly called "Neolithic" time, an unfortunate word choice for which he was mocked endlessly by junior intellectuals in the 1970s. Visionary poets' newly developed distrust of revolutionary politics and their perception of the writer's desacralization converged in a single complaint which led them into the role of the oracular intellectual.

In the pages that follow, I look at the contradictions that emerged in Zambrano, Paz, and Saenz during their internalization of the revolutionary fatigue which each experienced sometime between the 1930s and the 1940s. They understood that a pre-reflective immediacy was the way through which multitudes connected to competing versions of a national culture, as presented in mass media, and they surmised that popular traditions and the poetry of oral transmission were the most authentic manifestations of national energy that readers could receive. However, at the same time they questioned whether the projection of the nation's future – like the interpretation of its past – could be entrusted to the unreflective subject projected in mass culture's print

and visual texts. The oracular sage had to step in and become the mediator between elite and mass readerships.

1.1 The Problem of Visionary Poetry

Over the last twenty years, critical dissatisfaction with the culturalist poetics of Cold War Latin America has reshaped the reception of literary practitioners whose domination of the public sphere was achieved, in part, by embracing political positions that were anathema to the Left and by giving conservative voices a place to speak in little revues, middlebrow magazines, and even on television. Hispanic culturalists of the mid-century have come under critical scrutiny for not having had more faith in the potential of popular culture and mass media to realize the promise of a more inclusive national project (Jean Franco). However, criticism still struggles to address the contradictions that arise from modern "visionary" poetry or the "poetics of revelation" because it has yet to situate modernist nostalgia firmly within the field of cultural production, where it may interrogate visionary poetry as poetry and as the unity of the institutions that made it possible. There is a need, therefore, to ask how a lost faith in the communitarian ideals of radical politics may coexist in poetry with a refusal to forfeit a unitary life force that could be transmitted through a continuum of history.

Such an inquiry would need to address the modernist visionaries' modified understanding of the intellectual's role in the public sphere after the breakdown of

politically radical forms of communitarian thought. For example, why and how did a twenty-three-year-old Mexican enthusiast of Spain's Popular Front, who had recently written articles for a communist newspaper at home, abruptly turn away from political militancy? Why and how did Zambrano – who was Paz's senior by ten years – complete an analogous shift away from organized politics after the defeat of that same Popular Front in 1939 and her banishment from Spain, choosing not to become an anti-Franco activist, unlike many of her comrades now living in exile in either Mexico or Cuba? Why and how did Saenz – who was Paz's junior by seven years – effect a parallel political retreat (this time from the radical Right), just as a diverse coalition of academic revolutionaries and aggrieved military veterans was consolidating after the loss of the Chaco War, that is, precisely during the formation of the Movimiento Revolucionario Nacional (MNR)? These questions are not rhetorical. In all three cases, the authors' commitment to the people (rather than to any self-declared people's party) continued after 1939, as seen in Paz's many writings on the Mexican Revolution, Zambrano's theorization of personhood and sacrificial history, and Saenz's poetic guidebook to geographical landmarks and archetypal people of La Paz.

The struggle to address the antinomies that traverse the poetry, theory, and public personae of these visionaries is reflected by the uncritical practice of erasing a contradictory term of their cultural production or by the tendency to address opposing

positions independently, as if they were not bound to each other by their mutual antagonism. Enrico Mario Santí, for example, whom Octavio Paz appointed to edit numerous volumes of his own work in Spanish in the canon-making Ediciones Cátedra and Fondo de Cultura Económica, has consistently omitted from his chronologies and critical assessments the poet's early, intense militancy in communist propaganda campaigns which supported the Second Republic of Spain and the Soviet Union. Similarly, critics like Juan Federico Arriola (2008), Yvon Grenier (2001), and Erwin Rodríguez (2006) have addressed Paz's political positions in isolation from his theories of aesthetics and poetic creation, attempting to prevent his aesthetics from becoming contaminated by his politics. Nor has this been the only frustration.

Other critics offer a more holistic methodology and address both terms of the conflict – i.e. immersion in collective action and the language of the people versus a withdrawal from that engagement into a culturalist discourse for the initiated – but keep the assessment of the mutually opposing terms independent of each other. This can be observed in Ana Bundgård's treatment of Zambrano first as a modernist mystagogue in *Más allá de la filosofía* (2000) and then as an engaged intellectual at the service of the Second Republic of Spain in *Un compromiso apasionado* (2009). A similar strategy appears in Mercedes Gómez Blesa's *Modernas y vanguardistas* (2009), where Zambrano is

considered a proto-feminist in the democratizing project of the Second Republic, and in *La razón mediadora* (2008), where she is studied as a philosopher of neo-stoicism.

An additional frustration has occurred in the consecration of these intellectuals into official institutions of cultural production. All three writers have become major national personalities in their respective countries. Their notoriety has elicited the proliferation of myths and the reinvention of their personae, among literary commentators, translators, publicists, novelists, as well as by the authors themselves. Ironically, the critical awareness of this anxiety over the posterity of their public personae has appeared most acutely in the literary genre of parody. In *Los detectives salvajes*, Roberto Bolaño comically makes an aging Octavio Paz stroll in circles through an urban park, as he is surveilled by young aspiring neo-avantgarde poets, because "tiempo circular" is a major *topos* in the Mexican's poetics and because his poetry frequently features a literary alter ego that thinks and has visions while the lyric subject strolls through the city. Similarly, in *Vivir abajo* by Gustavo Faverón, the antinomy of radical political engagement and retreat to a culturalist discourse, eminently observable in Jaime Saenz, is travestied as the duplicity of a Cold War spy, a Bolivian asset of the CIA named "Jaime Saenz" who is portrayed as a literary spook living under the alias of "Alejandro Pizarnik" in Argentina during the Videla dictatorship. It is as though this

critical awareness of the contradictions that traverse modern visionary poetry were available only through literary parody.

So, how can the problem of modern revelation be permitted to articulate its unity? The method proposed to pursue this line of inquiry has been conceived as the "literary oracular." Using the tools of contemporary critical theory, the sociology of cultural forms, and post-structural literary analysis, I have developed this model with the hopes of setting off-balance cultural hierarchies and value judgments, intent on blurring, if not erasing, binary oppositions, to show how Nietzsche's transvaluation of values, aside from being a literary provocation, may serve as a critical framework in the analysis of national cultures. This model is designed for the express purpose of interpreting the proliferation of revelation in an age of revolution.

1.2 Poetic Revelation and the Idea of Community

In an investigation that employs such loaded terms as "poetic revelation" and "community," it seems necessary to specify what I mean by these concepts and how I apply them throughout the chapters of this study. Let me begin with "poetic revelation." With this term I wish to denominate a discourse of transatlantic literary modernism which is not limited to the cultural production of the case studies included here but rather forms part of an articulated and often imbricated constellation of aesthetic and social texts. So, while there are some undisputed, historically organic connections

between the three protagonists of the study, their structural similarities are no less relevant to my analysis and, accordingly, receive the same rigor.

In the discourse of solitude, poetic revelation refers to the literary practice and the textual performance of a subject who is convinced that the world no longer takes notice of him. Revelation itself, on the other hand, has no abandonment narrative since it *always already* is enthralled in immediate experience. Whereas poetic revelation is a literary performance of delirium in the domain of the sacred, revelation itself is the shudder of a human possessed by a transcendent, ineffable meaning which is the subject of all authentic poetry. If revelation is the subject's confrontation with the absolutism of reality in an act that lacks duration, the literary vision, with an affinity for the temporally heterogenous, strives to insert the poet into a continuum of history while simultaneously describing his strife, providing a rationale for his struggle, and elevating the mission of poetic revelation above the objectives of instrumental reason.

Whereas revelation is legitimated by a transcendent, unsayable meaning that remains forever impervious to analytical reason, poetic revelation authorizes that truth by establishing a discipline by which it may be accessed and a discipleship to certify the status of its practitioners. Insofar as it emerges from transatlantic modernism, the "literary oracular" invites us to experience *the conflict of poetic revelation as unity of voice* through a critique of instrumental reason leveled by cultural mediators who refused to

accept the disintegration of tradition, which they thought had to pass through them if it was to survive. Their concern that "national energy" was so volatile it could transform assemblies into mobs convinced them of the need for a conduit and to believe that they had to become its custodian.

This line of inquiry enters a moral domain, since the problems confronted by María Zambrano, Octavio Paz, and Jaime Saenz arise as soon as they ask how they are supposed to endure adversity. Explicitly or tacitly, poetic revelation responds to the question, *how will I ever make it through this day?* The weight of this question, which is equal parts complaint and inquiry, falls on "conduct," on how one is to face tribulation and the means available to help one make it through. Now, when I say "conduct" to help "make it through," I wish to evoke the full etymological meaning of this word derived from the Latin verb *conducere,* referring to the "provision of safe passage"; via the Old French *conduit* or "channel"; and the late Middle English meaning of "management," which denoted "self-management" and "behavior" by the 16th century.

In their unrelenting concern for the restoration of moral values, practitioners of poetic revelation consistently exercise what I call an "oracular logic of mediation," which affirms the resilience of a truth that predates western philosophy by promoting a code of conduct that could serve as consolation for the oppressive life produced by the violence that philosophy exercises in its fraught attempt to realize its ideals. This code of

conduct fuses the analogies of the *custodian*, *channel*, and *manager* into a discipline of the literary oracular. Practitioners who followed this discipline identified more strongly with a community of interlocutors that spanned the ages than with any particular social movement or political orientation of their time. Their most intense experience of being-in-common knew no temporal limits.

Insofar as it emerges in transatlantic modernism, I observe the phenomenon of poetic revelation within a "community" of the literary oracular, where the commons transcend the boundaries of historical experience. These modernist mediating agents – working as they did in close contact with vernacular print cultures which threatened their elite minority status – came to imagine community as a transhistorical colloquium among like-minded interpreters after the failure of politically radical notions of communitarianism. The notion of community I have in mind draws on the idea of "literary communism" set forth by Jean-Luc Nancy (1990), who strips the concept of any trace of immanence and suggests that community entails an arrival at the limit of finitude to which we are called by writing. In the mediating logic of the literary oracular, this convocation transcends the boundaries of history, convening the copresence of heterogenous voices that speak about liminal experiences of adversity. In this transhistorical colloquium, a truth older than western philosophy was invited to speak again, no longer through the oracle, but rather through now engaged now withdrawn,

nostalgic poets whose political disillusion did not dull their double-edged concern for the people as a political category and for community as a utopian ideal.

For a study in which the institutions of literature and the networks of publication are paramount, a transatlantic perspective helps us more fully appreciate how Paz's immense prestige depended on the work of fellow poets and small publishers on both sides of the Atlantic. This perspective also helps us better grasp the social forces that shaped some of Zambrano's most important works, which were written while she was living in the Americas or published in the Americas while she was living in Europe, resulting in a vaster readership and greater recognition in Cuba and Puerto Rico than in Spain until much later in her life. Saenz, in turn, represents an eccentric element, given that his writing – or what we know of it – was produced only in Bolivia and for a Bolivian readership. For now, he is viewed from a transnational perspective, but perhaps this will change in a not-so-distant future, when papers relating to his work in the 1940s for McGraw-Hill World News and the United States Information Service may surprise an unsuspecting scholar and allow us to view him through a hemispheric lens.

1.3 The Path from Consolation to Confession

In chapter one, I discuss the concept of consolation, the metaphors of the path and exile, arriving at confession as a literary genre and as method in the poetics of María Zambrano from 1932 to 1944. Using tools of post-structural theory and the sociology of

cultural forms, I ask how consolation, during her exile in the Caribbean, responded to the defenselessness of a political system that had failed to realize its ideals. While watching Europe descend into darkness after 1939, Zambrano wondered how her age compared to the reign of Caligula, when philosophy had evolved into uninspiring scholasticism and the new religion of Christianity stared spreading on the outskirts of the Roman Empire, where such intellectual caregivers as Lucius Anneas Seneca mediated between the old faith of Logos-as-Nature and the humble life of need.

Zambrano's proposal of consolation in *El pensamiento vivo de Séneca* had an obscuring effect on the figure of Seneca in a debate over Spanish national culture which had begun between Ángel Ganivet and Miguel de Unamuno during the so-called disaster of 1898, when the Stoic philosopher was promoted as the embodiment of a national essence. Zambrano's "obscured Seneca" calls into question the notion of authorship by redistributing responsibility to the practice of interpretation, adding an ethical dimension to the practice of reading (J. Hillis Miller 1987; 1991). I ask how the principles of self-abnegation and resignation inherent in "senequismo" were appropriated across a broad range of the political spectrum during the first half of the 20th century and how Zambrano's treatment of the Stoic philosopher reimagined the Carlist notion of "tradition" (*Dios, Fueros, Patria y Rey*) as a transhistorical community of

"pensadores del pueblo," that is, intellectuals who forged new *ways of thinking* rather than new *systems of thought*, because they did not abstract from lived experience.

These 'ways of thinking,' with their emphasis on experiential learning, come under scrutiny when I analyze the metaphor of "the path" in Zambrano's participation in the community-based service-learning program Misiones Pedagógicas and in her description of philosophical inquiry as "un cauce" [a course of a river]. Her early social engagement in the most marginalized regions of rural Spain was a testament to her idealism and early revolutionary faith. I ask how the historical account of her engagement compares to her autobiographical testimony produced years later, and how this comparison may help illustrate practices of authorship in the construction of her public persona as it has been passed down to posterity, suggesting that going *on the road* with Misiones Pedagógicas was a crucial element to that construction.

Drawing on the post-structural critique of logocentrism set forth by Culler (1982), I suggest that Zambrano's invocation of Max Scheler's *Ordo Amoris* in her text "Hacia un saber sobre el alma" [Toward a Knowledge of the Soul] offers an aesthetic correlate to the social text of the country path, insofar as she aimed to establish a method for unifying logos and the psyche. I argue that the influence of phenomenology on her thinking does not come from Husserl, as critics have suggested, but rather from Scheler. Was following the path of life, she wondered, any different than what Socrates did when

he visited the oracle? Was perusing one's own path any different than becoming one's own oracle? Like all paths, those trodden by Zambrano in the 1930s forked several times, notably, between her and her mentor, José Ortega y Gasset, who reproached her for daring to publish such an indiscretion, sending her out of his office in tears.

Zambrano's 1934 banishment from Ortega foreshadowed her exile from Spain in 1939 and carried with it consequences that she would feel when she arrived in Mexico. Like many Spanish academics, Zambrano was granted asylum in Mexico by the administration of Lázaro Cárdenas, among whose policy achievements was the expansion of the public education sector. Whereas many professors and students from her own Facultad de Filosofía y Letras were commissioned to teach in the newly founded La Casa de España (now El Colegio de México), an invitation was never extended to her to teach there or anywhere else in the capital; instead, she ventured to an underfunded provincial high school in Morelia, state of Michoacán. Three times an exile – first from Ortega, then from Spain, then again from Mexico City – Zambrano again and again explored this concept from the perspectives of philosophy and poetry.

In lectures that she appears to have delivered with limited preparation, Zambrano spoke to rural high school students in Morelia about Plato and the crisis of objectivity, noting that the philosopher of *The Republic* had relied on religion (a form of hope) when he invoked the Myth of the Cave to produce a revelation precisely at that

moment in the text when the dialogue seems to grow weary. Before the glossy eyes of her students, she suggested that philosophy is born out of the ecstasy of being integrated in a totality but that it is a failed ecstasy, since the philosopher looks away from appearances, convinced that he must seize forms in their abstract ideality.

The poet, on the other hand, never looks away or renounces anything, because he falls in love with the most transitory aspect of each object at every instant. Wanting everything and denying nothing, she went on, the poet accepts what is and what is not, and it was precisely this refusal to discriminate between the beauty of presence and that of absence which gave Plato the rationale for the poet's banishment. Wrapping humans in a veil of forgetfulness, she contended, Platonic philosophy wielded reason as a weapon of hope against the tyranny of jealous gods. Since the poet did not use reason but rather pronounced the word of inspired speech, he was judged to be doing the tyrant's bidding and, therefore, deserved no place in the republic.

She explained to her students that, unlike philosophers, poets achieved totality by merging into the heterogenous humus of life, uninterested in the purity that philosophers anxiously protect. The language equipped to name this act of integration was the *delirio*, enthusiasm, a combination of madness and ecstasy. Thus, we may say with Derrida (1981) that in this place of exile we are dealing with the spellbinding *pharmakeia*, which serves as the topos of revelation, and with the *pharmakon* that, as a

drug, is both cure and poison. Just as in Greek mythology the alluring waters of the river Illissus attracted Orithyia until the boreal wind carried her into the void, so too does the *delirio* promise totality to the subject who is nostalgic for the organicity of transcendent experience while threatening complete destruction. Unlike their *regeneracionista* predecessors, poets of revelation were anti-bourgeois practitioners who believed that the paradoxically poisonous-therapeutic pharmakon could release repressed energies for the benefit of poetry and society.

What makes this argument so intriguing is that Zambrano does not delimit her analysis to the poets whom Plato had in mind, even if she does read the "drunkenness" of Anacreon as a contradiction to the ethos of western metaphysics. Instead, with elective affinities she suggests that the language of delirium uttered by Anacreon during his poetic ravings was equally observable in Saint John of the Cross's plaintive cries for communion and in the diabolic "intoxication" of post-Romantics like Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Lautréamont. In this community of visionaries that spans two and a half millennia, Zambrano determined poetry's primary function to be a selfless gift that belongs to no one and to everyone, since no one deserves poetry but every so often everyone finds it. If the philosopher is defined by his systematic search, the poet forever wanders, because he seeks nothing and only finds.

Zambrano elaborated on this idea of a transhistorical colloquium in which visionary poetry was invited to speak again shortly after she left Mexico in the early 1940s, when she gave talks in Havana, in the company of the Orígenes group. There, she turned her attention to the crisis of western civilization and studied "confession" as a literary genre and a theoretical method, treating the *Confessions* of Saint Augustine as the formal paradigm of self-assessment which demands self-reflection of the listener, because, according to her, the goal of confession is to determine the cause of a crisis. This decision to pivot intellectually from consolation invites us to ask why confession attracted the thrice-banished poet's philosopher living in 1940s Havana.

In confession, María Zambrano discovered a literary genre to which both poetry and philosophy historically have turned in their attempts to bridge the gap between the essentialism of Greek philosophy and the reality of lived experience. Unlike the voice of an imaginary world, Zambrano contends, the living voice of confession is verified in the real time of life, since confession does not seek a virtual temporality, but a real temporality that cannot be transcribed. Like poetic delirium, confession held the promise of unifying life so that one does not feel like a fragment cleaved from an invisible whole. Thus, for the remainder of this chapter, I turn my attention to the relation between cognition and performance in the complex speech act of confession, based on the framework advanced by De Man (1979), and I highlight how Zambrano

problematizes the intensely contested topic of confessional poetry, drawing on recent scholarship of Grobe (2011) and Sherwin (2011).

In his infinite mercy, Zambrano suggests, God gave humans the gift of enchantment while at the same time condemning them; however, no sooner were they cast out of Paradise than humans stole the magic of its invented temporality. Poetry is the genre that most closely resembles confession since its reality is that of the spell, where this incantation proves to be a Christian translation of what in Platonic philosophy was conceived as primary admiration. This rhetorical parentage allowed her to argue that poets came closest to overcoming the condemnation of philosophy and that, for this reason, they were considered *los malditos* [the damned].

Facing the crisis of western civilization as well as her personal crisis of exile, Zambrano found in confession the language of someone whose condition as subject has not been erased. Confession, too, proved to be a transhistorical phenomenon, but unlike delirium, confession had ramified into transformation and expression. Beginning with Saint Augustine of Hippo who had introduced the new faith into ancient culture and, as a philosopher, concerned himself with neutralizing the effects of the gods, Zambrano suggests that by the end of Romanticism, confession had split into "literary life" (Rousseau) and "the underground" (Rimbaud), i.e., into the most original expression of one's fortunate encounters with the lost psyche and into the anguish of condemnation

suffered by poets who longed for a lost paradise that they had no room for in themselves even if they could find it, which they could not.

1.4 Visionary Poetry and the Institutions that Make it Possible

In chapter two, I address the problem of revelation in the poetry and public relations of Octavio Paz from the late 1930s to the early 1970s. Reading Paz's literature and the institutions that made it possible, I examine his rhetorical strategies and the socio-historical conditions which facilitated his ascendency in the marketplace of ideas. Concerned with his Janus-faced role as cultural producer and cultural promotor, I ask how the author's early activity as a poet, literary delegate, anthologist, journalist, and public speaker facilitated his rise to prominence as poet and diplomat during a period that spans roughly 1936–1956. If the poems "Entre la piedra y la flor" and "¡No pasarán!" count among his most noteworthy examples of socially engaged poetry, how did his intervention in the Second International Congress of Writers in Defense of Culture alter the trajectory of his poetic production? Militating as a propagandist of pro-Republican articles for the Communist newspaper *El Nacional*, reinventing the Mexican literary tradition as coeditor of the anthology *Laurel*, and pronouncing his first theory of poetics "Poesía de soledad y poesía de comunión" [Poetry of Solitude and Poetry of Communion] at a religious festival, Octavio Paz presents a case in which the

commonplace binomial of engagement-autonomy becomes blurred amid declarations of revolutionary passion and the liturgy of heretical eroticism.

With respect to Paz's ability to shape public discourse, how did the value of his critical perspectives on poetry relate to his preeminence as a poet? How did his unyielding practice of revisionism relate to his theorization of poetics? To what degree was his unmatched success the outcome of his own strategies and to what extent was it the result of an attitude adopted by commentators who happily accepted his self-interpretations and the personae that he handed down to posterity? Paz's domination of the field of literary production exemplifies what Bourdieu (1990) described as the habitus and what Foucault (1992) was getting at when he characterized an "author" as an articulated series of discourses, inviting us to rethink how the poetics of revelation in Octavio Paz has proliferated over the course of the 20th century. In their capacity to orient a social phenomenon within the field of production, these frameworks help overcome the critical frustration of commentators who erase the opposing term of the conflict or who address both terms of the antagonism independently.

The heretical eroticism of "Poesía de soledad y poesía de comunión" shared that skepticism toward technology and progress which infuses Theodor Adorno's *Minima Moralia*, where culture lives under the perennial threat of commodification and dehumanization. However,'Paz's lecture also provided an interpretive model that could

address a wide variety of poetry, modern and ancient, but it worked exceptionally well when applied to the erotic poetry that Paz himself had published in 1937: *Raíz de hombre* and *Bajo tu clara sombra*. From the early-1940s to the mid-1950s, however, his poetry strayed from the course of eroticism and transformed into a poetics of estrangement, crafted with the tools of French Surrealism into an existentialist investigation of horror and angst. A reader who wished to apply the solitude-communion model to the poetry of *Libertad bajo palabra* (1949), *¿Águila o sol?* (1951), or *Semillas para un himno* (1954), would have had to graft it onto those poems out of sheer critical will. The image of the poet advanced critically by Paz in 1943 no longer coincided with the image that emerged from his most recent poetry. This impasse required a new interpretive model that could address the place of history in modern poetry and redefine the "tradition" through the selection of new precursors.

With oracular logic, Paz's preoccupation with tradition recast the poet as an interlocutor in a transhistorical colloquium, who mediated between the everyday speech of the literate masses and the font of linguistic creation which could restore to words their lost significance. Presented in *El arco y la lira* [The Bow and the Lyre] (1956), this retooled interpretative model certified his influence in the marketplace of ideas and was authorized by the credit he had received from his earlier interdisciplinary interventions. I suggest that Paz's notion of poetic contemporaneity was derived from T. S. Eliot's

understanding of "tradition" and that, as in the case of Eliot, this critical model would guide readers who turned their attention to the critic's later poetic production.

Poetic restoration appeared as a necessity to an intellectual who harbored disdain for the vernacularizing effect of popular culture, which, in the case of Paz, he conflated with consumer society and the burgeoning mass readership of Cold War Latin America. Inquiring into the proclaimed need for restoration, I examine Paz's proposal in *El arco y la lira* as an example of the contradiction between poetic and communicative language explored by Adorno (1974) in his study of lyric poetry and the subject's descent into individuality. This framework helps us address the problem of poetic revelation insofar as it allows us to derive the social text from the organizing view present in the poem.

After the publication of *El arco y la lira*, Paz's public persona enjoyed a vast accumulation of prestige, and in the public sphere the author could express himself without restraint, exerting powerful influence on the shape of public discourse in the Hispanic world. The prestige of his critical passion had consolidated by the 1960s, coinciding with his poetic maturity and establishment in the Mexican diplomatic service, when the social modernization of Mexico was under way and a new generation of intellectuals started questioning the prevailing order and promoting revolution. 1968 was the year that Paz publicly distanced himself from the Mexican State, revealing a

generational, cultural, and ideological rift, anticipating the new role that the public intellectual would play. As the prestige of the Soviet Union grew in postwar Mexico, its wartime transactionalism was concealed and the purges were omitted from the historical record with a sanitizing effect. The horrors of the war were blamed on the barbarism of global capitalism and on democracy's inability to contain its contradictions.

During Paz's diplomatic career, first in Paris then in New Delhi, which coincided with the arrival of his maturity as a poet-critic, the afterlives of Marxist-Leninism thrived in the Mexican university classroom. Before the war, European democracies had been the target of leftists who took aim at "U.S. imperialism" after the war, adopting the anti-western attitude of the Cold War Soviet Union. If 1930s socialism had been the paradigm of national planning which offered an alternative to the exploitative system of capitalism, by the 1960s it represented an anti-bourgeois, individualist escape from the alienating consumerism of wealthy societies with the promise of greater equality. In the university, Marxists tried to free their theory of dogmas and immediate programs, so that their method might become a tool worthy of social analysis that could be deployed in what González Torres (2002) fittingly calls the *Cold War of ideas*.

Paz's poetry and criticism came to a head in 1967 with the publication of his critical essays on literature, history, and politics, *Corriente alterna*, just before his Frenchified anti-bourgeois work of poetry-as-criticism was set forth in *Blanco*. *Corriente*

alterna formally embodied the critical spirit of his poetic praxis in the metaphor of "alternating current" – electric current that can change direction – structurally demonstrating the independence of the heterodox intellectual who performs his disregard for convention and ideological purity with the self-referential conventions set forth by the Structuralist revolution. *Blanco*, in turn, is an example of culturalist poetry-as-criticism that employs "negative categories" (Culler 1989) which call attention to the gap between language and its objects by disrupting conventional processes of signification. As Rancière (2011) has said of Mallarmé, the difficulty of such cases lies not in the language used by the poet but in the objective that he sets for himself. So, on one hand, I approach the aesthetic text of *Blanco* with these post-structuralist and post-Marxist methodologies; however, I also avail myself of the tools of cultural sociology and attend to the fraught reception of Paz's arguably most ambitious poem in the cultural ecology of 1968 Mexico, where the polyphony of *Blanco* was inaudible in the Plaza de las Tres Culturas days before the Olympic Games, when the accumulation of democratic demands was met with the military repression of the Díaz Ordaz government.

For the decade following his very public resignation from the Mexican diplomatic service, Octavio Paz was lauded by the international community as an independent intellectual who made an ethical decision at a time when he could have

continued to benefit from the financial support of the State, as many of his contemporaries did. In this disavowal of the economy, instead of "selling out," he used the weight of his public persona to criticize the State and to support the student movement. Such a disavowal, as Bourdieu (1993) has shown, paradoxically produces an accumulation of symbolic capital which in the long term is converted to economic capital. Octavio Paz is a strikingly eloquent example of what Bourdieu seems to have had in mind. It is as though he were thinking of the Mexican when he developed this idea. After his resignation, Octavio Paz received generous invitations from one elite academic institution after the next, where he revised his theory of poetics to achieve greater coherence with his poetry-as-criticism, from University of Pittsburgh to University of Texas – Austin, and from Cambridge to Harvard, where he was awarded the prestigious position of Charles Eliot Norton Professor of Poetry for 1971–1972 and then professor of Comparative Literature in 1973–1980.

During the Norton Lectures at Harvard, Paz retooled his theory from *El arco y la lira* into a model based on analogy in *Los hijos del limo* [Children of the Mire] (1974). In these talks, he singularly omitted Romanticism from the Hispanic literary tradition and claimed that Surrealism was a 20th-century iteration of Romanticism, even though scholars of Romanticism understood *irony* – not *analogy* – to be the essential Romantic trope. In the parentage that he identified between Charles Fourier and Andre Breton,

and between French Surrealism and his own poetry, I ask why Paz surmised that Romanticism went underground with the triumph of Realism, only to reemerge as an occult secret that is transmitted through discipleship. Drawing on insights of Philip Silver (1997), we will see how the modernist mediation of Romanticism offers a counterproposal to Paz's emplotment and, crucially, allows us to interpret his genealogical affinity not merely as a historiographical perversion but as a rhetorical strategy animated by an oracular logic, which aimed to preserve a channel for the transmission of revolutionary knowledge.

1.5 Revelation Goes Underground

In chapter three, I turn to the visionary poetry of acclaimed Bolivian author Jaime Saenz and suggest that the absence of historical references, allusions, and quotations in nearly all his poetic works has invited transatlantic readers to view him as an independent literary outsider whose work exemplifies the autonomy of art. I show how Saenz himself promoted this tendency by denigrating the practice of criticism and call into question the supposed originality of Saenz's poetry to suggest that his profuse metabolization of Tellurist aesthetics has elevated his status as a literary pioneer. How can the intellectual history of Tellurism inform our understanding of the modern poet who rejected the social conventions of technological modernization and celebrated preindustrial society in praise of the spirit of the land?

The longstanding history of mineral extraction in Bolivia combined with Tellurism's German irrationalist inheritance set in motion the concept of "mineralization." Saenz "mineralized" the poet into a modern *curandero*, a medium who followed a discipline of submergence into the depths of the social substratum and into the morally obscure corners of the psyche. Prohibiting all forms of explanation, this discipline of the plunge gave rise to a crisis in representation, which, in Saenz as in Maurice Blanchot (1995), is theorized as an authorial death. In this logic of mediation, the poet's exaggerated love for an unbridled anti-order convinced him that instrumental reason would dominate even spiritual affairs if he did not proactively protect it. For as much of an outsider as Saenz may seem to be, in reality he belongs to a community of the literary oracular, since the work of the poet as an instrument of the divine is homologized with the work of the cultural custodian who mediates between the absolutism of reality and the subject of mass culture who is unaware that reality needs to be revealed.

The visionary poetry of Jaime Saenz grew out of the Tellurist discourse of the land. The theoretical framework of Tellurism, however, was animated by the irrationalism of Germany – an inheritance that can easily go unnoticed given the firmly nativist positions of intellectuals like Humberto Palza and before him Franz Tamayo. Juan Albarracín Millán has convincingly argued that while Franz Tamayo was in

Germany as a young man, he believed to have found a way to condemn the enslavement of Bolivia's indigenous majority. Tamayo's thinking was profoundly shaped by Nietzsche and Fichte who, each in his own way, were committed to exalting life with a philosophy capable of ridding itself of the exculpations of reason which ailed 19th-century Germany, a nation oppressed in the heart of Europe. The other influence came from Count Hermann Keyserling, who described "mineralization" as a devolution of the self into a primitive state of spiritless senility. Tellurists retooled this negative concept into the alienated subject's virtuous reintegration into a pre-reflective anti-order, and, following Tamayo's lead, they passed it off as a product of Bolivian national culture.

In poetry Saenz could not escape the discourse of Tellurism. After Tamayo had argued for the existence of Bolivia's *genius loci*, the task then became a matter of tapping into the source, identifying who was best suited for that mediation, and establishing a discipline for the practice. Saenz answered that call in the middle of the century with a proposal of his own: He renounced the materialism of capitalist culture and the spiritual indifference of an emergent consumer class, calling for the literary revival of religious fanaticism that entered the domain of the abject. Bringing to bear the sociological analysis of Albarracín to *Muerte por el tacto*, I dispel the claims of originality from the debate on Saenz and ground his cultural production in its historical context, foregrounding the afterlife of reactionary *Lebensphilosophie* in his later poetry.

This becomes increasingly evident in Saenz's long poem *Recorrer esta distancia*, where the lyric subject performs a radical separation, setting himself apart from others by vituperating the foolhardy optimist, the hard-working coward, the self-satisfied derelict, or the blinded polemicist. The lyric subject is repulsed – alas, for him the greatest abomination is that everyone else is not as repulsed as he. In this mature poem, the voyage tracing this separation manifests as a descent into the wells of memory but also into the veins of mountains, into the *entrañas* or innermost recesses of subjectivity. Like Dostoevsky's underground man, Saenz's lyric subject cannot resist the temptation of taboo, the destruction of convention, crime, even if (or precisely when) the punishment outweighs the benefit. Drawing on Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection (1982), I study this subject's search for redemption in failure, focusing on moments of transgression when he cannot resist the attraction to horror and risks everything, contrasting this with Paz's notion of sacred horror as the experience of being returned to an original state of insufficiency and contingency.

I suggest that Saenz's disenchantment with Andean modernity convinced him that the *tremenda* [primordial terrors] remained accessible to the subject who lived in repulsion from modernization, leading him to bestow upon the *officium* of the poet the responsibility of channeling terror into the heart of his readers. The ethos of this "poetic instigation" demanded the testimonial structure of an ecstatic voyage at a great velocity

into the heterogenous matter of an erotic anti-order. This endless voyage was taken under the sign of "júbilo," an expression of religious fanaticism evoked by an immanent end, which was motivated by a sensation that the world takes notice of the subject only just before the apocalypse. Drawing on the philosophy of myth (Blumenberg 1985), I ask how Saenz's poetics was equipped with the Romantic notion of "significance."

The repulsion that I identify in *Recorrer esta distancia* has its social correlate in the poet's activity as a cultural promotor in La Paz during the 1970s, when his visionary poetry and outlandish lifestyle earned him the admiration of the Bolivian youth and the attention of cultural brokers in the Hugo Banzer dictatorship. Saenz had become a countercultural icon. His poetry insulted so profoundly the bourgeois taste of Paceño *letrados* that it won their admiration. His decision not to become a poet-diplomat in the style of Ricardo Jaimes Freyre or Fernando Díez de Medina, appealed to middleclass, cosmopolitan university students and aspiring writers, whose self-published books he would authorize with the distinction of his prologues while at the same time producing evidence of teaching excellence, as it were. Saenz's practice of cultural promotion in the mid-1970s institutionalized poetic revelation under the auspice of the State. Drawing on Bourdieu (1993), I ask how Saenz's unyielding dedication to unofficial (underground) cultural production ultimately produced an official credit which has legitimated his permanent place in the Bolivian literary tradition.

Lastly, I address the topic that Saenz most often extolled in his autobiographical accounts of his literary workshops, namely, the 19th-century Austrian composer, Anton Bruckner. Informed by the historiography of cultural musicologists (Gilliam 1994; Korstvedt 1996), I suggest that Saenz's affinity for Brucker was an outcome of his military training and of an enduring nostalgia for the "moral clarity" he attained by politically radicalizing in Nazi Germany. When Jaime Saenz the military cadet arrived in Berlin during the Third Reich, the Regensburg Festival had just taken place. There, the figure of Anton Bruckner was enshrined in the Valhalla, and, in his keynote address Joseph Goebbels praised the composer as a humble genius aggrieved by bourgeois cosmopolitans (Jews) and as a secular prodigy who embodied the German *Volksgeist* (despite his Austrian nationality). So, I first ask how Bruckner's music and persona were leveraged in the propaganda campaign that aimed to establish a rationale for the Anschluss.

In this context, I highlight how Bruckner's music – especially the Eighth Symphony – has famously been the source of debate due to the composer's numerous revisions, unclear annotations, and the interventions of his students who inserted changes into scores unbeknown to their aging mentor. This work that seemed to exist "eternally in progress" attracted a poet like Jaime Saenz for whom poetry always was a discipline before it was an object. I suggest that Saenz's Bruckner derives from the

representations advanced by Max Auer and Joseph Goebbels during the Third Reich, but that, unlike Auer and Goebbels, for whom the myth of Bruckner urgently required an *explanation*, Saenz faced the same myth with deeply committed *acceptance*. Saenz does not explain Bruckner but performs him, well aware of Bruckner's centrality to Nazi-era ideology. In the late 1970s, Saenz the philo-Nazi was not a politically active fascist, but he seems to have known that his poetic Bruckner would give him the semblance of a Nazi and to have found the promise of this provocation irresistible insofar as it guaranteed the disgust of his readers. *Bruckner* would ensure that the author would be perceived as "tactless" – a permutation of an idea that first emerged in *Muerte por el tacto*. Bruckner was poetic proof of just how much prudence Saenz lacked.

The Bolivian's writings on Bruckner bring to light the fascist parentage of his project to restore to modern poetry oracular legitimacy, but this transmission of underground knowledge did not occur without significant adulterations. In the poems "Bruckner" and especially "En la abadía de San Florián" from *Tocnolencias*, Saenz reverses Goebbels's secularization of Bruckner and instead portrays the composer as a religious fanatic who enlists the help of Lucifer to praise the glory of God. Similarly, Saenz updates the Nazi-era depiction of Bruckner as the pious fool by recasting him as an abject creator, but like the Nazis, he suggests that Bruckner's music represents a mythical spirituality. I argue that Saenz saw in Bruckner the paradigm of poetic

revelation, in which artistic creation incited "el júbilo aniquilador" [destructive jubilee], that is, the ever deeper plunge into the realms of impurity and contamination. This framework offers a critical response to the parodic treatment of Saenz as a Bolañesque Latin American Nazi or CIA spook (Faverón) by leveraging the tools of intellectual history to trace the afterlives of Bruckner from German National Socialist propaganda to Saenz's late visionary poetry of Germanic nostalgia.

2. Consolation, Exile, Confession: The *razón mediadora* of María Zambrano

In the early 1940s, during a series of talks at social clubs in San Juan, Puerto Rico, Spanish philosopher María Zambrano asked herself if life in exile from Francoist Spain resembled the latter days of the Roman Empire during the reign of Caligula. She wondered how her historical moment compared to the age of Lucius Anneaus Seneca, who was born in Córdoba of Roman Hispania in 4 BC and lived during the century of Christ when Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy had seemingly *devolved* into uninspiring academicism. Desperate for new methodologies in a period of cultural decline, Greek thinkers in marginalized neighborhoods of the empire's social base were drawn to a new religion that spoke directly to the question of how to live the good life and found nourishment in Christian belief [*doxa*].

These thinkers were not the strident philosophers who filled the city streets in the age of Socrates but rather "mediators" who anticipated the contemplative practice of monastic life in years to come – *pensadores del pueblo*, proto-intellectuals. Reason still governed the morality of Stoics like Seneca, she claimed, but it was not pure reason. It was an imperfect "razón dulcificada" [sweetened reason] that predated the Greeks and more closely resembled a religion. If someone who lived under the threat of Roman power anguished more than one who lived before Socrates had shown that virtue could be taught, then what was one to do but blink and for the first time accept a belief?

Zambrano's conclusion that Greek philosophy proved incapable of accounting for the human terror of life in the Roman Empire, I want to suggest, is an ethical reading of Seneca. In this reading, the philosopher hermeneutically retools the Carlist model of "tradition" as *Dios, patria y rey* and recasts it as a transhistorical colloquium of "visionaries" who transmit underground forms of knowledge. In this *unity of voice*, the consolations of Seneca are adjacent to the confessions of Saint Augustine, and the plaintive cries of Saint John of the Cross to the diabolic jubilation of Comte de Lautréamont.

Zambrano's retooled concept of consolation coincided with the revolutionary fatigue that befell her in exile. How could she have banished from her thinking the devastation and humanitarian emergencies entailed by two European wars stretching from 1936 to 1945? That "national energy" (Fichte) which once had seemed like a veritable "eternal tradition" (Unamuno) now appeared dangerously volatile, prone to convert the more reflective assemblies of a democratically inclusive politics into easily combustible mobs. This degradation of the liberal-republican and moderate socialist ideals that Zambrano saw represented in Machado and her own father proved even more perilous in an era of mechanized warfare. Modernists like she who lost her revolutionary faith and retreated from politics after 1939, choosing not to become a militantly anti-Francoist intellectual, continued to feel nostalgia for an organic totality as she scrutinized the category of "people" in the discourse of charismatic leaders who

pronounced the coming vindications of aggrieved communities. In *El pensamiento vivo de Séneca*, Zambrano offers an ethical reading of the Cordobese which differs crucially from treatments of the Stoic by such literary dilettantes of national regeneration as Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo and Ángel Ganivet.[1] Her attraction to the consolation is reflective of an enduring exploration of paths less trodden in the history of ideas, which took her to such other "minor genres" as the confession, delirium, spiritual guide, brief treatise, and ecstatic vision.[2]

Zambrano considers Seneca primarily as a moralist since the problem she confronts is how to endure adversity rather than, say, how to devise the agency needed to reverse the adverse situation in which Spain finds itself under a dictatorial regime. Her seminal question is, *How will I ever make it through this day?* The weight of this question falls on "conduct," on how I am to behave and the means available to help me make it through this tribulation. Now, when I say "conduct" to help me "make it through," I wish to evoke the full etymology of "conduct," with its derivation from the Latin *conduct-* [brought together] from the verb *conducere*, referring to the "provision of safe passage"; from the Old French *conduit* with the sense of a "channel"; and from the

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[1] See Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo, *Los grandes polígrafos españoles* (Santander: Sociedad de Menéndez Pelayo, 1944) pp. 13–52.

[2] Regarding other minor genres, see Zambrano on the confession in "La confesión como género literario y como método," *Luminar* vol. 5, no. 3 (1941) pp. 292–323 and *Luminar* vol. 6, no. 1 (1943) pp. 20–51; the brief treatise in "Poema y sistema," *El Hijo Pródigo*, vol. 5, no. 18 (1944) pp. 137–39; the spiritual guide in "La perplejidad," *Revista de las Indias*, no. 56 (1943) pp. 151–76; and the ecstatic vision in "Delirio de Antígona," *Orígenes*, vol. 5, no. 18 (1948) pp. 14–21.

late Middle English sense of "management," which would denote self-management and behavior by the 16th century.

In *El pensamiento vivo de Séneca*, María Zambrano proclaimed the resilience of a pre-Socratic Logos (Logos as Nature) and insisted on Greek philosophy's incapacity to realize its ideals. Her retooled Seneca espouses a code of conduct that serves as consolation for the oppressive life produced by the violence which western logic inflicts in its fraught attempt to seize forms in their abstract ideality. This code fuses the analogies of the custodian, the channel, and the manager into a discipline of the literary oracular, guided by "una razón mediadora" [a logic of mediation]. What did Zambrano stand to gain by setting forth in this discipline a "medida" [measure] that was absent in philosophy's absolutism? And how are we to assess this therapeutic "medio" [medium] that liaises between the poles of hope and despair, counteracting the vulnerability of life in an autocracy, be it *The Republic* of Plato, the Rome of Caligula, or the Spain of Franco?

The reinvention of Greco-Roman antiquity pervades European literary modernism.[3] In Spain, it was strongly inflected by public debate over Spanish national identity, which had occurred after the Franco-Prussian War (1870–1871) and Spain's loss

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[3] Let us recall, for example, that Ezra Pound's first *Canto* (1915) was a translation of the opening scene of *The Odyssey*, and his inspired translations of Sextus Propertius (1919); T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) begins with a quote from *The Satyricon* of Petronius; Joyce's *Ulysses* is built on the structure of *The Odyssey*; and Yeats adapted *King Oedipus* (1926) and *Oedipus at Colonus* (1927) of Sophocles. See Ezra Pound, *The Cantos of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions, 1970) pp. 3–5 and "Homage to Sextus Propertius" in *Personae: The Collected Poems of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions, 1926) pp. 205–30; T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land* (New York: Harccourt, Brace & Company, 1971) p. 133; James Joyce, *Ulysses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997); see W. B. Yeats, *Sophocles' King Oedipus: A Version for the Modern Stage* (New York: Macmillan, 1928).

of its last ultramarine colonies in the so-called disaster of 1898.[4] Zambrano adds an unmistakable political dimension to her recovery of pre-Christian Cordoba's substantial, if imperfect, philosopher whom history seemed to have forgotten. Although historically distant and misunderstood, Seneca felt "familiar" to her and to all Spaniards, she claimed, evoking the *Idearium español* (1897) of Ángel Ganivet, who had famously argued that Seneca was Spanish in essence and that Spanishness was essentially Stoic. Ganivet's "senequismo" initially was the product of a fin-de-siècle debate with Miguel de Unamuno, but the concept enjoyed an enduring afterlife into the mid-20th century.

Zambrano's contribution to that debate was an "obscured Seneca," which demands a figural reading of the representation of consolation. However, in addition to looking at the self-referential language of this "literary" writing, I recognize and take seriously the call on criticism to seek correlations between aesthetic regimes and political regimes, which J. Hillis Miller (1991) acknowledged in his discussion on the "ethics of reading" and which Jacques Rancière (2004) has theoretically modeled as a "distribution of the sensible." So, let us examine how Zambrano's *razón mediadora* emerged rhetorically out of the discourse of national regeneration in post-Napoleonic Europe, when nationalists appropriated Greco-Roman antiquity to legitimate administrative regimes following the regional reconfiguration. Using this tool of post-structural

[4] A similar disillusion to that which was elicited by Spain's territorial loss is evident in the territorial concessions that Bolivia made to Chile following the War of the Pacific.

analysis, I examine rhetorical strategies of poetic revelation and contextualize its logic of mediation in the first half of the 20th-century, before asking if such a thing as a truly Spanish philosophy exists and, if it does, what role Seneca may play in it.

2.1 The Afterlives of Seneca in Spanish National Culture

The identification of a "common history and a common essence" (Baldwin) was the legitimating factor of the Spanish nation-state at the end of the 19th century, even if a few dissenting voices (those who had read and understood Renan's 1882 "Qu'est-ce qu' une nation?") insisted that the commonality of language, history and character across a well-defined geography and landscape did not suffice to make a community stand as a single nation. By way of an example, another Cordobese – the diplomat, congressman, and polymath Juan Valera – had been complaining since the later 19th century that Spaniards lacked a common project to undertake and carry to completion in the future, and that an ill-advised, generalized nostalgia for the recently lost empire had only aggravated the intolerance of the reactionary sectors of the Church and the aggressiveness of the military, whose leaders were exceptionally prone to enact coups for lack of a larger colonial enterprise.

Be that as it may, Greco-Roman antiquity appeared in European literary modernism through imitation or confrontation, and in Spain it took the form of an historical parentage. Roman culture offered not only the prestige of national greatness, but especially the historical bloodline needed to legitimate the identity of the new

nation-state. Ángel Ganivet's *Idearium español* is an exemplar of this phenomenon and stood as a significant signpost in María Zambrano's *razón mediadora*. Ganivet's theory came in response to Unamuno's *En torno al casticismo* (1895) and it spilled over the pages of those books into the public forum of *El Defensor de Granada*, the newspaper in which they debated the question of national identity in a string of open letters during the summer of 1898.[5]

Rather than practicing conventional historiography, Ganivet (as much as Unamuno) was convinced that national identity was to be attained, not from historical facts, but from a continuum that ran through history and that was observable in the spirit of the people; not in the "ruído de la historia" [noise of history] (245) as Juan Cruz has observed, but in the *Volksgeist*. At the beginning of *Idearium español*, Ganivet demonstrates this approach to history: "Séneca no es un español, hijo de España por azar, es español por esencia; y no andaluz, porque cuando nació aun no habían venido á España los vándalos; que á nacer más tarde en la Edad Media quizás no naciera en Andalucía sino en Castilla" [Seneca is not a Spaniard, a son of Spain by chance. He is Spanish in essence; and not an Andalusian, because when he was born, the vandals had yet to reach Spain; had he been born in the Middle Ages, he may well not have been born in Andalucía but rather in Castile] (6). The obvious anachronism deserves our

[5] For the compilation of these letters, see Ángel Ganivet and Miguel de Unamuno, *El porvenir de España* (Granada: Diputación de Granada, 1998).

pause. As Baldwin observes, Seneca was born in the year 4 BC and was distinguished in the social sphere of Cordoba in the Roman province of Hispania, but that was fifteen centuries before nation-states came into existence, so to suggest that he was the 'son of Spain' at the very least is adventurous. This essential "senequismo," which channels the spirit of Spain, convinced Ganivet that Seneca would have been born in Castile rather than Andalucía, if he had lived during the Middle Ages, since central to Seneca's *representativeness* for Spaniards is that his philosophy was articulated from the very heart of political, religious, and military life in a conflicted empire.

Ganivet's Seneca urged fin-de-siècle cultural brokers not to feel defeated by anything foreign to their spirit and to recognize within themselves a "fuerza madre" [mother force] that was indestructible even though it often remained hidden amid the accidents of life. With this guiding force, the prosperous events of life as well as the adverse were to be met with the righteous resolution of a heroic patrician. The essence of this guiding force could be identified in different extraordinary men of the Iberian Peninsula. Since Ganivet believed that the brilliance of Seneca's suicide was in his preference for the tranquil mode of bloodletting, he could claim that the Stoic's impact on modern life was on par with that of Hippocrates or Galen, and that Spain outperforms all nations combined "por el número y excelencia de sus sangradores" [in the number and excellence of its blood-letters] (7).

This conception of history as a continuum established a link between the doctrine of Seneca and the dogma of Christianity, since they both mark the end of an historical phase; however, they seem to move in opposite directions, like two people walking toward each other on a path. These two moral codes crossed each other at the end of the Greco-Roman philosophical evolutionary phase of history when every solution to the ethical problems of life had proven to be ineffective. After the failures of primitive pre-Socratic empiricism (and its much-attenuated Aristotelian version), Platonic idealism, and syncretism, the Stoics championed virtue but despised the power of its defective logic, choosing to close their eyes and redeploy their consciousness inwards to accept for the first time a belief that was known through revelation rather than reason.

Since the propagation of Christianity coincided with the destruction of pagan religion by philosophy and with the destruction of philosophy by the philosophers who were most invested in instrumental reason, Ganivet argued that *belief* was the only remaining option Spain had in either salvaging or re-shaping an autochthonous national culture with Seneca at its center and endowed with intellectual and moral authority. He argued that people who are skeptical of Christianity's countless martyrs need to recognize that the death of Christ was nothing short of the religion's prophetic erudition, and that the later martyrdoms constituted the equivalent of a public relations campaign. "Sin su sacrificio, Jésus hubiera sido un moralista más; y sin el sacrificio de

los mártires, el cristianismo hubiera sido una moral más" [Without his sacrifice, Jesus would have been just another moralist; and without the sacrifice of the martyrs, Christianity would have been just another moral] (10). In Ganivet's *reductio ad absurdum*, self-sacrifice is elevated to the status of a national virtue of asceticism. In political rhetoric, this takes the form of austerity. The dangers inherent in this idea of triumph in defeat became more evident in the 1930s, when *senequismo* was popularized and politicized. The Stoic virtue of self-sacrifice was appropriated ideologically by cultural producers and propagandists across a broad sector of the political field, during a period of "sacrificial history" concerning what has been called *la generación del toro* [the generation of the bull].[6]

While for Ganivet, the morality of Seneca's *Consolations* was reimagined as a continuity visible in Christian dogma, for Republicans the betrayal in Seneca's *Medea* was seen as a critical allegory aimed at the radical Right. Perhaps, nowhere was this as evident as in the 1933 production of *Medea* in the Roman Theater of Mérida, based on Unamuno's translation of the play, starring Margarita Xirgú and directed by Cipriano de Rivas Cherif (brother-in-law of Manuel Azaña – the only president that Spain's Second

[6] On the rise of Spanish Nationalism and its evolution, see José Álvarez Junco, *Spanish Identity in the Age of Nations* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011); Antonio Morales Moya *et al.*, *Historia de la nación y del nacionalismo español* (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2013); Antonio Duplá Ansuátegui, "Notas sobre fascismo y mundo antiguo en España," *II Congreso peninsular de História Antiga* (1990) pp. 337–352; and Manuel Álvarez Martí-Aguilar and Fernando Wulff Alonso, *Antigüedad y franquismo (1936–1975)* (Málaga: Centro de Ediciones de la Diputación de Málaga, 2003).

Republic knew in 1936–1939 and about whom Zambrano wrote admiringly).[7] The seemingly boundless acclaim that Unamuno's *Medea* received amid the fanfare of Republican cultural life, attended by prominent members of the Azaña government, as we learn from newspaper reviews, suggests the powerful impact that Seneca had on progressive cultural circles of the Left.[8]

This period of popularization and politicization of Seneca was equally resonant among reactionaries. For them, Stoic self-abnegation tactically produced consent for the autocratic domination of the State. It did not take long for campaigns of bad actors to transform *senequismo* into an instrument of violence. The ideological vulnerability of Ganivet's notion of a national essence is one of the lessons of caution that modernist literature can teach. Even today, the Stoic concept of self-abnegation serves neoliberal entrepreneurs who promote Stoicism to business administrators as a management strategy capable of increasing productivity through the reproduction of happiness.[9] The inherent contradiction of resignation was already perceptible in the 1930s, when Ramiro de Maeztu refashioned Ganivet's theory to facilitate and accelerate the introduction of

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[7] For Unamuno's translation of Seneca's *Medea*, see *Teatro completo* (Madrid: Aguilar, 1959) pp. 195–231. For the historical context and reception, see Bernardo Antonio González, "Nationalizing Medea: Rivas, Xirgu and Unamuno in Merida, June 1933." *Hecho Teatral*, vol. 11 (2011) pp. 147–66.

[8] See Alardo Prats, "Medea, arrebatada en carro de aladas serpientes, consumará su fatal destino en el teatro romano de Mérida," *El Sol* (13 April 1933); Juan Chabás, "La próxima representación de Medea, en Mérida," *Luz* (13 June 1933); and Matilde Muñoz, "Una fecha en el teatro: después del estreno de *Medea*," *Crónica* (2 July 1933).

[9] For neoliberal appropriations of Senequist thought, see Oliver Burkeman, *The Antidote: Happiness for People Who Can't Stand Positive Thinking* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2013); Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *Antifragile: Things that Gain from Disorder* (New York: Random House, 2012); and Ryan Holiday, *Stillness is the Key* (New York: Penguin, 2019).

fascism into Spain.[10] In *Defensa de la hispanidad* (1934), Maeztu reminded his readers that the Spanish essence was to be found in the practice of resignation:

> [C]uando cae sobre los españoles un suceso adverso, como perder una guerra, por ejemplo, no adoptamos actitudes exageradas, como la de suponer que la justiciar del Universo se ha violado, porque la suerte de las batallas nos haya sido contraria o que toda la civilización se encuentra en decadencia, porque se hayan frustrado nuestros planes, sino que nos conducimos de tal modo que 'siempre se puede decir de nosotros que somos hombres', porque si nos abate la desgracia, ni perdemos nunca, como pueblo, el sentido de nuestro valor relativo en la totalidad de los pueblos del mundo. (43)
>
> When an adverse event befalls the Spanish, such as losing a war, we do not adopt exaggerated attitudes, like supposing that the justice of the Universe has been violated because the luck of the battle has gone against us, or that all of civilization is in decline because our plans have been frustrated, but rather we conduct ourselves in such a way that 'it always can be said of us that we are men,' because if we fall into disgrace, we never lose, as a people, the meaning of our relative value among all the peoples of the world.

This 'relative value' is perceptible in the moral conduct of philosophical aesceticism. What distinguished Spaniards from the rest of Europe was their triumph in defeat, their resignation. The rhetoric of *senequismo* pervades little revues and more inclusive middlebrow magazines of the Hispanic transatlantic during the first half of the 20th century, when an afterlife of this idea was directed toward and consumed by a popular readership. In the Spanish state propaganda instrument *Y: Revista para la mujer*, the Granada-born writer Melchor Fernández Almagro, who would soon become *ABC*'s main literary critic in the post-Civil War period, did not find it difficult in 1939 to identify the ideal spirit of a leader in a lineage from Seneca to Ganivet, even if that line

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[10] For an analysis of Maeztu's political philosophy, see José Luis Villacañas Berlanga, *Ramiro de Maeztu y el ideal de la burguesía en España* (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 2000).

was full of twists and turns, because it righted and reverberated in José Antonio Primo de Rivera.[11]

In addition to the broad ideological range in which the idea of *senequismo* has lived its afterlives, I want to suggest that the politicization and popularization of *senequismo* was not a strictly peninsular affair. In the vernacular print culture of 1940s Buenos Aires as well, the figure of Seneca had become a critical commonplace in the political rhetoric of austerity and the determination of a moral conduct that was based on the principle of self-abnegation. In this way, whereas Ganivet's idea of *senequismo* was conceived as a Spanish nationalist project, it now served the broader goal of producing obedience by promoting a code of conduct, a discipline that fused Christian morality with the philosophical doctrine of resignation. That Seneca's twentieth-century appearance also occurred on the pages of *Caras y Caretas* in Buenos Aires says something significant about its place in popular culture.[12] There, Ganivet connects the ascetic practitioner to the mystic in a tradition where Christ appears but not as the first link in the chain; instead, he appears amid the continuum of history:

> Un pueblo que concentra todo su entusiasmo en el pan y el agua, debe de ser un pueblo de ayunantes, de ascetas, de místicos. Y así es, en efecto: lo mistico es lo español, y los granadinos somos los más místicos de todos los españoles, por

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[11] See Melchor Fernández Almagro, "Fondo andaluz de José Antonio," *Y: Revista para la Mujer* (November 1, 1939) p 15. My thanks to C. J. Enloe for bringing this article to my attention.
[12] See also "Celebridades que fueron enjauladadas," *Caras y Caretas*, no. 2,032 (1937) p. 29; "Celebridades que fueron enjauladadas," *Caras y Caretas,* no. 2,034 (1937) p. 33; and José María Salaverría, "En la muerte del general Mola," *Caras y Carretas,* no. 2,021 (1937) pp. 50–3 and 121 esp. 52.

> nuestro abolengo cristiano y más aún por nuestro abolego arábigo. España fue cristiana quizás antes de Cristo, como lo atestigua nuestro gran Séneca.
>
> A people who concentrates its enthusiasm solely on bread and water must constitute a people of fasters, ascetics, mystics. So it is, in effect: Mysticism is Spanishness, and the Grenadines are the most mystical of all Spaniards, due to our Christian pedigree and even more because of our Arabic pedigree. Spain very well may have been Christian before Christ, as our grand Seneca bears witness.[13]

The Senequist mediation of moral conduct had already been appropriated by the far right in Spain and Argentina when Zambrano produced her work on the Stoic and published it in Buenos Aires.[14] Her intervention in the *senequismo* debate invites us to ask whether her progressive idealism led her to naïvely enable ideological appropriation from the radical Right, or if her intervention sought to counteract the ideological threat of appropriation by redefining the tradition and preventing it from being weaponized.

2.1.1 The Oracular Logic of Mediation

It falls to criticism to examine the tropes that structure the genre of consolation. The centrality of this tropological approach – conceived paradoxically as its *triviality* – has been advocated by such theorists as J. Hillis Miller (1987), who showed how deconstruction held the promise of renewing the study of figures of speech. Miller suggests that, in its capacity to rearrange the way that literature is taught, deconstruction may be considered "trivial" in the etymological sense of *trivium*, referring to the three branches of a liberal arts education in medieval times, which lead

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[13] See Ángel Ganivet, "De 'Granada la bella,'" *Caras y Caretas*, no. 2,110 (1939) p. 41.
[14] See Melchor Fernández Almagro, "Hombres ilustres que he conocidos: Ángel Ganivet, el granadino," *Caras y Caretas*, no. 2,026 (1937) pp. 2–5.

from grammar to logic and then to rhetoric. After these preliminary studies, students then advanced to the *quadrivium*, upper-level education comprising studies in arithmetic, astronomy, and music.

> Things were somewhat simpler then, but the *trivium* remains basic in a liberal arts education today. Deconstruction, as a renewal of rhetoric in the sense of a study of the role in language of figures of speech, has challenged the claims of both grammar and logic to be able to encompass, contain, and give the law to the tropological dimension of language. (335)

It is, therefore, worth asking how figural language acquires the laws that come to govern it by examining tropes which erect and destabilize its structure, that is, which cause it to undergo transformations. Such a trope worthy of our consideration is that of the consolation offered by the people's philosopher. The theoretical project of Spanish Stoicism had been a concern of María Zambrano as early as 1940, when she identified in the *coplas* of Jorge Manrique "un pensador del pueblo,"[15] the prototypical manifestation of the socially engaged intellectual. In Manrique as in Seneca, Zambrano found a thinker who had abandoned the refuge of pure contemplation without entirely losing his critical distance from political action. This thinker no longer attempted to achieve a harmonious philosophical system, but instead *spoke* in his writing with an orality that aimed to assuage the subject who was prohibited from realizing a totality and who strove to survive as a fragment. Zambrano's most comprehensive statement on *senequismo* is

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[15] See María Zambrano, "Estoicismo culto español: Jorge Manrique," *Revista de la asociación de mujeres graduadas*, no. 4 (1940) p. 19. Also relevant to her early theorization of tradition is "El español y su tradición," *Hora de España*, vol. 1, no. 4 (1937) pp. 23–7.

found in *El pensamiento vivo de Séneca* (1944), which she published with Losada in Buenos Aires while she was living in Havana. This was the only first edition she ever published in Argentina.[16] While on one hand it represents her interest in resemanticizing the concept of tradition, her work on Seneca is also reflective of the literary market's demands insofar as the guiding framework of Losada's "pensamiento vivo" imprint required her to present an historical figure's enduring relevance to contemporary thought. As happened so often in her career, the promise of a break-out moment did not pan out, and the first edition enjoyed no significant reception in comparison to other books published contemporaneously.[17] This was the unfortunate literary fate shared by many exiled and self-banished authors whose writing lost its potential audience in Spain without finding a replacement readership abroad. Women seemed to suffer this loss of audience more acutely, as shown by the careers of the two other well-known prose writers of her generation – María Teresa León and Rosa Chacel – with whom Zambrano stayed in touch intermittently through the challenging exile years.[18]

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[16] The invitation to introduce Seneca to Losada's imprint *El pensamiento vivo* was probably aided by Rafael Dieste and Guillermo del Torre who had exiled to Buenos Aires. It was a major professional opportunity for a relatively unknown woman philosopher in a field dominated by men to receive a commission from a major publisher far afield from La Casa de España en México, which had been her primary funding source since 1939.

[17] An editorial flop, it was not republished until 1965 and remained ignored by criticism until the 1980s.

[18] I am thinking of María Teresa León's *Memoria de la melancolía* (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1970) and Rosa Chacel's *La sinrazón* (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1960), both very ambitious narrative works originally published in Buenos Aires and all but ignored by Spanish American critics and readers for different reasons. Although Chacel's longest novel showed a surprising appreciation for Franco's victory in the Civil War, and its sales in Spain could have benefitted from her sojourn in the homeland in 1961, it hardly interested anyone. It would go through several modest reissues since the late 1960s without selling the small run of publication

Zambrano retooled Ganivet's *senequismo* into the mediation between the Logos of pre-Socratic antiquity and the humble person in need who strove to find a way to survive the repressive regime of a philosophy whose legitimacy had become defenseless. Her writing on Seneca, it turns out, is more representative of her own thinking than it is of the Stoic philosopher's. She suggests that Greek *logos* became indefensible after Plato had failed to realize his Republic of Justice and Reason; that Christianity recovered the concept of *agape* which had been relegated to the margins of life by the Roman Empire's exertion of power; and that consolation in life under the demands of empire was attainable through Stoic *resignation*. This political reading of Stoicism is one of her contributions to the 20th-century debate on national cultures. Zambrano's Seneca *resigns to hope*, but he does not resign all the way, nor is he overtly optimistic; he reposes, in the middle, avoiding absolute hope and hopelessness, yearning for the pre-Socratic faith in Nature as "the measure" of something. Between that ancient *logos* of ancient philosophy and "la vida humilde y menesterosa" [the humble life of need] (186), Zambrano's notion of consolation receives its oracular logic of mediation:

> Si Séneca nos atrae es porque pertenece a una rara especie de hombres, a esos que no han sido enteramente una cosa sino para ser otra, a esos de naturaleza mediadora que a manera de un puente se tiende entre nuestra debilidad y algo lejano a ella, algo invulnerable de lo que se siente necesitada. No es Séneca un pensador de los que piensan para conocer, embalado en una investigación

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or attracting any admiring remarks by serious historians of the novel despite philosopher Julián Marías's ardent campaigning.

> dialéctica, ni tampoco lo vemos lanzado en la vida, sumergido en sus negocios y afanes y ajeno al pensamiento. Es propiamente un mediador; un mediador, por lo pronto, entre la vida y el pensamiento, entre ese alto *logos*, establecido por la filosofía griega como principio de todas las cosas, y la vida humilde y menesterosa. (*El pensamiento*, 186)
>
> If Seneca attracts us, it is because he belongs to a rare species of men, who have been something only to become something else, men of a mediating nature who, like a bridge, stretch out between our weakness and something far from it, something invulnerable that is felt as a necessity. Seneca is not one of those thinkers who think in order to know, involved in a dialectical investigation, nor do we see him throwing himself at life, submerged in business and desires, far from thought. Properly speaking, he is a mediator; a mediator, that is, between life and thought, between that lofty *logos*, established by Greek philosophy as the principle of all things, and the humble, necessitous life.

Zambrano wondered if her historical present resembled the age of Seneca, who lived during the century of Christ when Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy had declined into uninspiring scholasticism. She argued that Platonic-Aristotelian philosophy reached the hearts[19] of men only after it had been nourished by Christian belief which emerged on the margins of the Roman Empire. Mediators like Seneca were not the strident philosophers who inhabited the city in the age of Socrates, but forerunners of those individuals who would lead a monastic life in years to come, dedicated to contemplative life. What Greek culture had revealed of humankind (and even of Nature insofar as it was subjected to a measure) contradicted the reality of a life lived under the duress of an Emperor like Caligula. The Greek *psyche* suffered the harshest servitude under this regime, entirely on its own, "desválida en medio de la

[19] For a more detailed account of the metaphor of the "heart" in the history of ideas, see her contemporaneous article "La metáfora del corazón," *Orígenes*, vol. 1, no. 3 (1944) pp. 3–10.

pompa inhumana de este poderío sin medida" [defenseless amid the inhumane pomp of unfettered power] (191). Trapped in the philosophical impasse where the concepts which once ordered the cosmos were divorced from the experience of reality, these mediators "tuvieron que acudir a la razón cierta medida, a la razón restringida, como mediación y como consuelo" [had to place a certain measure on logic, a restrained logic, as a mediation and as a consolation] (192).

The reward of philosophical resignation was consolation in a life of need. Zambrano used the figure of "la vuelta" to evoke the regressive movement of a withdrawal from something that had been abandoned for hope. The appearance of consolation was another symptom of historical crisis. Like Ortega, she believed that when resignation seemed like the best option for a majority who called upon an elite minority, an historical crisis was already under way (193).[20] Seneca was the evidence of the decline of Rome; senequismo was the evidence of the decline of the Spanish Monarchy. For Zambrano, Seneca was the exemplary intellectual who, facing the unchecked power of Roman Law, returned to the old faith that saw Nature as a measure [*medida*], to arm a defense against the violence of philosophy's absolutism. Yet, she points out that the code of conduct reflected the consolation that hope sought to attain:

> Séneca es uno de los sabios mediadores que, abandonando el recinto de la pura sabiduría, tiende hacia el hombre, hacia el hombre de la calle, de toda clase y

[20] Ortega's formulation of "mass man" appears in *La rebelión de las masas* (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Cultura, 1937) pp. 37–54. For Zambrano's perspective on it, see *Persona y democracia* (Madrid: Alianza, 2017) pp. 199–213.

> condición, una mirada misericordiosa; y se dispone a darle, no ya lo que sabe, sino lo que él necesita. Y está casi dispuesto a hacer traición comprometido en esta mediación. (*El pensamiento*, 196)
>
> Seneca is one of the wise mediators who, abandoning the sphere of pure knowledge, directs a merciful gaze at man, the man of the streets, in every class and condition, taking it upon himself to impart not what he knows but what he needs. His engagement in this mediation verges on betrayal.

By now Zambrano's Seneca stands in clear contrast to the figure fashioned by Ganivet and appropriated by Maeztu. Her treatment of the Stoic is a product very much her own, which endeavors to counteract the ideological weaponization of *senequismo*. In popular culture of Spain, she suggests, to be a Seneca was to be the kind of intellectual who is skilled at persuading others to follow their own intellectual pursuits, in which they too could find the strength to endure adversity if only they tried. Since persuasion took the therapeutic form of consolation, as a mediator Seneca needs us to need him, which showed that the Greek concept of *agape* had grown into the Christian *caritas*. For Zambrano, the *logos* of Seneca was not the principle of the world, but the law of Nature conceived as invariable and inflexible – a law that the Stoic would relativize as far as he could. This process of relativization she felicitously calls "la dulcificación de la razón" [the sweetening of logic] (214). A prototype of the modern intellectual, Seneca no longer relied on the ideality of forms. He was drawn not to the *power* of reason but to the *harmony* of reason. He valued words not for their meaning but for the music they make when they are spoken. Zambrano's distinction theoretically aligned the Stoic with Jorge Manrique, since they both were "pensadores del pueblo," aristocratic intellectuals who

sought new *ways of thinking*, without losing sight of experience or the humble life in need and – in Manrique's case – elevating the unadorned register of vernacular Castilian to the status of national language. This turn from systematic philosophy to ways of thinking had occurred over the previous ten years and is evident in Zambrano's participation in the volunteer service-learning program Misiones Pedagógicas, which put her in direct contact with Spain's social substratum. So, let us address these country paths which she actually took before analyzing the metaphorical value of "el camino" and "el cauce" in her writing.

2.2 The Paths of Misiones Pedagógicas

In the way that many students today partake in a semester of non-evaluative, socially engaged, experiential learning, María Zambrano the philosophy graduate student joined a pedagogical mission. In Spain, Misiones Pedagógicas was a program created for university students to engage in community-based learning, embodying the democratic education models designed by John Dewey and Francisco Giner de los Ríos, where pedagogical *missionaries* volunteered in a community-outreach program that promoted leisure [*ocio*], sociability, and self-reflection.[21] Going *on the road* with Misiones Pedagógicas was the more rustic study-away option offered to graduate students at

[21] The immersive element of the pedagogy, in turn, anticipated the social justice learning that Paolo Freyre would develop later in the century.

Universidad Central of Madrid, in comparison to boarding a Mediterranean cruise.[22] Zambrano's experiential learning in Misiones Pedagógicas was consistent with her understanding of "el camino" [the path] as the sign of her generation and with the idea, which she shared with Martin Heidegger (2010), that truth cannot be attained systematically but only through a *way of thinking* – a process of discovery that unfolds in the real time of dialogue like a traveler walking down a country path.

The ideology of this outreach program is evident in the apostolic language of its public messaging. This was a highly idiosyncratic humanities festival which radically proclaimed that liberalism's ineffectiveness had become an historical emergency. The metaphor of "missions" allowed Manuel B. Cossío to promote the "contact" that early modern religious missions had made with autochthonous communities of the Americas as the historical precedent for the existence of Misiones Pedagógicas – the current extraordinary response to the problem of subalternization within Spain's own borders. Cossío invited the intellectual youth to participate in cultural redemption, and redemption required sacrifice. Missionaries were often aspiring humanists who participated, not to add another bullet to their curriculum vitae, but to achieve self-improvement through experiential learning. Missionaries were prohibited from professionalizing although the outbreak of war in July 1936 prolonged indefinitely the

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[22] See "Por tierras de España," *Residencia: Revista de la Residencia de Estudiantes*, vol. 4, nos. 4–5 (1933) pp. 151–160 and vol. 4, no. 6 (1933) pp. 207–216.

contracts of the few missionaries with a paid appointment (for example, the poet Luis Cernuda), who went on to perform propagandistic duties on behalf of the threatened Republic while still on the payroll of Misiones. Be that as it may, career advancement was too utilitarian for the intellectual aspirations of the program. In the same pedagogical spirit of sacrifice, all missionaries were adjuncts, without the possibility of tenure.

If the following personal account of the 1932 mission to Navas de Madroño (Cáceres)[23] in the *Memorias* of the *Patronato de Misiones Pedagógicas* may be attributed to María Zambrano[24] as I suspect, then what we have are the impressions of the rural substratum of Spain enunciated from the locus of a 28-year-old graduate student in philosophy who grew up in a family of public-school teachers and administrators in Málaga, Segovia, and eventually Madrid. During Misiones Pedagógicas, Zambrano claimed to perceive the "virginity" of rural people; virgins because they were facing many things for the first time. They were like children, she thought paternalistically, waking from a dream that had lasted for centuries. Their constantly unprecedented

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[23] The Mission to Navas de Madroño (Cáceres) was held from March 27 to April 1, 1932. It was formed by María Zambrano, then an adjunct professor at Universidad Central; Elena Felipe of the Instituto-Escuela; Juvenal de Vega, the superintendent of Cáceres; the attorney Abraham Vázquez; and Antonio Sánchez Barbudo, then still a student. The mission visited Navas de Madroño, Garrovillas, Salorino, Herreruela, and Piedras Albas. See *Patronato de Misiones Pedagógicas: setiembre 1931–diciembre 1933* (Madrid: S. Aguirre, 1934) p. 17.

[24] The section "¿Qué dicen los misioneros?" of the *Patronato* (1934) does not specify who supplied the report from a given mission. Since we know from testimonials that Cossío preferred that his service-learners reflect on their experiences in one-on-one meetings with him rather than a written text, we may speculate that the personal accounts recorded here are Cossío's transcriptions of the oral reports that service-learners such as Zambrano provided him.

experience of things stirred in them an immense eagerness to know more about their place in the world. Their ignorance, she suggested, stemmed from a series of suppositions that were developed over the centuries they had slumbered through intellectually:

> Es de notar el género de ignorancia en que se hallan estos pueblos. Es una ignorancia distinta de la que un observador ingenuo pudiera creer. No se trata de ignorancia de verdades particulares, de falta de noticias, de estar enterados al día de acontecimientos más o menos recientes; es algo distinto. Lo que ellos ignoran es toda esa series de supuestos de nuestra cultura, los cimientos que sustentan y hacen posible nuestro saber. Por eso la primera y más angustiosa impresión que de ellos se recibe es que falta el terreno común para entenderse; que no hay, intelectualmente, convicciones comunes de donde partir. (*Patronato* 1934, 37)

> The type of ignorance that besets these people is worth noting. This ignorance is different from what a naive observer may believe to grasp. We are not dealing with ignorance of particular truths, a lack of news, being up to date with the more or less recent events of the day; it's something different. What they don't know is a series of suppositions from our culture, the building blocks that sustain our knowledge and make it possible. That's why the first and most anguishing impression that one gets from them is the lack of common ground on which we might understand each other; for intellectually there are no shared convictions to begin with.

This description of the ignorance of the people from Navas de Madroño who were engaged as active learners by the Misiones Pedagógicas volunteers is a useful way to observe the cultural tensions in effect at the time. Frequent mentions of the challenges these missions faced suggest that they were not always welcome and, sometimes, were firmly opposed.[25] On the other hand, adversity was a requisite for the missionary's transformational self-sacrifice. She suggests that the combination of ignorance and

[25] For difficulties faced by Misiones Pedagógicas, see *Patronato* (1934) pp. 33, 37, 46, and 53.

passion prohibited certain pedagogical materials, such a documentary film about Granada intended to facilitate a conversation about the discovery of the Americas and the unity of Spain. Participants in the mission protested the showing in their uncompromising position against any Catholic King. Missionaries also were prohibited from reciting a ballad of the Virgin Mary and from playing a record of Gregorian chants.

These challenges of service-learning on the road disappeared in Zambrano's later testimonial of her participation in Misiones Pedagógicas. Writing years later about the experience, she revised the account of her mission to Navas de Madroño, portraying the missionary as the mediator between the unlettered social base and the goods of cosmopolitan culture. Although missionaries faced obstacles, resistance, and distrust, she reports, their calling to a secular apostleship of politically Left idealism produced in them the need to raise the book as though it were sacred, before donating it to a public library:[26]

> A mí me cupo en suerte hablar a aquella multitud desde el balcón. He hablado desde muchos balcones. Entonces temblada de arriba a abajo. Era joven estudiante todavía, pues he sido estudiante toda mi vida. Entonces tenía muy poca voz; era pequeña, delgada, la voz. Se hizo un silencio cuando hablé que ni una palabra se perdió. Así comenzaron las sesiones. Al finalizar, entregamos la biblioteca. Más que entregarla, la expusimos, la dimos, la repartimos. No se atrevían a mirarlos, eran libros de historia, de poesía, de literatura. Eran también libros de derecho elemental para formar ciudadanos. Gente que sentíamos la patria como una poesía, como una inspiración, como el don del cielo. Gente que

[26] For more on the libraries of Misiones Pedagógicas, see Ana Martínez Rus, "María Moliner y las bibliotecas públicas: un compromiso con la democracia republicana y la diffusion de la cultura," *Métodos de Información*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2010) 5–24; Ramón Salaberría, "Las bibliotecas populares en la correspondencia de Juan Vicéns a Lulu Jourdain y Hernando Viñes (1933–1936)," *Anales de Documentación*, vol. 5, no. 5 (2002) pp. 309–32.

> queríamos transformar el trabajo y a veces lo lográbamos en una poética, maravillosa y libre transformación. (*Palabras*, 183)
>
> I was fortunate enough to speak to that crowd from the balcony. I've spoken from many balconies. Back then, I was shaking from head to toe. I was still a young student, in fact, I've been a student all my life. Then, I didn't have much of a voice; it was weak, timid. Silence befell us when I spoke and not a single word was lost. That's how the sessions began. At the end, we delivered the library. Rather, we exhibited it, donated it, distributed it. They didn't dare look at the history books, poetry, literature. There also were books on elementary law to form citizens. We felt as through the homeland were poetry, inspiration, a gift from above, and we wanted to transform labor into a poetics, a wonderous unrestricted transformation, and sometimes we succeeded.

Misiones Pedagógicas was probably one of Zambrano's most significant incursions in public speaking happening as it did in the decade when she least frequently spoke for the elites and her political views were truly left-wing and focused on the people rather than the privileged few. This outreach program's influence on Zambrano can also be measured in material terms, since this immersive teaching-and-learning experience was one of the commitments that drew her away from her academic program, which may explain in part why she did not write her proposed dissertation on Spinoza. A second no less important factor was her active engagement in magazine publishing and *tertulias* – often understood as a hybrid of teach-ins and table-talk gatherings – which convened in cafés and formed around the editorial boards of little revues, their directors, contributors, and readers.[27] In an intricate web of group affiliations with some of her generation's most salient personalities, Zambrano operated

[27] For more on the participation of women in cultural life of the 1920s–1930s, see Mercedes Gómez Blesa, *Modernas y vuanguardistas: mujer y democracia en la II República* (Alcorcón: Ediciones del Laberinto, 2009).

primarily outside the academic system, writing inspired articles and giving captivating talks on philosophy, poetry, and religion, with the seductive charisma of a snake-charmer. During her years of exile, and despite mounting financial difficulties, she seems to have declined what few opportunities she had to achieve some security by professing in a higher education institution or working at other academic or government venues. She only actively sought permanent teaching appointments in Mexico and Puerto Rico, refusing to cast a wider net in other American countries.

From the time that she began graduate work in 1927 at Universidad Central of Madrid, where she met José Ortega y Gasset, who already was a celebrity intellectual and eventually would become her advisor, and where Antonio Sánchez Barbudo, José Antonio Maravall, and E. Azocoaga became her new colleagues and friends, Zambrano frequently attended conferences, rallies, and other public assemblies.[28] She grew deeply embedded in multiple social networks alongside other women intellectuals of her generation, such as Rosa Chacel, María Teresa León, Concha Méndez, Concha de Albornoz, Aurora Riaño, Fe Sanz, and Maruja Mallo, with whom she attended *tertulias* at the Liceum Club and Residencia de Estudiantes. She joined discussions led by Ramón Gómez de la Serna at Café Pombo and by Ramón del Valle-Inclán at La Granja del Henar, where she met Rafael Dieste. This marked the beginning of an intellectual

[28] These years are narrated by Zambrano in her autobiographical account *Delirio y destino* (Madrid: Mondadori, 1989) and are fictionalized in Max Aub's novel *La calle de Valverde* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1985).

network that transformed multiple times through the 1930s.[29] In 1934, the paths she had travelled on foot in her role as *missionary* just one year earlier leading her into the social substratum of Spain, reappeared metaphorically as "the river's course": a *way of thinking* through the problem of alienation as an alternative to the systematic violence of philosophy.

2.2.1 In Search of an Order to Modern Inwardness

The commonplace metaphor of "el camino" [the path] was already present in Zambrano's early understanding of Stoic resignation,[30] which is to say that she saw Stoicism as a Spanish path. Her attraction to what may easily be confused for a simple literary cliché was shared by Martin Heidegger, for whom the country path offered an example of how an authentic conversation was to unfold organically, without a predetermined destination, but by following the impetus that emerges from the discussion wherever it may lead, like an exploratory excursion beyond the city limits.[31] In 1934, María Zambrano had just returned to Madrid after traveling with Misiones

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[29] Dieste, Sánchez Barbudo, Serrano Plaja, and Azcoaga launched the magazine *Hoja literaria* in 1932, *Buque Rojo* in 1936, and in 1937 the well-known *Hora de España*, which has received ample critical attention. See Antonio Jiménez Millán "La intelectualidad republicana y la revista *Hora de España*," *Analecta Malacitana*, vol. 5 (1982) pp. 343–390; Rafael Osuna, *Semlanzas de revistas durante la República, 1931–1936* (Málaga: Centro Cultural Generación del 27, 2006); Jesús Guzmán Mora, "La imagen de la Unión Soviética a través de la prensa en la Guerra Civil española: *Destino* y *Hora de España*," *Castilla*, vol 8 (2017) pp. 459–98; and Marco Antonio de la Ossa Martínez, "Compromiso, adaptación y contexto: el concepto de cultura y pueblo en la revista *Hora de España*," *Artseduca*, no. 21 (2018) pp. 72–101.

[30] See María Zambrano, "Un camino español: Séneca o la resignación," *Hora de España*, vol. 17 (1938) pp. 11–20.

[31] Heidegger's dialogues were written between 1944–1946, following his conscription into the German Territorial Army, and thus, contemporaneously with Zambrano's meditations on Seneca. See Martin Heidegger, *Country Path Conversations* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

Pedagógicas, when as a 30-year-old doctoral student whose attention and energies were scattered across multiple publication and outreach activities, she submitted the article "Hacia un saber sobre el alma" [Toward a Knowledge of the Soul] to *Revista de Occidente*, the socially ineffectual highbrow revue directed by Ortega y Gasset.

In the article she suggested that if every historical moment has its truth, then the truth of her generation is "el camino," the path that is the source of life, or rather, the path that takes life as a source. Her charming argument is crafted around the metaphor of the *cauce* – the course or bed of a river as the conduit that channels a unitary life force. The Quietists, she observed, would say that "todo se pasa" [this too shall pass], a great consolation if only our lives did not equally come to an end. However, the leisurely gaze soon perceives that something in this passing remains: the flow of the river. Water flows over the riverbed, but the *course* of the river remains. Truth is the course [*cauce*] of life. When philosophy is loyal to itself, it reveals its course within the philosopher and, therefore, may be considered a path into the psyche. On this path, she concluded, we feel the need to establish an order to our inwardness.

Zambrano's was a path of writing, but her writing emulated what we might call the orality of the phonocentrist philosopher who judged writing to be secondary or supplemental to the unmediated transmission of knowledge that occurs in speech. Jonathan Culler (1982) describes the awkward situation that ensues when we accept the

critical invitation of deconstruction to consider philosophy's appeal to logic, reason, and truth from the perspective of rhetoric:

> If philosophy is to define the relation of writing to reason, it must not itself be writing, for it wants to define the relation not from the perspective of writing but from the perspective of reason. If it is to determine the truth about the relation of writing to truth, it must be on the side of truth, not of writing.... [It] is precisely because it is written that philosophy must condemn writing, must define itself against writing. To claim that its statements are structured by logic, reason, truth, and not by the rhetoric of the language in which they are "expressed," philosophical discourse defines itself against writing. (90–1)

Zambrano's philosophical writing contains this contradiction insofar as it emulates orality and defines itself against writing. However, the "logic" that structures the claims of this "saber sobre el alma" turns out not to be a logic at all, but rather an intuition, a type of love that elevates the weak. Zambrano's "linguistic realism" reproduces the sound of the philosophical dialogue and the intellectual *tertulia*. This phonocentrism makes her writing resemble a "transcript," albeit a transcript corresponding to a speech that was not always given. Unlike the reason that philosophy protected from passion, her anti-essentialist "saber" had grand unitary aspirations.

Contending with western metaphysics that reason and passion must be unified, Zambrano evoked the *Ordo Amoris* of Max Scheler and proclaimed the need to establish an order of the soul which remained unknowable to rational thought. Her reference to Scheler may come as a surprise to transatlantic readers of today, but the philosopher enjoyed extraordinary international prominence among readers of phenomenology, and this was especially true in the elitist circle of *Revista de Occidente*, which published

excerpts from many of Scheler's works during Zambrano's university years.[32] Following the German's lead, she argued that ever since the discovery of the *res cogitans*, the modern subject's vocation had always been the vocation of thought, and that whatever was unthinking disappeared in the shadows. What had become of this abandoned *psyche* that philosophy surrendered to psychoanalysis? In recent times this question has produced a critical tendency to treat Zambrano as a Husserlian phenomenologist.[33] Although she dedicated a few pages to Husserl,[34] she seems to have been a closer reader of Max Scheler, the other German phenomenologist who was popular in Spain and translated in *Revista de Occidente*, a thinker who diverged from Husserl in ways that she seems to have inherited. Let me make this clear.

Román Ortiz (2014) has shown in the development of phenomenology that the method for attaining essences bifurcated between Husserl's "representative variations" and Scheler's "intuition." This distinction helps us more fully understand the influence of German phenomenology on María Zambrano. Perhaps with some discrepancies, Scheler's thinking aligns well with the basic premises of Husserlian phenomenology,

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[32] The writings of Max Scheler that were translated and published in *Revista de Occidente* include "El porvenir del hombre," no. 50 (1927) pp. 129–59; "El puesto del hombre en el cosmos," no. 73 (1929) pp. 1–29; "La experiencia fenomenológica," no. 152 (1936) pp. 187–208; "La idea del hombre y la historia," no. 41 (1926) pp. 137–81; and "La supervivencia," no. 136 (1934) pp. 1–31.

[33] See Karolina E. Källgren, "Towards a Concept of 'transcendere' in Husserl, Heidegger and Zambrano," *Aurora (Seminario María Zambrano*), vol. 13 (2012) pp. 90–7; María Carmen López Saénz, "Aproximación fenomenológica a la razón mediadora de Zambrano," *Revista de Filosofía*, vol. 38, no. 2 (2013) pp. 35–59; and Christian Sternad, "The Reasons of Europe: Edmund Husserl, Jan Patočka, and María Zambrano on the Spiritual Heritage of Europe," *History of European Ideas*, vol. 44, no. 7 (2018) pp. 864–75.

[34] See Zambrano's note on Francisco Romero's study, "Descartes y Husserl," *Taller*, no. 6 (1939) pp. 59–62, republished in *Nosotros*, nos. 48–49 (1940) pp. 303–4.

insofar as in this system the phenomenon is not exhausted in pure facticity but occurs during the subjective act of consciousness – an *intentional experience* – which is produced by sensible matter, and the content of this act which constitutes its unified meaning. Determined to "return to the things themselves," in *Philosophy as a Rigorous Science* Husserl proclaimed that our turn to objects must eradicate all prejudice and preconception, since things have their own essences which guide us in the discovery of how essences are constituted through one's experience of things. This demanded a rationalized judgement of things to obtain absolute intellectual evidence, which meant that philosophy must start with the *datum* [given], and through the abstraction of the subject's existential position and natural reality it must reach truth as a necessary, universal essence intuited through the eidetic reduction. Despite their coincidence on this method, Román contends, Husserl attains essences through representative variations, whereas Scheler abandons classical abstraction to achieve essences through spiritual intuition, as is evident in Scheler's *The Human Place in the Cosmos*, which Zambrano referenced on multiple occasions.[35] Whereas Husserl constituted objects by the act and assigned a transcendental function to the subject, Scheler defended the essential act-object correlation. Whereas Husserl's concept of love continues to be Greek

[35] See María Zambrano, "La agonía de Europa," *Obras completas II* (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2016) pp. 364–6; see also *El hombre y lo divino* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2016, pp. 33–4.

agape, an aspiration of the lower for the higher, Scheler inverted this hierarchy through Saint Augustine's concept of *amor*, which meant the elevation of the weak.

If Pascal spoke in his *Pensères* of the "désordre du cœur" and suggested that 'the heart has *its* reasons,' Scheler in *Ordo Amoris* is invested in discovering how "the idea of a strictly objective realm independent of man" could be restored. How was one to establish "the objective order of what is worthy of love in all things, something we can only recognize, but cannot 'posit,' produce, or make" (108)? The heart, Scheler argued, was the Christianized *psyche*, "a *structured counter-image* of the cosmos of all possible things worthy of love," and since man is a loving being before he is a thinking being, the heart was "a *microcosmos of a world of values*" (116). Scheler claimed that the modern subject no longer saw objective connections with the world, and that these connections remained veiled in the language of emotional life. Like Zambrano, he argued that the realm of emotional life has been wrongly surrendered to psychology. The psychologist, Scheler suggests, does not ask "what is going on in my consciousness when I behold a beautiful object?," but simply studies states of emotion:

> It is, however, an act of unequalled arbitrariness to carry out this investigation only in the case of thinking and to hand over to psychology the remaining part of the spirit. In doing so, one presupposes that any immediate relation to objects belongs to the act of *thought* alone and that any other relation to objects through *intuition* and its modes or through *striving, feeling, loving, and hating*, comes about only indirectly, by means of an act of thinking which relates a content given in inner perception. . . to objects. (122)

Like Scheler, Zambrano suggested that, between the psychic facts of naturalism and the self of idealism, the piece of the cosmos called *soul* had vanished. She asked,

what do we know about the unthinking thing that philosophy has forsaken? As we see, this question was entirely beyond the scope of Husserlian phenomenology, but it was a question that Scheler had advanced in his dual critique of naturalism and idealism. Through Scheler, Zambrano interrogated the Romantic argument for the existence of a twofold knowledge: the knowledge of a dominant logic, and the knowledge of an indomitable "decir poético" [poetic enunciation] ("Hacia un saber," 436). This inquiry was further pursued in *Filosofía y poesía* and then in *La confesión como método y como género literario*. For the Romantic, Nature is the terrifying incommensurability that the poet beholds during its maximum moments of splendorous fury. He is closest to reintegrating into the world during a storm, when lightning strikes, or when a volcano erupts.

Although the Romantic in poetry spoke of Nature with terror, Nature was also a mirror that reflected the soul. To the modernist thinking of Zambrano, the psyche of the Romantics had been released from metaphysics only to be surrendered to psychoanalysis by phenomenology. This was a Schelerian distinction. Left alone, banished from totality, amid the ruins of forms, the soul looked for itself in poetry, and whatever truth it could find there awaited its discovery in life: "El cauce que esta verdad abre a la vida va a permitir y hasta requerir que el fluir de la *psique* corra por él" [The riverbed which channels this truth into life will permit and even require the current of the *psyche* to flow through it] (440). Zambrano's genealogy of the psyche begins to

outline the vessels through which it travels, rooted as it is in the old religions of the pre-Socratic East, which even Catholicism dared not disdain. The "oracle" here is the quintessential conduit of a truth that is impervious to analytical reason but that can be confirmed by the intuition.

> En Grecia encontramos los oráculos, que nos hablan del alma o al menos aluden a ella. ¿Qué son los oráculos en la vida griega? Si la filosofía con Tales comienza con su pregunta: ¿qué son las cosas?, el oráculo vendrá a llenar la necesidad de esta pregunta [con] otra pregunta: ¿qué soy yo? ¿cuál es mi destino? ¿Qué tengo que hacer ante tal o cual situación? Y veremos hasta a Sócrates consultando el oráculo de Delfos, le oímos escuchando su *daimon* interior. ("Hacia un saber," 440)

> In Greece we find the oracles, which speak to us of the soul or at least allude to it. What are the oracles in Greek life? Although philosophy begins with Thales's question – What are things? – the oracle will come to fill the need of this question with a question of its own: What am I? What is my fate? What must I do when faced with this or that situation? And we will see even Socrates consulting the Oracle at Delphos, where we hear him listening to his inner *daimon*.

Now, these consultations with the oracle, Zambrano argued, were not the orgies of the later Dionysians who searched for the music of Nature in a cosmic bath, trying to immerse the soul in the primordial sources of the life drive. Orgiastic eroticism (the reconstitution of the soul and nature) marks a return to the font of vitality of the being that starts to feel that it is on its own, at the moment it no longer conceives of itself as an extension of the divine. Whereas the cosmic bath of the Dionysians showed the soul's reconciliation with life, the oracle in Socrates expressed the soul's anxiety for rationality, the hope for laying doubts to rest rather than curing pain. It was a desire to know oneself in order to know how to live a good life. Socrates, she concluded, "llegó a ser el oráculo de todo ciudadano de Atenas que no tuviera temor de pensar, es decir, de llegar

a ser él mismo su propio oráculo" [came to be the oracle of every Athenian citizen who was not afraid to think, that is, to become his own oracle] (442).

It turns out that this idea of *becoming one's own oracle* did not impress José Ortega y Gasset; in fact, he admonished Zambrano in person for her juvenile indiscretion, sending her out of his office in tears, and, although he published her paper, it marked the end of her discipleship.[36] Her banishment from Ortega in 1934 anticipated her exile from Spain five years later,[37] on January 27, 1939, when she crossed the French border with her mother Araceli Alarcón, her sister, Araceli, her cousins José and Rafael Tomero, and Rosa the domestic worker (Moreno Sanz, 66). The traumatic experience of this exodus is powerfully recorded in the posthumously published journal entry "España sale de sí" [Spain Escapes from Itself]. The wrenching confession that concludes the journal entry reflects the devastation that had befallen her, yet it also points to a bifurcation that would emerge in her thinking: on one hand, the direction of "exile" and "banishment," with all the hazards and affordances these experiences and concepts offer; and on the other hand, the direction of "confession" as a method of interrogation and as a literary genre. As she paused to look upon the endless line of weeping refugees,

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[36] This account is drawn from a text titled "Para entender la obra de María Zambrano," held at the Fundación María Zambrano and reproduced in *Obras completas IV*, pp. 739–41. It is a transcript from a phone call mostly likely with her cousin Rafael Tomero. See also "Hacia un saber sobre el alma," *Revista de Occidente*, no. 138 (1934) pp. 261–76.

[37] It appears that Ortega and Zambrano to some extent found a way to reconcile their differences, despite her criticism of him toward the end of the 1930s. Her writings in the late 1940s reveal her amenable treatment of his work and figure in Hispanic culture. See María Zambrano, "Ortega y Gasset, filósofo español (I)," *Asomante*, no. 1 (1949) pp. 5–17; "Ortega y Gasset, filósofo español (II)," *Asomante*, no. 2 (1949) pp. 6–15.

so completely covered in dust that they appeared to be made of the earth itself, she beseeched the Lord to help her people who again had become a sacrificial offering to the jealous gods:

> Señor, ¿qué ha hecho mi pueblo? ¿Contra qué rostro alto e imposible ha arrojado su piedra? ¿Qué monstruo lleva en sus entrañas que así ha aterrado al mundo? ¿O qué nueva simiente, qué criatura sobrehumana va a ser tu pugna por ser dada a luz, que tales dolores produce? ¿Qué parto más allá de sí mismo va a tener lugar en la tierra, a través de mi pueblo, de este pueblo que se no resigna, que en la tortura no perece, de este pueblo, el único, Señor, que te resiste? (255)

> Lord, what have my people done? Against what impossibly high face have they thrown their stones? What monster do they bear in their guts that has thus terrorized the world? What new seed, what superhuman creature, which causes so much pain, is to become of the battle you've had to fight because you were born? What kind of birth that comes from yonder is to take place on earth, through my people, who refuse to resign, who won't perish in torture, these people, the only ones, Lord, who resist you?

2.2.2 Forks in the Road: Ortega and Zambrano

The cultural ferment of late-1920s Madrid, where intellectuals and artists grappled with the new aesthetic paradigms advanced by practitioners of Cubism and Surrealism, was intensified by debates over the *social engagement* of intellectuals, and the question of how intellectual pursuit and political practice were to be negotiated. The tensions of this environment became extreme on March 7, 1929, when Article 53 of the Reforma Universitaria was passed, accrediting private higher education institutions of Spain, which were owned by the Catholic Church and run by Augustinians in El Escorial and Jesuits in Deusto. This was an evident exhibition of political domination aimed at the youth movements that rose in opposition to the dictatorship.

Undergraduates in the public sector reacted with a strike to agitate against the proliferation of an institutionalized intellectual aristocracy. When Universidad Central of Madrid shut down, intellectual exchanges emerged in public places. Ortega himself, who had just started the course, *¿Qué es la filosofía?*, began giving lectures at upscale theaters, such as Sala Rex.[38] In 1930, the year Primo de Rivera was deposed, Zambrano started collaborating with the weekly magazine *Nueva España*, but it was 1932 that proved to be a decisive year in the young philosophy student's life. She began attending *tertulias* run by Ramón Gómez de la Serna at Café Pombo, and with the painter Maruja Mallo, others run by Valle-Inclán at La Granja del Henar, where she met Rafael Dieste. This marked the beginning of an intellectual community that would transform multiple times through the 1930s. Dieste, Sánchez Barbudo, Serrano Plaja, and Azcoaga launched the magazine *Hoja literaria*, which Zambrano would contribute to, and the same group launched *Buque Rojo* in 1936 and in 1937, *Hora de España* (Jiménez Millán 1982; Osuna 2006; De la Ossa Martínez 2018). In 1933, many from this group would depart for months at a time with Misiones Pedagógicas and at least two (Sánchez Barbudo and Serrano Plaja) became political commissars during the war, in which they participated as combatants.

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[38] Ortega's notes from these lectures can be found in "¿Por qué se vuelve a la filosofía," *Obras completas IV* (Madrid: Santillana Ediciones Generales, 2005) pp. 322–341. For the notes of a student who attended these lectures, see José Ortega y Gasset, *¿Qué es la filosofía?* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1997).

Zambrano's affiliation with these often-overlapping circles which aimed at democratizing intellectual discourse has its correlate in her formal place in the academic institution and her connections to the "liberal" instructors whom she studied under, such as Gregorio Marañón, but especially José Ortega y Gasset. The generational divide between Zambrano and Ortega emerged in 1930, when the first of several conflicts broke out over the intellectual's role in public sphere. In his article titled "Organización de la decencia nacional" published in *El Sol* (February 5, 1930), Ortega suggested that the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera had grown out of the Constitution of 1876, which could not guarantee the rights it claimed to guarantee Spanish citizens and, therefore, that it needed to be dissolved and remade. He argued that a genealogy of Spanish governance, beginning with the first elected government, would show that the difference between the *ancièn regime* and the dictatorship was negligible, since it was the perfect demoralization of public life, the impossibility of the people as such, the obstacle that prevented the State from coming into statehood. Except for a few select groups closest to the State, he claimed, no one had enjoyed a truly public life. He proposed the nationalization of the State "por encima de 'derechas' e 'izquierdas'" [beyond the Right and the Left] and the creation of "un enorme partido arrollador, tan grande y tan sin manías que casi no pudiese llamarse partido" [an overwhelming encompassing party, so large and devoid of fixations that it barely could be called a party] (758). Aside from Italy's Fascist Party, there were at the time only two forms of political associativism that

could be seen as "overwhelmingly encompassing": the so-called National Front (an eclectic and opportunistic coalition of centrist and right-of-center groups) and the Popular Front (an equally eclectic and strategic coalition of centrist and left-of-center groups). It was clear to Zambrano, and possibly to most of Ortega's readers, that the philosopher from Madrid – a former supporter of the Bourbon monarchy – was not thinking of the Popular Front.

Zambrano responded to Ortega's veiled reactionarism in a letter dated February 11, 1930,[39] insisting that, as a public intellectual, he had been of the utmost importance for the youth of Spain who now felt that it had lost something of itself with the tenured philosopher's political realignment. The nation needs to be built, she agreed, but a party that proposes to build it must be, rather than a party, the foundation of all parties, the protection of pluralism, because without this rationality whose unity depends on division, democracy is impossible.

> [Los partidos] de hoy han de ser creadores por el momento, por exigencia de la conciencia histórica y han de ser su instrumento. No se puede crear historia sintiéndose por encima de ella, desde el mirador de la razón; sólo quien está por debajo de la historia puede ser un día un agente creador. Y en ello – veo yo – nos diferenciaremos los de esta generación de la de usted – si es que vamos a hacer algo, que a veces lo dudo –, en que nuestra alegría está en sentirnos instrumento y sólo aspiramos a tener una misión dentro de algo que nos envuelve: el momento histórico… Debe y puede usted hacer más, señor Ortega y Gasset; su misión con España está más alta. Y no es que yo ni nadie individualmente, ni aun la juventud como tal, podamos exigirle más. A nosotros –todos lo que le hemos leído y escuchado– sólo en profundo agradecimiento nos queda por todo lo que

[39] This letter, which Zambrano herself titled "Carta de un jóven a su maestro, D. José Ortega y Gasset," along with two others, was presented by Magdalena Mora in "María Zambrano: Tres cartas de juventud a Ortega y Gasset," *Revista de Occidente*, no. 120 (1991) 7–26.

> por usted ha germinado. Pero si hay una conciencia histórica nacional, ésa sí puede exigirle mayores cosas, y no porque haya entregado pocas, sino porque puede entregar más, y mientras se puede se debe. (15)
>
> Today's parties must be creative for now, due to the demands of historical consciousness, and they must be its instrument. One cannot make history by feeling that one is above it, from the overlook of reason: only he who stands under history can be a creative agent one day. And in this regard – as I see it – those of us in my generation differ from yours – if in fact we manage to achieve anything which sometimes I doubt – since our happiness comes from feeling that we are an instrument and from aspiring to have a mission within something that envelops us: the historical moment… You can and must do more, Mr. Ortega y Gasset; your mission for Spain is greater. Neither I nor anyone else individually, nor the youth as such, can demand any more of you. We who have read you and listened to you are deeply grateful for all that has germinated in us thanks to you. But if such a thing as national historical consciousness exists, it indeed may demand greater things of you, not because you have given little, but because you can give more, and insofar as one can one must.

What had become of the Ortega of *España invertebrada,* Zambrano wondered in a letter, daring her mentor and Ph.D. advisor to stand on the right side of history. The courage of the 26-year-old graduate student must be appreciated, given Ortega's dominance in the cultural field of Spain and Hispanic America at the time. The conflict between Zambrano and Ortega was exacerbated later that year, when her friend and soon-to-be fellow "missionary," Pablo de Andrés Cobos, who had studied in Segovia with her father, Blas Zambrano, reviewed her recently published book *Horizonte del liberalismo* (1930) in *El Socialista* (November 2, 1930)[40] and suggested in no unclear terms that Ortega's most devoted disciple had admirably refuted her mentor. A. Cobos

[40] See Magdalena Mora, "María Zambrano," pp. 17–18.

suggested that Zambrano's book showed that she had asked herself what the task of the philosopher is and had rightly concluded that it could not be apolitical:

"Cuando don José decía (según rumor) que la libertad de cátedra no le afectaba directamente, es seguro que María Zambrano, en su mesa de estudio, con *El Espectador* ante sí, se preguntaría: ¿Cómo puede pensar de tan mala manera hombre de tanta capacidad de pensamiento?" [When Don José said (as rumor has it) that the freedom of tenure did not affect him directly, María Zambrano, seated at her desk with *El Espectador* in front of her, surely must have asked: How can a man so gifted in philosophy have such terrible ideas?] (17–8).

Although Zambrano already had told Ortega that he "must do more" with the credit he had accrued as a public intellectual in the latter days of the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera, she had leveled her criticism personally, in the privacy of a letter, avoiding the sensationalism in which the comment of Cobos indulged. Nonetheless, she was in her third year of graduate study, when she worried that the review might impede her successful completion of the program and obstruct networking opportunities that might help her establish a career as a woman philosopher in 1930s Spain or the Americas. The day after the review was published, that is, on November 3, 1930,[41] she sent a copy of it to Ortega along with a letter explaining that her work had been

[41] Although this letter is undated, it most likely was written on November 3, 1930, given that Andrés Cobos's article was published on November 2 and that Zambrano's letter was received by Ortega on November 4, 1930.

instrumentalized to attack his politics. She refuted the suggestion that in *Horizonte de liberalismo* she stood 'against' him and complained that the reviewer had invented her comments.

Her explanation does not seem entirely untrue; however, an unsent letter to Ortega that Zambrano wrote only two years later, toward the end of 1932,[42] makes clear that his reluctance to use his public celebrity to advance a progressive agenda continued to exasperate her. In that letter, she writes about finding several issues of the magazine *España* 1915, which Ortega had directed during her youth. Overwhelmed with emotion, she could not get past the first three. On those pages, she perceived his restlessness to save Spain from itself by interpreting it and a polite refusal to embrace popular democracy: "Me ha dado pena por usted, al ver lo que su esperanza hubo de encontrar" [I feel bad for you when I see what has become of your hope]. Ortega had accused Zambrano and her peers of dreaming only among themselves. What do you expect to happen? He jabbed. Her response was rotund: "Si miramos en nosotros es porque sentimos con angustia infinita que somos nosotros quienes [hemos] de dar respuesta a la pregunta de ustedes" [If we look in ourselves it's because we feel with infinite restlessness that we are the ones who must provide an answer to the question your generation has posed] (214). She put down the magazine, wondering whether she and her generation one day might be able to make a Spain of their own.

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[42] The two unsent letters to Ortega are compiled in *Obras completas VI*, pp. 212–5.

2.3 Poetry of the Banished

María Zambrano had been banished from José Ortega y Gasset and five years later from Spain. When the war was lost, she went into exile, passing through Paris for three months, New York, and then to Havana, where she briefly reunited with José Lezama Lima before settling temporarily in Mexico, where she was welcomed by the government of Lázaro Cárdenas, who turned the post-revolutionary State into a major destination for the Spanish diaspora. In 1938, La Casa de España en México was founded by Alfonso Reyes and Daniel Cosío Villegas, after Cárdenas formally accepted political asylum-seekers from Spain in an act of solidarity and to legitimate his own expansion of the state apparatus in the name of social democracy. Many faculty and graduate students from Zambrano's own Facultad de Filosofía y Letras were commissioned to teach and research in this new national academic institution, which in 1940, was rebranded with the name it bears to this day: El Colegio de México. This institution, through which many of the brightest minds of the monied intelligentsia would pass in years to come (including Octavio Paz), initially established itself on one hand as a School of Philosophy directed by José Gaos, and on the other hand, as an academic publisher which over the last century has become one of the most prolific university presses in the world: Fondo de Cultura Económica (FCE).

The significant cultural impact that exiled Spanish intellectuals played in the formation of this institution is well-known. Despite this intercultural ferment, María

Zambrano was not offered a position at La Casa de España, which was quickly staffed primarily by faculty from her home university in Madrid. For a third time, she was banished, now, to Morelia in the state of Michoacán. It is not hard to see that this banishment was an outcome of her conflict with Ortega, but it also happened because she was a woman practicing philosophy in a patriarchal intellectual sphere, and because she wrote only a few pages of her dissertation, without completing her degree. Although this interrupted dissertation may have been more a sign of wartime disorientation than intellectual lethargy, a symptom not of withdrawal but overextension, it relegated her – upon arrival in Mexico – to the countryside to her apparent displeasure. She thus seemingly followed in the footsteps of countless banished poets throughout history. After facing the psyche abandoned by western metaphysics, María Zambrano turned toward the sympotic poets whom Plato had cast out of *The Republic* precisely as she herself was exiled in Mexico.[43]

Silently turned away from La Casa de España in Mexico City, Zambrano accepted a humble commission at the Universidad Michoacana de San Nicoás de Hidalgo in Morelia. Her correspondence[44] from Morelia to Alfonso Reyes and Daniel Cosío Villegas reveals that she was working intensely on many projects simultaneously,

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[43] Zambrano gives a personal account of her journey to Mexico in *Delirio y destino* in *Obras completas VI: Escritos autobiográficos (1928–1990)* (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2014) pp. 1050–3.
[44] For more on this context and the reproduction of the letters themselves, see Anthony Stanton "Alfonso Reyes y María Zambrano: una relación epistolaria," *Homenaje a María Zambrano: estudios y correspondencia* (Mexico City: Colegio de México, 1998) pp. 93–142.

developing multiple course outlines, writing lectures with the aim of compiling them into a book, which could be used for other courses. What is more, her repeated petitions to Reyes for books that she needed to carry out research and develop lectures suggests that San Nicolás de Hidalgo was underfunded and that its library was quite limited. This problem of access even led her to back out of an agreement she had made with La Casa de España to publish a book she had proposed as "La crisis de la objetividad" [The Crisis of Objectivity], forcing her to replace this project with another devoted to the stoicism of Seneca, which I will discuss in chapter 2.5. During the fall of 1939, her lectures were focused on poetry and the allegory of exile. It is unclear whether these lectures were entirely new work or if they were revisions of the course that she had taught the year before in Madrid, where she was the substitute for Xavier Zubiri.[45] It is ironic that the book form of this course – *Filosofía y poesía* – was a project that she appears to have executed hastily and without much planning, while she was strapped for source materials, and still it has received far more critical attention than her highly ambitious and meticulously planned opus, *El hombre y lo divino*. That said, in the interest of describing the relation between exile and confession and how these concepts are operationalized by a mediating logic that guides the poetics of revelation, let me dwell for the remainder of this section on the Morelia lectures.

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[45] Lecture notes from that course are not included in the Fundación, leading me to suspect that they have either succumbed to the force of time, or that the talks were improvised.

The first of these talks focused on Plato's Myth of the Cave, where she suggested that "admiration" and "violence" were the source of philosophy's power. She argues that philosophy is born of an ecstatic shudder that strikes when one faces things and that becomes violent when one tries to release oneself from them. Philosophy is a failed ecstasy, failed because it is ripped apart; an excision that inflicts violence in its search and that grows violenter the more systematically it operates. Zambrano shows how the modern subject gets caught in a predicament where man does not fully emerge through philosophy, and where the totality of mankind does not emerge through poetry. She pointed to this dramatized conflict in Plato's Myth of the Cave, where we find the power that gives rise to philosophy through admiration and violence. Philosophy is born in an ecstatic jolt which strikes during confrontation and in the violence that ensues as one tries to be released from what one faces. This admiration, Zambrano reminds us, does not explain why philosophy transformed into a system or why this system became so dependent on abstraction. Philosophy, here, is a failed ecstasy, failed because it is cleaved, because it tears. Its violence stems from its search and increases insofar as it becomes more systematic. Philosophy is born out of primary admiration – *to zaumassein* – an ecstasy that fails and that it seeks to recover by renouncing appearances and by enforcing an adherence to forms in their abstract ideality. Poetry, on the contrary, refused to look away from appearances; it remained loyal to the ecstasy of being integrated in a totality, without tearing itself away from that revelation, because the

totality came from within. The poetry that Plato banished from *The Republic* would calm but never quench. It would assuage the restless soul trembling in admiration, but it would never realize the contemplated ideal in its totality nor would it impose such a realization on another subject. Philosophy's rejection of poetry turned asceticism into an instrument of interested knowledge. The danger that the poet posed to this system was that "no renunciaba ni apenas buscaba, porque tenía" [he didn't renounce anything, much less look for anything, because he already had it] (*Filosofía*, 19). This was especially clear for Zambrano in Book VII of *The Republic*, where Plato introduces the myth.[46]

To comprehend the significance of this poetic myth, Zambrano points out, we must begin by recognizing that it appears *suddenly*, when in the dialogue it seems like the road of dialectic has grown weary and is nearing its end. The myth interrupts and, as an interruption, it is a truth that can be revealed through poetic beauty but not demonstrated. One does not pursue this truth, but comes into contact with it through discovery, grace, or what the Greeks called *agape* and the Romans *caritas*. The philosopher thinks he first must save himself from the appearances and second save the appearances themselves, restore their coherence through the invisible unity that emanates from forms. What the seduction of this myth shows us, Zambrano suggests, is precisely philosophy's hope for self-justification. Philosophy is shown to be founded on

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[46] See *The Republic* in *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997) pp. 1132–55.

religion and poetry, both forms of hope. Meanwhile, in its impossible search to possess ideal knowledge systematically, it remains hopeless.

One of the most defiant arguments in *Filosofía y poesía* is that the unity of poetry stands in stark contrast to the unity of Platonic philosophy. Poetry falls in love with the most transitory aspect of each object and every instant. The poem is a unity, but not one that is hidden; instead, it is the unity of the present, a totality made fleetingly and instantaneously manifest, made into perishable flesh.[47] Unlike the philosopher who unleashed violence on the appearances to achieve unity with forms, the poet, without inflicting any violence at all, also achieved unity, but through what is given, heterogenous as it may be. Poetry does not care about the purity that philosophy anxiously protects. It does not strictly want Being in its plenitude, but instead it wants both what is and what is not. The 'whole' for the poet is a 'whole *a posteriori*,' a totality that will be total when everything fully integrates into it. This allows her to say, without misleading us, that the poet has no method or ethics. He wants everything, denies nothing, takes what is and what is not. His refusal to discriminate between the beauty of presence and the beauty of absence warrants his banishment.

Zambrano has argued that the Platonic condemnation of poetry is made in the name of morality, truth, and justice. This condemnation operates through the "light"

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[47] Zambrano's metaphor of the flesh [*carne*] as the manifestation [*encarnación*] of unity conceived in an eternal present is equally evoked by Octavio Paz, perhaps more frequently, as the "encarnación-desencarnación" binary. See Octavio Paz, "El verbo desencarnado," *El arco y la lira* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1972) pp. 232–49.

that comes down to us from Greece, the illuminating clarity of the mystery suddenly bathed in light. Since justice for Plato is the correlate of being in human life, poetry turns out to be unjust, because it is untrue – poetry betrays the Logos. But this notion of justice recently begins with Plato. The pre-Socratics, she reminds us, thought that being was unjust because it entailed being at the expense of something else, something else that it is not – the indeterminate *apeiron*, that is, the unlimited, the boundless. For the pre-Socratics, unity does not reside in any particular being, but only in the whole. Platonic justice, on the other hand, "aun siendo armonía es vindicativa, punitiva. Recoge en su concierto la disparidad, en torno de la unidad. Afirma y nuega, escinde. Y algo de lo que niega es la poesía" [harmonious as it is, remains vindictive, punitive. It gathers disparity into its fold around unity. It affirms and denies, it divides. And poetry happens to be something that it denies] (*Filosofía*, 29). Since platonic philosophy maintained that man lives wrapped in a veil of forgetfulness, knowledge held the promise of an unveiling, so that he who *knows* can *be* fully in the light. Reason was a weapon of hope which philosophers aimed at the tyranny of jealous gods. In the framework of Plato's humanized concept of justice, the poet was the only one who did the tyrant's bidding, since poetry was the irrational word pronounced at the service of inspired speech, jubilation, drunkenness, delirium. Poetry was banished from *The Republic* because it was the word of madness and, therefore, constituted a lie:

> Traicionamos la razón usando su vehículo: la palabra, para dejar que por ella hablen las sombras, para hacer de ella la forma del delirio. El poeta no quiere

> salvarse; vive en la condenación y todavía más, la extiende, la ensancha, la ahonda. La poesía es realmente un infierno. (*Filosofía*, 32)
>
> We betray reason by using its vehicle – the word – to let shadows speak through it, make out of it a form of delirium. The poet does not want to save himself; he lives in condemnation and, what's more, he prolongs it, grows it, delves deeper into it. Poetry is a veritable inferno.

In this poetic theory, one can sense the intense disillusion that Zambrano felt toward her former intellectual role models and mentors, such as Azorín, Marañón, and Ortega, who had the respect of the youth and the authority of established public intellectuals and who, nonetheless, did not use this authority to contest the emergent authoritarianism. In the early months of 1940, the ways in which her present condition of banishment appeared in history consumed Zambrano's thinking and writing about "Los que han callado" [Those who have kept quiet].[48] What was driving that desire to speak without breaking the silence? She wondered. Why did intellectuals like Ortega want to speak from silence, instead of asserting their disagreement in the public sphere with the power of their cultural capital? It was not that they agreed with the premise of authoritarianism but that they tolerated it out of individual interest. She felt that people who had not publicly protested the war remained exaggeratedly silent. Terrified by that silence, Zambrano saw the war as a revelation of Spain's most unspoken conflicts. After three hundred years of life endured under an ever-increasing inhibition, Spain exploded in the delirium of a political community that, after being bound by its own decision,

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[48] Never published in the author's lifetime, "Los intelectuales en el drama español. Los que han callado," appears in *Obras completas II*, pp. 259–65.

stepped out of prison for the first time. "Era una gigantesca y cruentísima purificación" [It was a devastating giant purification] (260). The silence of Ortega and Azorín, even if it was out of moral purity, still lacked compassion for the sinners.

> Esta falta de misericordia era lo que nos irritaba, el sustraerse al delirio, al permanecer callados cuando todos gritábamos, el quedar lúcidos cuando habíamos renunciado a la lucidez, poseído como estábamos de esa otra lucidez que da el amor exasperado hacia algo que amenaza ser destruido ante nuestros mismos ojos. (261)
>
> That lack of mercy was what irritated us, the removing oneself from the delirium, keeping quiet when we all were shouting, staying lucid when we had renounced lucidity, possessed as we were by that other lucidity which exasperated love gives to something that threatens to be destroyed before our very eyes.

From Morelia, the charity whose absence she identified in Ortega, Azorín, and Gregorio Marañón[49] at once emerged from the poetry of the banished as the truth with which one comes into contact through discovery. For this reason, years later in *Los bienaventurados*, Zambrano could state quite honestly "yo amo mi exilio" [I love my exile], since exile in fact created conditions that were favorable to the experience of enthusiasm, which she observed in pre-Socratic poetry, and the experience of grace, which she found in Spanish mysticism. She addressed these topics in her second and

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[49] Zambrano seems to have felt especially betrayed by Gregorio Marañón, whom she criticized in "Un liberal." After departing Spain on amicable terms with the Madrid-Valencia war administration in early 1937, Marañón proceeded immediately to campaign – in France and the Southern Cone – against the legitimacy of the Second Republic's democratically elected government and in support of the military and fascist insurgents with a vociferous tenacity that Ortega was careful to avoid much of the time. Zambrano unleashed perhaps an even harsher criticism of him in the later piece "Carta al doctor Marañón," which is one of the few places where she speaks punitively and forcefully about the betrayal of the Second Spanish Republic. See María Zambrano, "Un liberal" in *Obras completas VI,* pp. 730–6; see also "Carta al doctor Marañón," *Palabras*, pp. 325–32.

third lectures of *Filosofía y poesía.* They deserve our attention, since we have yet to establish how this *delirio poético* provides a rationale, indeed, a logic of mediation, for the poetics that she was advancing as an alternative form of knowledge that sought to escape the violence of western philosophy. So, let us look closer at the claims of enthusiasm such as they appear in her lectures and remain attentive to her discursivity in which the literary oracular is at work.

2.3.1 The Claims of Enthusiasm: Anacreon's Drunkenness

In *The Republic*, myth unexpectedly appears at that point in the dialogue when the dialectic path has lost momentum and seemingly nears its end. Myth interrupts the conversation. As an interruption, the truth of myth can be revealed through poetic beauty but never known to reason. One does not pursue this truth, but comes into contact with it through discovery, through *grace, agape*, *caritas*... The philosopher thinks he first must save himself from the appearances and second must save the appearances themselves, and that he must restore the coherence of the invisible unity which emanates from forms. Myth, however, showed that philosophy *was hoping* to justify itself, that philosophy was founded on religion and poetry, which are both forms of hope. Myth showed that – in its impossible search to possess ideal knowledge systematically – philosophy was hopeless. With a quite different unity, Zambrano argued, poetry falls in love with the most transitory aspect of every object at every instant. Its unity is not hidden, but the unity of the present, a contemporaneity, a

community of presence. Unlike the philosopher who unleashed violence on appearances to achieve unity with forms, the poet, without inflicting a bit of violence, achieved unity by merging into the heterogenous given, the *humus* of life. The oracular position had become quite clear: Poetry does not care about the purity that philosophy anxiously protects. It does not merely want Being in its plenitude, but desires *what is and what is not*. The totality of the poet will be total when everything fully integrates into it.

The label that Zambrano designated to name this act of integration was the *delirio*, a key concept that deserves our close attention. In Zambrano, the *delirio* functioned like the untranslatable *pharmakon* which Jacques Derrida (1981) famously discussed in relation to Plato's *Phaedrus*. We will recall that in that dialogue, with its uncharacteristic setting outside the city, Socrates and Phaedrus on their sojourn into the countryside come upon the *pharmakeia*, which serves as the topos of revelation. Socrates recalls the myth in which Orithyia, in this very location, was drawn to the alluring waters of the river Illissus until the boreal wind carried her away. Derrida notes that this being carried away must be understood through the citational play or trace in the *pharmakon*, which makes itself legible as both drug and remedy, poison and cure:

> When a word inscribes itself as the citation of another sense of the same word, when the textual center-stage of the word *pharmakon*, even while it means *remedy*, cites, re-cites, and makes legible that which *in the same word* signifies, in another spot and on a different level of the stage, *poison*… that choice of only one of these renditions by the translator has as its first effect the neutralization of the citational play, of the "anagram," and, in the end, quite simply of the very textuality of the translated text… All translations into languages that are the heirs and depositaries of Western metaphysics thus produce on the *pharmakon* an *effect of analysis* that violently destroys it, reduces it to one of its simple elements

> by interpreting it, paradoxically enough, in the light of the ulterior developments it itself has made possible… There is no such thing as a harmless remedy. The *pharmakon* can never be simply beneficial (98–9)

The bucolic setting of the myth evoked by Socrates is at once the antithesis to the urban setting of most Platonic dialogues. This location outside the limits of the city was homologous with the location of the banished subject who found himself outside the protections of citizenship. The topos of revelation, here mythologized as the river Illissus, was the place of banishment, the *pharmakie*. To the communitarian thinking of Zambrano, poetry represented the remedy/poison that held the promise/risk of releasing/channeling a radical underground knowledge. Like the *pharmakon* for Derrida, the *delirio* for Zambrano held the potential of a cure (organicity of experience) which was inseparable from the threat of destruction (madness). Unlike her predecessors of national regeneration, Zambrano was an anti-bourgeois practitioner who believed that the paradoxically therapeutic-maddening *delirio* could release repressed energies for the benefit of poetry and society.

For Zambrano, *delirio* was enthusiasm, the shudder that passes through the poet, possessing him. Here, the poet is a medium. As the shudder flows through him, his exaggerated love for it convinces him that it cannot be left to flow on its own but requires a conduit. In this sense, Zambrano belongs to a community of the literary oracular, since her poetics homologizes the work of the poet as an instrument of the divine and the work of the custodian as a cultural mediator. In her Morelia lectures, the literary oracular fashioned itself as the conduit through which a unifying energy flows

and as a custodian who protects a pre-reflective organicity of experience out of fear that it may disintegrate if left to an unreflective subject represented in vernacular print culture. Zambrano's defense of poetic delirium in her treatment of the Greek poet Anacreon recovered an unsung literary outsider of antiquity whose poetry contradicted the ethos of western metaphysics. Her Anacreon dismisses philosophy's strictures because he doesn't wish to preserve anything eternally. He would find it more useful to know "How best to mix the sparkling wine,/ To make the mellow draught divine," because this intoxication offers unity through integration into the present, an adherence to the transitory, where human fate was "mix'd with earth and kindred clay."

If philosophy produced desolation, poetry offered a consolation. The philosopher recollects his origin and conducts his life accordingly, whereas the poet has no recollection at all. He is the eternal host of this world – its faithful lover who knows that one day he will cease to behold it. The philosopher disavows appearances because they perish, whereas the poet embraces them for that same reason, knowing that they won't last forever, lamenting their immanent passage, feeling that he too will forfeit his possessions. Poetry sympathizes with its prohibitions, tender to what it casts out of itself. An agent of destruction, it threatens the order of things by loving them indiscriminately.

Drunkenness is the rhetoric of poetic disarray that Rimbaud the "seer" adopts on his voyages. Zambrano (1987) realized that Anacreon too had taken recourse to the

drunken stance in his own poetic ravings, since he did not set out to find this *delirio* intentionally, but rather only after growing tired from anguishing over something. (One also recalls the intoxicating hashish poems of Charles Baudelaire – an evocation that was equally legible, as we will see, in Octavio Paz's discussion on psychodelics.) Thus, poetry was no longer the "búsqueda" [search] it once had been but rather an "embriagadora poesesión" [intoxicating possession]: "El poeta tiene lo que no ha buscado y, más que poseer, se siente poseído" [What the poet has he has not sought, and rather than possessing anything, he feels possessed] (*Filosofía*, 39). What Derrida points to in the *pharmakon*, Zambrano identified as *delirio* in the accursedness of modernism, which, although observable in the rhetoric of disarray proper to symbolism, found unity with the poetry of Anacreon, whom Plato had targeted in the *Phaedrus*.

This strategic recovery of a lesser-known literary figure drawn from remote history (Greek antiquity or early modern Europe), whose poetry contradicts the ethos of the dominant aesthetic, is common in transatlantic modernism, as we see in Ezra Pound's translations of Sextus Propertius and Octavio Paz's translations of John Donne. Zambrano's reading of Anacreon's odes (in French translation) showed her a unity of voice in the rhetoric of intoxication, as celebrated by poets and condemned by philosophers. Anacreon dismisses philosophy's strictures because he doesn't wish to preserve anything eternally: "Why prate to me of critic rules,/ And jargon of the jangling schools?/ Your learned dogmas, prithee, spare;/ They're useless all, not worth my care"

(*Odes*, 97–9). For Zambrano, Anacreon was not an isolate case of poetic intoxication. She explains:

> Lo que él tiene no ha precisado salir a buscarlo, no se ha fatigado en su cacería, sino que se sintió cargado de algo que le angustia y le colma al par. Posesión infinitamente azarante, como si excediera de las fuerzas humanas. Su vivir no comienza por una búsqueda, sino por una embriagadora posesión. El poeta tiene lo que no ha buscado y, más que poseer, se siente poseído.
>
> What the poet has he has not sought, he has not grown weary in his search, but rather he felt burdened by something that made him anguish and at once overflow. An infinitely shocking possession, as though it exceeded human strength. It does not come to life as a search, but with an intoxicating possession. The poet has what he did not seek and, rather than possessing something, he feels possessed. (*Filosofía*, 39)

If the philosopher's deficit springs him into an endless search to recollect his primary integration in a totality, the poet's unknowing utterance produces an excess and "agobiado por la gracia no sabe qué hacer" [overwhelmed by grace he knows not what to do] (40). This emotional state is empty, abandoned, tedious. Eagerly anticipating the miracle – what poststructuralist criticism would call the "anxiety of anticipation" – his desperation grows with the hope that the delirium will return. His only desire is for precisely that which annihilated him, since "la gloria del poeta es sentirse vencido" [the glory of the poet is to feel defeated] (idem). Pre-Socratic poetry invited María Zambrano to theorize exile with the logic of mediation proper to the literary oracular, designed to channel an organicity of transcendent experience away from religious and military totalitarianisms through the cultural conduit of the *sabio*, the proto-intellectual. What is remarkable about her juxtaposition of Anacreon and Rimbaud is how the systematicity of the proposed disarray of the senses is already perceptible. At the end of Ode XIII,

Zambrano reminds us, Anacreon's yearning for delirium is already *una queja* [a plaintive cry] which laments the fulfillment it can experience only through absence:

> And some, who to the waters throng
> Of laurell'd Phoebus, god of song,
> At Claros drink the vocal wave,
> And with prophetic fury rave;
> Then shall not I, when wine inspires,
> And Chloe's eyes dart love's bright fires;
> When bath'd in sweets, without alloy,
> And rapt in wild, delirious joy,
> Refuse awhile stern reason's sway,
> And be as madly wild as they? (*Odes*, 37–9)

To the extent that he refuses "reason's sway," Anacreon betrays the Logos, since he does not strive to save appearances or eternalize forms, knowing quite well that his indifference to eternity will earn him condemnation or expulsion, but he doesn't care, since this poetry's ethos is martyrdom. Giving everything and reserving nothing, the poet is redeemed by what he appears to lack. Part angel, part demon. In Zambrano's elective affinities, this enthusiasm was equally observable in post-Romantics like Baudelaire, who was the epitome; Rimbaud, the hyperbole; and Lautréamont, the anomaly. Poetry's primary function is to give and ask for nothing, a concession aspiring to purity, and the gift that it gives belongs to no one and to everyone, since no one deserves it but every so often everyone finds it. After Plato, she argued, one could look upon poetry only in horror, because it was antithetical to rational thought. In a word, the poets who were banished from *The Republic* belonged an historical community that reemerged in the early modern period, when their enthusiasm was Christianized into

grace, which, as we will see in 2.3.2, awoke an insatiable desire for communion among the heterodox mystics of baroque Spain. Finding unity of voice in pre-Socratic enthusiasm, mystical grace, and symbolist disarray, Zambrano's enchanting argument must have been perplexing for her teenage pupils at the Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo in Morelia, over whose heads loomed an ominous final exam.

2.3.2 Insatiable Desire for Communion: The Plaintive Cry in John of the Cross

Poetry had no right to make itself a public concern; it was a transgression of the Greek idea of truth. The way of the flesh challenges the aspirations of those who wish to liberate the soul from its bodily tomb. It would become heresy later among Christians, but this kind of mystical thinking was foreign to Greek asceticism. The "body as tomb," Zambrano points out, is already a trope of Plato's. In her third lecture in Morelia, the youthful philosopher describes this bodily tomb, this prison, as both active and passive, like an ocean. The movement of the tides affords a dialectic metaphor similar to what she elsewhere employed in ruins.[50] Then, in a remarkable turn of Surrealist rhetoric, she draws an analogy between the flesh and the sea, because one and the other destroys through seduction. The flesh is not something that man comes up against, but something that carries him away: the unfathomable, the insatiable desire whose

[50] See María Zambrano, "Two Essays on Ruins," *Modernist Cultures*, vol. 7, no. 1 (2012) pp. 98–113.

attainment is pure transgression. To accept this objective and pursue it, aware at the outset of the immanent destruction, constitutes martyrdom.

> La cárcel es la separación y la soledad. Mas en la soledad y en la separación, el alma se conserva fiel a sí misma, y es libre de recordar su alto origen, de sentir nostalgia de sus compañeros y de su remota patria. (*Filosofía*, 48)
>
> Prison is separation and solitude. But in solitude and in separation, the soul stays true to itself, and is free to remember its lofty origin, to feel nostalgia for its companions and for its remote homeland.[51]

The nature of the soul stands in relation to the divine, but also the immortal and the eternal. For Plato, the soul is born out of the hope of recovering its own nature. Zambrano observed that the homeward bound journey predates Plato who was responsible for giving it its systematically rational basis. Erwin Rohde's eccentric interpretations of orphism provided the evidence that Plato had turned hope into certainty.[52] So arose her paradox: nature had to be recovered but this recovery required nature's destruction. The central image now became an ascent into the light. Philosophy had to be justified and the answer to that calling constituted an "elección a la vida bienaventurada" [election of the blessed life]. The pursuit of light became the justification of philosophy's violence. This didn't change essentially with the rise of Christianity and the reinvention of Platonism in Renaissance Europe, where people lived and loved "según la carne" [in accordance with the flesh]. There is nothing spontaneous anymore about this flesh and, plunging into it one is aware of one's own

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[51] English versions of *Filosofía y poesía* are unpublished translations by José María Rodríguez García.
[52] See Erwin Rhodes, "The Orphics," *Psyche* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1925) pp. 335–61.

demise. This is because Plato, she claims, practiced theology and mystical contemplation. He sought to recover human nature and rescue the soul from the body. The outcome was theology, because he thinks rationally about the divine, yet also mysticism, to the extent that he provides a path to conversion: catharsis and dialectic. This mystical reason holds that the delirium of the passions is dear to the poet who does not care to eternalize them. This changes the paradigm of poetic experience insofar as its temporality is derived from the instant, the eternal present, the course of the river flowing with vitality, committing the poet to a present without duration. The longed-for totality is bemoaned in a plaintive song as a protest against pain, pleasure, and even love itself, figured canonically as the *amada ausente* [Absent Beloved]. If the philosopher is defined by his systematic search, the poet is unknown to himself because he seeks nothing and only finds.

> El poeta no se cuida de hacer el recuento de sus bienes y de sus males; el inventario de su fortuna. Porque el poeta no puede saber quién es; ni sabe siquiera lo que busca. El filósofo, al menos, sabe lo que busca y por ello se define —*filo-sofo*—. El poeta como no busca, sino que encuentra, no sabe cómo llamarse. (*Filosofía*, 59)

> The poet cannot know who he is, let alone know what he seeks. The poet is not concerned with the inventory of his fortunes, with taking stock of the goods and the ills in his life. The philosopher, at least, knows what he seeks and defines himself by it – philo-sopher. Since the poet looks for nothing, but rather always finds, he does not know what to call himself.

By the time Christianity introduced sin into the Platonic model of justice, the poet had already become the one touched by grace, and poetry, the unsayable experience of glorification. It was divine possession, jubilation, enthusiasm, delirium. . .

The absence of love as poetry's self-justification emerged paradigmatically in the poetry of Saint John of the Cross. Zambrano references him in this lecture; however, it is in a short article which she wrote in Morelia and published at the end of 1939 in *Sur* that she develops the connection more fully.[53] She unambiguously affirms that Christianity was something that the mystical poet of Segovia suffered and survived. In fact, "el místico no es problema netamente cristiano y tal vez lo que sea problema es cómo existe una mística cristiana" [mysticism is not a purely Christian problem and perhaps the problem is how there exists a Christian mysticism at all] ("San Juan," 49). The paradox of the mystical experience, a very Augustinian paradox as we shall see in chapter 2.4.1, arises as the Beloved's absence becomes inseparable from the poet because it is within him. Zambrano suggests that the mystic's desire for communion was already observable in the weariness of the dialectic in *The Republic* when the Myth of the Cave is interpolated, but in a poet like John of the Cross, the submergence into the flesh is marked by the anxious anticipation of reaching a totality which guides his search, even though it is unreachable. A slave to delirium, nothing can satisfy his desire for communion.

> El alma de quien se hace místico no puede proseguir en la naturaleza, ni tampoco en el conocimiento; ni tampoco en la poesía. ¿Cómo es que no le bastan ninguna de estas tres actividades fundamentales de la vida humana que son conocer, sentir y poder? Ni puede con el poder, ni le vale el conocer, ni se sostiene en el sentir. No parece estar enteramente conformado; es como si le faltase una parte de sí mismo, algo que no le permite asentarse en ninguna cosa. La atención va

[53] Zambrano, María. "San Juan de La Cruz: De la 'noche obscura' a la más clara mística," *Sur*, vol. 4, no. 63 (1939) p. 49.

> dirigida hacia algo no coincidente jamás con lo que ante sí tiene, y su amor está prendido de eso que le alumbra. ("San Juan," 49)
>
> The soul of someone who becomes a mystic cannot continue in nature, not in knowledge; much less in poetry. How is it that none of human life's three fundamental activities – knowing, feeling, willing – is not enough for him? He does not seem to be formed entirely, as though he lacked some part of himself, something that prevents him from settling for anything. His attention is drawn toward something that never coincides with what he beholds, and his love is ignited by what illuminates him.

2.4 Confession as Transformation and Expression

Zambrano's pronouncement of revelation as the source of philosophy turned her toward alternative literary genres such as the dialogue, the spiritual guide, the brief treatise, and the confession. Of these genres, the confession was most central to her early understanding of poetics. Around 1940, as the Nazis occupied Paris, where her mother and sister lived precariously, Zambrano left Morelia and travelled to Cuba and Puerto Rico. She spent the first half of the year in San Juan, where she gave minor lectures to social clubs and readers of the graduate student journal *Asomante*, before she returned to Havana and examined the crisis of western civilization in two separate works,[54] studying a form of self-reflection which demands that the reader/listener perform a similar self-reflection, because the goal is to determine the cause of a crisis. That this

[54] As with many of her works, Zambrano published (and republished) these two as multiple articles in different revues. *La confesión: género literario y método* was first published in book form by Luminar in Mexico City in 1943. It was originally published as two separate articles under the title "La confesión como género literario y como método" in the magazine *Luminar*, no. 3 (1941) pp. 292–332 and no. 6 (1943) pp. 20–51. *La agonía de Europa*, first published in book form in 1945 in Madrid by Editorial Sudamericana, was published as "La agonía de Europa," *Sur*, no. 72 (1940) pp. 16–35 and *Revista Cubana* (1941) pp. 5–25; "La violencia europea," *Sur*, no. 78 (1941) pp. 7–23; "La esperanza europea," *Sur*, no. 90 (1942) pp. 12–31; and "La destrucción de las formas," *El Hijo Pródigo*, no. 14 (1944) pp. 75–81. In-text references are to *Obras completas II*.

determination cannot occur individually, but rather demands the presence of a reader/listener, is reflective of the social text we have before us and reveals its inherently political message. In this sense, it seems to ask how western civilization can find a way out of that crisis, perhaps through a return to person-to-person conversations. While it is doubtful that Zambrano may have known Wordsworth's famous definition of poetry (phrased in the understandably masculinist and androcentric parlance of his time) as "man speaking to man," both authors seem to have attempted a retreat from party politics in the wake of blood-shedding events caused by extreme forms of insurrectionist populism, respectively the defeat of the Second Republic by the military and fascist insurgents in Zambrano and the French Revolution (specifically, the Reign of Terror) for Wordsworth. However, as in most of Zambrano's early writings, here too the social regime of the text has its aesthetic correlate, and the political diagnostic proves to operate just as effectively as a theory of confessional poetics.

Over the last several decades, the genre of confession and the confessional mode of poetry have received significant attention from literary theorists and critics. Tambling (1990) has examined confession from a historical perspective paying central focus to the evolution of notions of sexuality and sin. Sherwin (2011), for her part, has addressed confession in the context of the so-called "confessional poets" of the United States, known for their implementation of hermeneutic textual strategies (for example, in John Berryman's or Robert Lowell's poetry) and the vociferous attacks they have faced from

postmodern critics. Grobe (2017), in turn, expands on Sherwin's literary study by assessing such diverse cultural forms of "confessional performance" as poetry, comedy, social media, and reality T.V.

I want to suggest that Zambrano contributed to the theorization of confession a distinctively oracular logic of mediation. To make this case, let me call attention to Paul De Man's examination of confession as an "excuse" in his tropological study of the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. De Man (1979) showed how the French philosopher's ironically unrepentant *Confessions* set forth the self-perpetuating structure of the "excuse," the belated speech act that comes after the crime without closing off the apologetic text. He contends that "shame used as excuse permits repression to function as revelation and thus to make pleasure and guilt interchangeable. Guilt is forgiven because it allows for the pleasure of revealing its repression" (*Allegories of Reading*, 286). The excuse, he goes on, always exists as a fiction and as an empirical event, preventing either of these possibilities from being determined as the veridical.

> The indecision makes it possible to excuse the bleakest of crimes because, as a fiction, it escapes from the constraints of guilt and innocence. On the other hand, it makes it equally possible to accuse fiction-making… of being the most cruel. The knowledge of radical innocence also performs the harshest mutilations. Excuses not only accuse but they carry out the verdict implicit in their accusations. (293)

On one hand, the subject who confesses seeks to overcome guilt by elevating the values of truth and falsehood over the ethical values of good and evil, because such vices as greed and envy compel him to lie. In those revelations, "the economy of ethical

balance is restored and redemption can start in the clarified atmosphere of a truth that does not hesitate to reveal the crime in all its horror" (279). Excuses, in turn, occur in the indeterminate space between knowing and not-knowing, where all other excuses turn on the permissibility of lying (286). By excusing himself for lying, the subject does not seek reparations for his victims but a type of forgiveness that may release him from shame of having concealed the horror of his crime.

In María Zambrano's theory of confession, we may identify that element of the "excuse" described as an indeterminate space between knowing and not knowing, since she sees confession as a genre to which both poetry and philosophy historically have turned in their different attempts to bridge the gap between Greek Logos and lived experience, confession being the exemplary genre of this crisis. Unlike the voice of an imaginary world, the "viva voz" [living voice] of confession is verified in the real time of life, since confession does not seek a virtual temporality, but a real temporality that cannot be transcribed. Such a theory is symptomatic of nostalgia for an organic totality in which one does not feel the dislocated member of an invisible whole or the instrument of a mechanized process. However, the affliction of this ontological homesickness was expressed in the violent rhetoric of the "queja" [plaintive cry, complaint], taken etymologically from the Latin *quassare* meaning "to violently beat," "to forcefully shake," and "to shatter." That said, why should this nostalgia be expressed in

the figural language of a shattering complaint if its hope is the attainment of organic totality? This line of inquiry will necessarily have to address the question of temporality.

Zambrano suggests that, in his infinite mercy, God gave humans the gift of enchantment, and, out of jealousy he issued the punishment of condemnation. As humans were cast out of Paradise, she continues, they took with them the magic of its invented temporality. Poetry most closely resembles the confession insofar its reality is that of the spell, and poets in turn come closest to overcoming their condemned condition which is why they are "los malditos" [the damned]. With shattering complaints of the damned, confession is the language of someone whose condition as subject has not been erased. To make a confession is to be part of the whole by shattering it, horrified by the incompleteness of being.

Zambrano suggested that an authentic confession occurs *in* time but not *over* time and that the person who reads or hears a confession feels a similar ethical exercise repeat within him, reformulating Kant's dictum (that we are not to teach philosophy, but to philosophize) to claim that knowledge of confession is attained only by confessing. She argued that when we hear or read a confession, we verify in ourselves what has been confessed, and that this verification reveals our inwardness as a feeling whose cause resides within us. A confession can be made only by someone who hopes for the appearance of what he is not, since he waits to constitute himself by finding unity in another. She claimed that confession is a method that releases life from the paradox of

having to coincide with itself. As the language of hoping and waiting, in confession it is more important to make oneself visible than it is to be seen, since the confessional poet hopes to be gathered by the grace of unity striving to recover a lost paradise.

> Y la mayor necesidad de todas las biológicas y psicológicas es sentir alguna vez que coincidimos con nosotros mismos; sentir, aunque sea de momento, que el personaje que camina delante de nosotros se ha hecho visible y se ha dejado alcanzar por este otro que nos hemos encontrado siendo, sin haberlo buscado. (*La agonía de Europa*, 371)
>
> The greatest of all biological and psychological needs is to feel at some time that we coincide with ourselves; to feel, if only momentarily, that the character walking ahead of us has become visible and reachable by this other one whom we find ourselves being involuntarily.

In what turns into a critique of mass culture, Zambrano argued that Europeans had lost the power of abstraction. The radical idealism of the past produced a blind slavery to the most apparent and immediate reality, resulting in a lack of solitude. Whereas the multitudes of 1930s Spain were the sign of the subject's deeply embedded membership, a decade later they threatened to asphyxiate anyone who stood at a critical distance from Naturalism. Zambrano argued that, with the right discipline, one could attain solitude and in it, freedom, even when this space is to be found between the teeth of the monster. She admonished Europe for succumbing to passivity and directing its energy at bellicose combat and material competition. This passivity, she went on, was rooted in Naturalism. She shares this skeptical attitude toward Naturalism with Scheler, as I explained in chapter 2.2.1. For her, Naturalism is the path of least resistance for the mind, even if Nature is not transparent on its own accord but has been tamed by Greek

and Renaissance thought. By the time that Nature reached the modern subject, it resembled something docile and obedient which barely caused surprise. No matter how fantastic it is, every modern advancement or innovation seems perfectly *natural*.

In Zambrano's theory of confession, we see that Naturalism concealed its lost power of abstraction neatly within its claim to absolute objectivity. Denaturalized by the modern subject, the world was thrown into a disorder that horrified as much as it seduced and that poetically came into language as a plaintive cry for that which the subject was not. What is more, since confession always is partly demonic – otherwise there would be nothing to confess – it sometimes took the form of a spell, a curse, or a conjuring of spirits. When the naturalness of Nature hardens and cracks, a common substance becomes evident, and in this end of the world as we know it, we discover with certainty the knowledge of our most intimate essence, which is not exclusive to the individual being or the being of anyone else, since this common source is not invented but received by transmission, as through a channel. In Zambrano's exile, confession provided a method to proclaim the demand for the conduit of this transmission and for the discipline of the conduit:

> Y esto consustancial, esencia de nuestra propia vida que no nos pertenece, es irrenunciable; hemos de transmitirlo como nos lo transmitieron. Y de no hacerlo así, sentiremos el horror de que la continuidad de algo que viene desde muy atrás se ha quebrado precisamente en nosotros (*La agonía de Europa*, 343)
>
> And this consubstantial essence of our life, which does not belong to us, is inalienable; we must transmit it as others transmitted it to us. And should we not, we shall feel the horror of the continuity of something coming from long ago breaking precisely upon us.

2.4.1 The Conduit between Antiquity and Modernity: Augustine of Hippo

Since Zambrano was not the only modernist to be seduced by the patrician of modern inwardness (e.g. Martin Heidegger and Hannah Arendt),[55] it is worth asking what the converted Church father had to say so urgently to the 20th century. A fellow traveler in a foreign land, Augustine of Hippo, in the eyes of Zambrano, despite his sainthood, was a philosopher who looked for ways to neutralize the effects of the gods while bringing the new faith into ancient culture through the work of "translatio duplex" because a Christianizing of existing pagan repositories of wisdom happens concurrently with heavy rephrasings and of the interlinguistic translation from Greek or Hebrew source texts.[56] Like Seneca in this regard, Augustine represented the mediation of philosophy in its search for new a totality and organicity of human experience. Despite his concern for the constitution of Nature, Augustine believed that being united with God was the best way to retain inwardness. Zambrano argued that this characteristic had defined European religious life. After Augustine brought to bear Platonic ideas on the act of creation, the notion of Nature came to designate the world created by the divine and the product of this creation would be designated with the

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[55] In 1921, Heidegger delivered the talk "Augustine and Neoplatonism" at Freiberg, in *The Phenomenology of Religious Life* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010) pp 113–84; in 1928, Hannah Arendt wrote her doctoral thesis on *Love and Saint Augustine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); and José Bergamín translated *La libertad y la gracia de San Agustín* by Paul Ludwig Landsberg (México: Séneca, 1940).
[56] For the concept of "translatio duplex" (alternatively designated as "translatio secunda") in Augustine and its influence in Spanish America, see José María Rodríguez García, *The City of Translation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) pp. xxiii, 34–35, 122, 178 n6.

consoling words of Stoicism. Zambrano considered the Hebrew Yahweh as the god of Europe, calling attention to the fact that he was a god of creation and that, while the appearance of the god of Christianity did not erase the former god, the new god was more *merciful* than *creative*.

Yahweh's creative impulse would eventually win out over the impulse of misericordia in Europe, producing the image that man has of himself as a creature who can create and who throws himself at the world from the solitude in which he landed after the fall from Paradise. This is the God of Saint Augustine's *Confessions* – a work in which we find the son of ancient culture stepping into the new culture, which is also the point of convergence for the new God and the new human. For Zambrano, the birth of European culture can be periodized within the lifetime of Augustine of Hippo, whose life reveals this transition and whose conversion was historical since it showed a way out of crisis in which the ancient world dies so that it may endure. As she asks in *La confesión*, if Augustine marks this transition, then what is born and what dies? Whereas Greek philosophy and Roman law would endure within the institution of the Catholic Church, what changed was the man engendered by the new faith and the new direction that his hope would take. Indeed, hope was the formula that responded to the need for rebirth as a way out of the crisis of objectivity:

> Toda resurrección no es sino la transmutación de algo que sigue siendo lo mismo, pero que ya no puede permanecer ni un instante más en su forma, y así, de pronto, en lo más escondido, encuentra una nueva inspiración, encuentra que su esperanza y desesperación andaban enredadas o eran demasiado difíciles, y descubre otras nuevas. Esta transmutación de esperanzas y desesperaciones es la

> que nos muestran las *Confesiones* de san Agustín. Y con ello vemos bien claramente, con sencilla evidencia, que una cultura humana no es sino un sistema de esperanzas y desesperaciones. (*La confesión*, 364)
>
> Every resurrection is but the transmutation of something that continues to be the same, but that can no longer remain an instant more in its form, and thus, in the most hidden of places, it suddenly finds a new inspiration, it finds out that its hopes and despairs grew tangled or too complicated, and it discovers new ones. The *Confessions* of St. Augustine shows us this transmutation of hope and despair. It allows to see clearly, with simple proof, that a human culture is but a system of hopes and despairs.

In Augustine, Zambrano identified the new paradigm that revelation would take within the framework of a nascent modernity. Against a backdrop of Greek melancholy and the disillusionment of the man who no longer had to find a foundation since philosophy had decided that he die in life, Augustine opens the new path. Since the human is not whole, there was a need to know oneself, and this knowledge leads to the being whose possibility is life itself. Zambrano was convinced that the confession distinguished itself from other genres insofar as it showed life as this path – a point she had intimated in "Hacia un saber sobre el alma," as we saw in chapter 2.2.1. Confession reveals the transition from that which one is to that toward which one is directed. Augustine provided a method of mediation between the dark self [*yo oscuro*] from which we flee and paradoxically identify as the obstacle between us and our projects, and the other self of our dreams which we confuse for ourselves in the most fortunate and ephemeral of moments. The new man of Europe would always have a two-sidedness, since while living within this system he also carries a system within him. Or, as Augustine has it in Book One of *Confessions*:

> What place is there in me to which my God can come, what place that can receive the God who made heaven and earth? Does this then mean, O Lord my God, that there is in me something fit to contain you? Can even heaven and earth, which you made and in which you made me, contain you? Or, since nothing that exists could exist without you, does this mean that whatever exists does, in this sense, contain you? If this is so, since I too exist, why do I ask you to come into me? (22)

The two worlds of modern man would henceforth require the practice of mediation.[57] Zambrano's description of this need was grounded in an oracular logic. What the modern man has in common with every other man in history is the need to inhabit himself, to turn himself into his own environment [*medio*], but his fathomless interiority – his hope for resurrection on earth – gave rise to the revolutionary demand of a world that always remains on the horizon. This historical angst, she argued, was symptomatic of his desire to nominalize his dreams in search of a way to keep believing in them. She understood confession as a genre that appears throughout history in moments of crisis, when one's being is defined by its insufficiency, like a fragment in an order that one cannot see. The person who makes a confession recognizes his essential indigence, negotiating his existential condition of orphanhood with nostalgia for an organicity of transcendent experience. His avid hope to reintegrate into a totality made the transhistorical temporality of revelation the most effective way to place the

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[57] Zambrano does not deal with the complex political implications of adapting to the twentieth century Augustine's two-sided human identity as conceived against the horizon of totality embodied by the Christian deity. Augustine grappled with these implications in *The City of God*, where he triangulates the faithful's relation to the divine by positing a threefold polity as the conflicted sphere of human endeavor: our consciousness moves continually between the "civitas Dei," the "civitas terrena" and the "civitas diaboli," and these transitions are eased and signified by the mediating "civitas permixta"/ "corpus admixtum." For a summary discussion, see Rodríguez García, *The City of Translation* xxiv, 36 and passim.

individual before an experiential truth that was impervious to reason, so that, in this eternal present, life would transform.

Zambrano reached the conclusion that until Augustine's *Confessions*, classical philosophies never had the time to concern themselves with the soul because they were so busy arming a defense for their abandonment of it. Whereas Greek philosophy ignored the religious foundations of its own mighty systems, modern philosophy abjured the demand to transform *life* and proposed to transform *truth* instead. "¿Dónde está la verdad que la razón moderna ha deparado para el hombre, para el hombre sencillo, para el hombre sin más?" [Where is the truth that modern logic has provided man, the simple man, the one who is merely a man?] (*La confesión*, 296). Human life was abandoned, left ignorant or confused, overtaken by positivist reason or else humiliated by dogma. Pride and humiliation inhabited the modern psyche, creating the need for this reform of European thought, which would not have been necessary, she contends, had Europe, like Saint Augustine, made a terrible confession.

2.4.2 Post-Romantic Ramifications: Literary Life and the Underground

María Zambrano's elective affinities allowed her to seat at the table the saintly Augustine of Hippo and the rather unsaintly Jean-Jacques Rousseau. When Rousseau made his confessions, she points out, the method split in two. On one hand, there was the Romantic who no longer tried to transform life in the presence of truth but simply to express as originally as possible his fortunate encounters with the lost psyche. On the

other hand, there was the post-Romantic "underground man" [*subterráneo*] who felt condemned, because he longed for a lost paradise that he had no room for in himself even if he could find it, which he could not. (I will return to the "underground" in chapter 4.2.2.) This bifurcation made anguish the only purity possible for the Romantic who does not want to have a history, whose ecstatic possessions are of the same tradition as the mystical gaze of grace. Like the possessed subject of modernism described by Georges Bataille in *Inner Experience*, the subject is "tormented" by his inconfessable desire to cleave himself from history and be timeless. As Zambrano would observe in Rousseau, this condition of "being possessed" was combined with the condition of "being dispossessed," that is, the subject's inability to find a self-image of plenitude within himself or the possibility of a paradisal community in the world outside. After the psyche was abandoned by Greek philosophy and mediated by primitive Christianity and Stoicism, this charitable heart was naturalized. Since Zambrano's concern from the beginning has been to study confession as a method but also as a literary genre, she now distinguishes two post-Romantic ramifications of confession which had endured to the literary avant-gardism of her day.

On one hand, confession was an ephemeral encounter with the "natural heart" in a subject whose first revelation is his own dissatisfaction, a conclusion also reached by Octavio Paz in *El arco y la lira.* Literary life is the kind of nature that sustains itself in the most beautiful Nature with a terrible nostalgia where reality responds exactly to desire.

Zambrano argued that Rousseau's confessions became "poesía literaturizada" [literaturized poetry], the reconquest of Paradise, the histories of the heart that only rarely is reached. This marked a significant transformation in the genre of confession, Zambrano argued, because it now had become the solitary life of the Christian heart that amuses itself in its history, living in imaginary landscapes. Adjacent to the literaturized poetry of Rousseau's confessions, however, a more demanding poetry emerged which took the form of an inner discipline which was devoted to the transmutation of life.

Although Zambrano recognized Baudelaire and Rimbaud as children of this "natural heart," with their artificial heavens and hells and their extremist intentions, Surrealism stood out to her as one of the clearest examples of confessional poetry in the mid-century, because it was an avid search that resembled a religion and not a scientific method in the manner of psychoanalysis. However, Zambrano also found Surrealism's excision of the self, which it shared with psychoanalysis, to be entirely problematic.[58] Despite its poetic character, she argued, Surrealism could not avoid the belief that the psychic is human reality itself, which motivated its practitioners to search for that original activity on the path of the psyche. Both Surrealism and psychoanalysis committed the same error of attending to the part of the psyche that belongs to no one – the part that "está fuera al parecer del sujeto consciente, del sueño que se llama yo" [is outside the perception of the conscious subject, the dream called 'I'" (*La confession*, 42).

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[58] This impersonal path, as we will see in chapter 3, is preferred by Octavio Paz and exemplified in *Blanco*.

Zambrano was not willing to excise the subject on the premise that psychic life constituted reality, but rather she advanced the claim that art and life were interdependent, and here we see the literary oracular at work:

> El arte nacido de tal íntima interioridad encontrará el cauce de su legítima independencia, al no pretender suplantar a la vida real. Y el vivir literariamente, la falsificación literaria de la vida, se hará imposible; arte y vida real se complementan, pues si el arte existe, es porque él nos proporciona algo que las horas cotidianas no nos dan, es porque ofrece lo que el tiempo de la realidad nos niega, es porque la vida lo necesita como agente de una acción que sin él no podría realizar. Entre tantas cosas que los europeos modernos hemos olvidado, se cuenta la función medicinal del arte, su poder de curación casi mágico, su taumaturgia legítima. (idem)
>
> Art born from such intimate inwardness will find the source of its legitimate independence, insofar as it does not try to supplant real life. And literary living, the literary falsification of life, will become impossible; art and real life complement each other. If art exists, it is because it gives us something that everyday time does not give us, because it offers what the time of reality denies us, because life needs it as the agent of an action that could not be carried out without it. Among so many things that we modern Europeans have forgotten is art's medicinal function, its almost magical healing power, its legitimate thaumaturgy.

This passage alone would suffice to show that Zambrano was attuned to the early-to-mid-20th-century debates on modernism, and that she herself helped displace the Romantic understanding of literature as a substitute for life – as in Rousseau's comparison of his novels to a guignol where he could act as puppet master – with the modernists' claim that art may alleviate the generalized condition of neurosis (even if she referred to it as anguish or suffering), which was endemic in the age of the urban masses, the train schedule, the assembly line, and the growing authority of science to the detriment of religion. The 'legitimate thaumaturgy' of confessional poetry was nowhere

so evident as in the underground men of post-Romanticism – Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Dostoevsky, all proto-existentialists to varying degrees – who yearned so deeply to exist that they became suicidal. Living in persecution as if by the Greek furies, they came closest to overcoming the condemnation of philosophy and, therefore, are precisely the accursed, the damned, *los malditos*, since they cast off tragedy and conquered a different solitude that was communicable: the solitude of the living dead. In a mysterious world that needs to be unified, considering oneself the "living dead" was the only solution for the modern who had lost realities which nonetheless went on to occupy his inner life. This lack of inner space produced the "queja," chilling screams from the grave, the panting of a man buried alive on the verge of suffocation, as they desperately sought to make more room for reality while being held captive by delirium.

Zambrano argued that the living dead, or underground men, were compelled to appropriate a reality foreign to them and from it they were to extract their own being, since their tragedy grew out of the lack of a subject who was exempt from fate and freed from the passions. Their groans from the depths of a tomb, which was their private inferno, echoed in plaintive cries for help made in an increasingly merciless age. This explained why such underground poetry was to be celebrated by merciful individuals who formed brotherhoods or leagues, like the cult to a missing person who needs us for his survival in the liturgy of remembrance and commemoration. For Zambrano, the

crisis of Europe was symptomatic of Naturalism's failure to account for its lost power of abstraction. The agony of the age could be heard in the underground "quejas" of the living dead, who revealed their association with a poetic tradition of revelation that emerges during periods of crisis. Europe's true problem, Zambrano contended, was that it had not confessed:

> La pavorosa faz de la actualidad, ¿no nos presenta sin duda, esta figura de un mundo sin sujeto, donde ha desaparecido el sujeto, donde el yo anda errante como rey sin súbitos ni territorio, donde no existe por parte alguna el alguien responsable, el alguien con identidad y figura propia? Mundo anterior al ser, en que lo psíquico tiene la existencia demoníaca de la multiplicidad inapresable y diluída; mundo de donde han huído las formas, quedando sólo el fantasma inasible y rencoroso; el fantasma y el vacío. ¿No estará necesitado de una verdadera e implacable confesión? (*La confesión*, 51)
>
> Does not the frightening face of our time present us without a doubt this figure of a subject-less world, where the subject has disappeared, where the Self wanders like a king without subjects or reign, where no one responsible is to be found anywhere, no one with an identity and figure of his own? A world prior to being, insofar as the psyche has the demonic existence of an ungraspable and dissolved multiplicity; a world that forms have fled, leaving only the unassailable and rancorous ghost; the ghost and the void. ¿Might it not be in need of a truly implacable confession?

3. Mediating the Simultaneous: Poetics and Public Relations of Octavio Paz

Although Octavio Paz went to great lengths to conceal his early political writings, revise the poetry of his youth, and amend representations of his public persona so that it would retain consistency and continuity with his newest political and aesthetic positions, the archive offers a different account. There was a time when Paz wrote poetry that condemned the exploitative labor practices of rural Mexico, when being an aspiring revolutionary poet entailed writing columns for communist newspapers in support of Republican Spain, praising the workers of the Soviet Union, and speaking at international political rallies of the radical Left. Like many intellectuals of his generation, Octavio Paz also participated in community outreach that supported the expansion of public education far afield from cosmopolitan life in Mexico City. From his early activity in engaged cultures, it is not hard to discern that Paz once believed that the intellectual had a role to play in the mobilization of the social underclass and in the democratic incorporation of historically subalternized populations, antithetical as this portrait may be to the belligerent critic of *El ogro filantrópico* [The Philanthropic Ogre].

Our inquiry into visionary forms of cultural mediation now will address the poetics and public relations of Mexican polymath, diplomat, and Nobel laureate Octavio Paz to determine the conditions and rhetorical strategies which facilitated his remarkable ascendency in the marketplace of ideas in Mexico and transatlantic cultures

more broadly. In addition to studying his *literature* and *literary persona*, I am equally concerned with his role as a journalist, editor, anthologist, and public speaker, which is to say that his activity as a cultural promotor falls directly within the scope of this research. In this chapter, I ask how the author's early activity as a poet, literary delegate at national and international gatherings and events, anthologist, journalist, and public speaker facilitated his rise to prominence during a period that spans roughly 1936–1956. With respect to his substantial influence on the public forum of social discourse, how did the value of his critical perspectives relate to his preeminence as a poet? How did his unrelenting practice of revisionism relate to his fluid theorization of poetics? And finally, to what degree was his success the outcome of his own rhetorical strategies and to what extent was it the product of a credulous attitude adopted by commentators who accepted his self-interpretations and the persona that he projected and handed down to posterity? Paz is indeed exceptional in having created a comprehensive and encompassing critical framework for interpreting his own poetic output historically and aesthetically, and in convincing many capable academics and critics *not to read him* outside the parameters that he himself promulgated.

To begin, we must turn to Paz's multifaceted activities as a poet, delegate, journalist, anthologist, and public speaker in the 1930s–1940s. Such manifold cultural production proved fundamental to his ascent in public notoriety and to the authority he came to enjoy as an effectual voice that shaped public discourse in the mid-century. The

public reception of Paz in the 1960s would embellish his youthful political engagement, following the author's lead in interviews, notes that he appended to poems, prologues to new editions, and warnings [*advertencias*] he added to revised works.[1] This careful management of his public persona and the afterlives of his work has received vibrant critical attention (Medina 1999; Pastén 1999; González Torres 2002). Operating in the field opened by these studies, this research interprets the social meaning of the cultural forms employed by Paz, while at the same time using hermeneutic tools developed by poststructuralist theories of authorship to account for the self-reflexivity of much of his output. So, let us begin by asking how this author came to attain so much authority.

In Paz's early poetry, modernization emerges out of the conflict between a delayed arrival of democratic incorporation and the regrettable fragmentation of tradition. Written in the Yucatan during a service-learning program sponsored by the Lázaro Cárdenas administration, the poem *Entre la piedra y la flor* [Between the Stone and the Flower] invites us to evaluate the poet's early social awareness and the role of poetry in popular mobilization.[2] I wish to contend – with Rubén Medina and against Enrico Mario Santí – that Paz's revisionism was not the simple evolution of a developing intellectual, but rather a deliberate practice through which his preeminence as a poet

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[1] A strong theoretical model that addresses the management Paz's persona and the afterlives of his work, specifically in relation to the genre of *advertencias*, is found in Guido Podestá, "Octavio Paz's Poetic Justice: Reading His 'Advertencias,'" *Siglo XX/20th Century*, vol. 10, nos. 1–2 (1992) pp. 211–20.

[2] Other materials that support this claim include a letter from Paz to Elena Garro and a notebook entry from his four-month term of service. See Mario Enrico Santí, "Poesía e historia," *Entre poética y política* (Mexico City: Colegio de México, 2009) pp. 30–1.

served to authorize his critical positions. Paz's numerous variegated statements on the nature of poetry required that his own poetry (even the early poetry) exemplify his latest theories, thus demanding their constant revision. During the 1960s, the malleability resulting from his revisionism certified his critical judgements, which would promote poetry that was compatible with his own, reject poetry that diverged from his latest framework, and deauthorize the arguments of critics based on their status as critics and critics alone. For Paz believed that those writers who were not themselves *strong* poets lacked the authority to assess poetry critically. By and large, his domination of the institutions that make literature possible was achieved by taking unpopular "independent" positions in debates with the revolutionary Left.

In 1937, during Mexico's most progressive post-revolutionary administration, Octavio Paz traveled to Spain to attend the Second International Congress of Writers in Defense of Culture in Valencia. Aside from reading a battle hymn and lecturing on modern Mexican poetry, this delegation experience (anticipating his later diplomatic service in Europe and Asia) became a social networking exercise with salient literary figures, editors, and publishers. Returning to Mexico with an intensified political commitment and a diversified strategy of cultural production, he wrote pro-Republican columns for the Communist newspaper *El Nacional*; he reinvented the Mexican literary tradition as a coeditor of the anthology *Laurel*; and he pronounced his first theory of poetics at a religious festival. Through political engagement, cultural production, and

public speaking events, Octavio Paz established himself as an unavoidable voice on Mexican art and literature during the Second World War. Over the next ten years, however, as he published *Libertad bajo palabra* incrementally, his interpretive model of solitude/communion became dissonant with his own poetry. This would not be the last time that this problem of divergence appeared.

3.1 Poetry, Engagement, and the Practice of Revisionism

In 1937, Octavio Paz moved out of his family's home and travelled to Mérida, Yucatán, in a service-learning program, which, since the creation of the Secretariat of Public Education in 1920, had opened channels for young intellectuals to participate directly in the expansion of the public education system to underserved rural communities.[3] His poem *Entre la piedra y la flor*, published in 1941, was written with the sensitivity of a socially comfortable 23-year-old cosmopolitan exposed for the first time to the hostility of manual labor in rural Mexico. His notes from Mérida reveal a young, concerned, sheltered academic from the city who, for the first time, "descends" from his

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[3] For literacy, publishing, and public libraries, see Adolfo Rodríguez Gallardo, *José Vasconcelos: alfabetización, bibliotecas, lectura y edición* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2015); for socialist mobilization in vernacular print culture, see Verónica Ruiz Lagier, "El Maestro Rural y La Revista de Educación. El sueño de transformar al país desde la editorial," *Signos Históricos*, vol. 15, no. 29 (2013) pp. 36–63; for intellectual engagement and the problem of weak democratic incorporation, see Guillermo Palacios, "Postrevolutionary Intellectuals, Rural Readings and the Shaping of the 'Peasant Problem' in Mexico: El Maestro Rural, 1932–34," *Journal of Latin American Studies* vol. 30, no. 2 (1998) pp. 309–39; and for the relation between artistic performance and public policy, see Alejandro Ortiz Bullé-Goyri, "El teatro indigenista mexicano de los años veinte: ¿Orígenes del teatro popular mexicano actual?," *Latin American Theatre Review*, September (2003) pp. 75–93.

comfortable position in the capital and lands in the substratum of society, confronting the exploited indigenous labor force sustaining the economy.[4]

The first version of the poem was highly lyrical, with a lavish employment of anaphora, a scheme endemic among young poets of the time who remained deeply influenced by the image of the sermonic bard embodied by Walt Whitman.[5] This much seemed true even to Paz himself, whose recognition of this poem's social text – written during an outreach program – is evinced by his inclusion of the geographical location and date of the poem's creation: Mérida, Yucatán, 1937. This awareness is also evident in the colophon, which the author signed by hand, in all 200 copies. An investment in his own prestige, the signature he added to each book was also an autograph.

In *Entre la piedra y la flor*, the lyric subject is a stranger in a foreign land, who asks, "¿Qué tierra es ésta?" [What land is this?] (5), dramatizing the discovery of Mexican society's heterogenous composition. The henequen plant is the central image of the text and highlights its regional specificity, visualizing the invisible labor of an agricultural commodity, which turns the poem into a critique of western capitalism's barbarism, as it was called. A witness to this exploitation, the subject yearns to sing to the humble Mayan peasant, who perspires under the burning sun, toiling in the henequen fields: "Si

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[4] The metaphor of "descending' to the social substratum is Paz's own creation in his description of disembarking the airplane in Yucatán in his letter to Elena Garro.
[5] This influence is evident in Jorge Luis Borges translation, *Hojas de hierba*, as well as Pablo Neruda's *Residencia en la tierra*, where the lyric subject fashions himself as the prophetic mouthpiece of social heterogeneity.

yo pudiera,/ en esta orilla que la sed ilumina,/ cantar al hombre que la habita y la puebla,/ cantar al hombre que su sed aniquila!" [If on this shore/ illuminated by thirst, I could sing/ to the man who inhabits and populates it/ sing to the man whose thirst annihilates him] (8).[6] The urgency of this cosmopolitan desire to fraternize with the rural underclass is reflected by the pervasive anaphora. However, this sermonic tone may easily overshadow the fact that in this construction the apodosis is but a ghost, a clause suggested but never stated, and that the protasis multiplies into a protracted parallelism that extols the virtues of the agriculturalist while at the same time it articulates the impossibility of communication through an unsatiating anapodoton.

Since the subject wishes that his poetry could reach the campesino, although it cannot, the poetic statement is directed at a reader who will be sympathetic with the lyric subject's failed attempt to communicate. In this poem, more tragic than the plight of the campesino is the cosmopolitan subject's frustrated communication with him – a frustration that returns with greater exacerbation in the last section where money is proclaimed the vile corruptor of modernity. This is more than an attack on the oligarchy that had dominated the henequen industry since the Porfiriato[7]; indeed, it argues that the capitalist proposal of democracy as the protection of personal liberties came at the

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[6] Translations of *Entre la piedra y la flor* are my own.

[7] For historical perspectives on the henequen industry, see Allen Wells, "All in the Family: Railroads and Henequen Monoculture in Porfirian Yucatan," *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, vol. 72, no. 2 (1992) pp. 159–209; M. C. Zuleta, "Hacienda Publica and Henequen Exports in Yucatan, 1880–1910," *Historia Mexicana*, vol. 54, no. 1 (2004) pp. 179–247; and Piedad Peniche Rivero, "The Domestic Community of the Henequen Hacienda in Yucatan, Mexico, 1870–1915," *Mexican Studies*, vol. 15, no. 1 (1999) pp. 1–32.

cost of the public good. The lyric subject perceives modernization's delayed arrival to the Yucatan peninsula and his anxiety is exacerbated by the insight that capitalist rationalization has disrupted the latifundia only to produce legal forms of subjugation that were no less violent and exclusionary. Submerged in anaphora at the end of the poem, the subject petitions fire to empower him with its rage so that the land may burn and regenerate: "¡Arde!... para acabar con todo" [Burn!... and lay it all to rest] (14).

Until the early 1940s, as Medina reports, the poetics of Octavio Paz consisted of a reconciliation between man and nature – an antithesis between the world as a presence and the world as an ideal representation. Eroticism was his modality of reconciliation between man in his primordial state and the utopia of a classless society organized by poetry. After Paz gave the Norton Lectures at Harvard in 1972, where he advanced "analogy" as the guiding principle of modern poetry, the poetic persona of his early engaged poetry stood in contrast to the image of the poet that he was promoting through criticism. As he continued to compile and republish his poems, he revised and, in the case of *Entre la piedra y la flor*, rewrote the text to attenuate that dissonance. This is perceptible in the omission of historical references to the exploited workers in a poem that now is more abstract. Moreover, the omitted anaphora in the revision moderates the sermonic tone that the young Paz had inherited from Romanticism.

A critical and dramatic dimension of the first version was created by the historical referents, the lyric subject, and the Yucatec laborer, making it virulent and compassionate

at the same time, because the subject suffers his own impotence when faced with the exploitation of the campesinos. In the 1976 revision, the inner struggle between impotence and social reality vanished altogether. Now, the subject is alienated from the landscape that he has fashioned out of words, even though the first-person plural narration would assume his inclusion in it. He now fatalistically accepts a degraded reality where one can only glimpse but never obtain an endless flux of energy.

In the 1976 revision of *Entre la piedra y la flor*, brown birds still fly like winged mud, but the tone of the poem has lost its youthful exuberance. The henequen plant remains the "índice verde" [green forefinger] that serves as a geographical signpost of the Yucatán, but when the lyric subject asks, "¿Qué tierra es ésta?" (87), rather than evoking the astonished disorientation of a young stranger in a foreign land, it calls forth the incredulity of a cosmopolitan who wonders how anyone can inhabit such an inhospitable place. Despite his solidarity with the campesino, the subject now questions how enlightened the laborer's religiosity is. This anti-Christian sentiment, inherited from late Mexican liberalism, in Paz was fused with a critique of instrumental reason. Christianity was no less defunct than capitalism. The lyric subject accuses the workers of kneeling before altars and pulpits until their knees bled, holding a votive candle that, dripping hot wax, burned them. The problem of Christian temporality in Paz found its alternative response in the cyclical: "Entre la piedra y la flor, el hombre:/ el nacimiento

que nos lleva la muerte,/ la muerte que nos lleva al nacimiento" [Between the stone and the flower, man:/ birth which takes us to death,/ death which takes us to birth] (88).

Entre la piedra y la flor is the most loyal display of Paz's historical concerns during the early phase of his poetry. It describes the effects of the exploitation of the Yucatec campesino without endeavoring to explain the causes, as he had done in his poems about the Second Republic of Spain. In addition to "¡No pasarán!" and *Bajo tu clara sombra*, this was one of the poet's major literary products released for the first time when he was still making a name for himself. His early support of the Second Spanish Republic and engaged intellectual activity in Mexico soon converged. On the heels of his return from Mérida, after four months away from Mexico City during his gap period of "experiential learning," Paz was invited by Pablo Neruda to be a delegate in Spain at the Second International Congress of Writers in Defense of Culture in the middle of the Civil War. Paz's 1937 experience in Spain profoundly awoke in him an urgency to agitate in the name of communism during a four-year period in which he wrote many texts that he quickly came to regret and that, for the rest of his life, he did not reprint and, in some cases, did not even claim attribution. At the same time, this experience put him in contact with a vast web of salient cultural producers who, in years to come, facilitated his ascent in transatlantic modern and in the marketplace of ideas. So, let me turn to Octavio Paz in Spain.

3.1.1 Literary Delegation as Social Networking: Spain, 1937

When General Francisco Franco overthrew the government constituted by the Second Republic of Spain, the insurrection reverberated around the world but resonated especially in Mexico, where the revolutionary state had been promoting solidarity and civic responsibility for the previous fifteen years as a strategy of national consolidation. Let us recall that the Lázaro Cárdenas's six-year presidential term came in the wake of the Cristera War, which had exposed and exacerbated fractures on the left between partisans of the socialized State and the final traces of liberal humanism. In response to the conflict on the other side of the Atlantic, Octavio Paz wrote the poems "¡No pasarán!," "Elegía a un compañero muerto en la frente de Aragón," and "El barco" before he travelled to Europe. These poems earned him notoriety and attracted the attention of Rafael Alberti in 1935, when he visited Mexico, and that of Pablo Neruda, who invited him to be a delegate at the Second International Congress of Writers in the Defense of Culture.[8]

In 1937, Octavio Paz, who may have been the youngest participant in the conference, could be characterized as an antifascist member of the Juventud Socialista Unificada de México and fellow traveler in the communist cause. He spent a week in Madrid in early July, before arriving in Barcelona, where he participated in a Catalan-

[8] For comprehensive historical study of the Second International Conference of Writers in the Defense of Culture, including reproductions of the minutes, speeches, and first-hand accounts, see Manuel Aznar-Soler, *II Congreso*.

American act of fraternity organized by the Alianza de Intelectuales para la Defensa de la Cultura held at the Casal del Merge. Although he did not present at the conference, he attended an antifascist rally sponsored by the Front Nacional de la Joventut, where he read his battle hymn "¡No pasarán!" – a long poem with epic aspirations in which the lyric subject blends his anger with the outrage of the multitude in a landscape that transforms into a scene of fascist terrorism. Parallel to the eroticism of *Raiz de hombre*, a referential mode emerged in Paz's poetry with its concern for the fate of society and human solidarity. Yet, this text which announces in his poetry a new opening to the historical reference, was later rejected by the author and categorically omitted from all editions of the collected poems. Therefore, "¡No pasarán!" merits our careful consideration not only because of what it has to say to us, but also because the author wanted to prevent it from saying anything at all. But what was so regrettable?

Alongside the *romances* that Republican poets were producing, "¡No pasarán!" belongs to a genre of lyrical battle hymns written by Hispanic foreigners in a gesture of solidarity.[9] However, unlike César Vallejo or Pablo Neruda, Paz wrote his poem before he traveled to Spain, not as a reflection after the trip.[10] The title came from one of the most common antifascist slogans of the war, revealing a poetic discourse that accommodates the vernacular of the progressive multitude and seeks to unambiguously

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[9] See Antonio R. Rodríguez Moñino, *Romancero general de la guerra de España* (Madrid-Valencia: Ediciones españolas, 1937).

[10] See César Vallejo, "España, aparta de mí este cáliz" (México: Editorial Séneca, [1940]); Pablo Neruda, *España en el corazón: himno a las glorias del pueblo en la Guerra* (Santiago de Chile, Ediciones Ercilla, 1938).

convey an affiliation with its political platform. Describing battle scenes in Extremadura, Irún, and Badajoz, the poem portrays mutilated soldiers, blood dripping from their mouths, whose bodies were strewn across the decimated landscape. Here, as in the poetry of Jaime Saenz, the image of the "entrañas" is employed with all its polysemic richness as the innermost recesses, the most intimate place within oneself (the psyche), but also the entrails, guts, and intestines. It is from this deepest of places that the battle-cry emerges:

> Como la seca espera de un revólver
> o el silencio que precede a los partos,
> escuchamos al grito;
> habita en las entrañas,
> se detiene el pulso,
> asciende de las venas a los labios:
> No pasarán. (39)
>
> Like the dry anticipation of a gun
> or the silence that precedes childbirth,
> we hear the cry;
> it inhabits our guts,
> the heartbeat stops,
> it rises from our veins to our lips:
> They shall not pass.

Paz's participation in the conference in Spain was animated by his brief political alignment with communism, which lasted approximately from 1936 to 1941, and by his desire to establish himself internationally as a relevant voice of anti-totalitarian militarism and anti-bourgeois intellectualism. The conference was an effective social networking opportunity for the young poet who ingratiated himself with the prominent cultural brokers he met during his delegation to Spain. He made numerous friendships

and cultivated working relationships with António Sánchez Barbudo, Arturo Serrano Plaja, Emilio Prados, Eduardo Vicente, Juan Gil-Albert, José Herrera Petere, and Ramón Gaya. Thanks to this network, he published an elegy in *Hora de España* a few months later,[11] and he collaborated with many from that circle once he started editing the magazine *Taller* in 1938, having returned to Mexico.[12]

The conference also was an opportunity for Paz to reconnect with Rafael Alberti and María Teresa León, whom he had met in Mexico in 1935 and with whose help he published an interview in *El Mono Azul*, where he praised the youth of Spain and the "hermoso ejemplo de los trabajadores soviéticos [quienes] nos dicen que lo que esperamos y soñamos es una realidad" [a beautiful example of the Soviet workers who tell us that what we're hoping for and dreaming of is a reality].[13] Finally, in August 1937, after the conference and before Paz returned to Mexico, he published *Bajo tu clara sombra y otros poemas sobre España*, with a foreword by the editor Manuel Altolaguirre.[14] This entrance into the international print industry proved highly consequential for a poet who seems to have been as eager to promote poetry as he was to write it. This activity of

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[11] See "Elegía para un compañero muerto en el frente," *Hora de España*, no. 9 (1937) pp. 39–42.
[12] In 1938, Octavio Paz also became a contributing editor of *Taller*, which placed him in a circle of Mexican writers, such as Efraín Huerta, Alberto Quintero Álvarez, Neftalí Baltrán and Rafael Vega Abela. Soon this circle would open to Spanish refugees who had worked closely on *Hora de España*, including Juan Gil-Albert, Antonio Sánchez Barbudo, and José Herrera Petere. Paz's early immersion into vernacular print culture also included contributions to the magazines *Ruta*, *Romances, Letras de México, Futuro* and *Sur.*
[13] See "La juventud española," *El Mono Azul,* no. 32 (1937) p. 1.
[14] See Octavio Paz, *Bajo tu clara sombra* in *Obra poética (1935–1988)* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1990) pp. 19–60.

cultural promotion intensified over the next several years, as he collaborated with many Spanish intellectuals in Mexico, where they found refuge in exile.

3.1.2 Revolutionary Passion in Periodicals and Anthologies

The cultural debates that were shaping public discourse when Octavio Paz returned to Mexico in 1938 had grown out of a shared hatred for an historical anomaly: a social being that established itself based on the individual's autonomy, which was anathema to a history in which society always had been organized by dependencies and asymmetrical reciprocities. As François Furet (1999) has suggested, the oldest of the revolutionary passions which gave rise to both fascism and communism was the hatred for the bourgeoisie. This hatred, old as the bourgeoisie itself, was introduced in Mexico and across Latin America by urban elite university students, rather than through popular action of the underclass majority. Originally animated by a reference to an old but not-too-distant society of the past, Hispanic intellectuals of the 1930s found in communism and fascism a "hope" for a solution to the crisis of western civilization. Upon his return to Mexico, Octavio Paz entered the field of journalism in the heat of these ideological battles, which profoundly inflected his practice of cultural promotion. The experience in Spain reaffirmed his faith in the autonomy of art and hardened his rejection of discriminatory nationalisms, while his deft practice of cultural mediation accelerated his accumulation of international credit and prestige.

The Marxist-Leninists of the 1930s offered totalizing answers to the problem of the State and showcased the Soviet Union as an alternative to the failed economies of liberalism, offering hope – even to liberals – in the economic planning promoted by socialism. The fascism of those years also had its allure since its form of populism offered a conservative alternative to Marxism by no longer seeking equality among the proletariat, promising instead that all cases would work organically toward rebuilding a strong national culture. Fascism and communism aimed to renew liberal humanism with promises of change and moral redemption, promises that attracted skeptics of western capitalism. In July 1937 Octavio Paz began writing a column in the communist newspaper *El Popular*, directed by Vicente Lombardo Toledano, a position he held until 1941. *El Popular* supported the Worker's Party and proposed the gradual transformation of the economy to a State-backed form of socialism in alliance with unions. Despite these moderate left-of-center aspirations, for years to come Paz shrouded in secrecy his contributions in the newspaper.

Medina has pointed out that Paz's participation in *El Popular* remains one of the most secretive periods of the author's biography, since the newspaper's other contributors are deceased and the historical archive scarce, leaving us with the testimonies and silences of the author himself. To highlight the degree of his youthful political commitment, we may note that Paz continued writing for *El Popular* after the Munich Pact (1938) had been made, even though some of the newspaper's editors

resigned in protest. He also stayed on after the creation of the German-Soviet Pact (1939) and even after the assassination of Trotsky in Mexico (1940).

This early reportage reveals an indecisive writer confronting historical events and contradicts the anti-Stalinist resolve with which Paz later portrayed his early politics. These early communist sympathies, moreover, must be understood in conjunction with the poet's aesthetic orientation during the same period, specifically in his capacity as coeditor of the anthology of modern Hispanic poetry *Laurel*, published in 1941. This collaboration resulted from the poet's friendship with Jorge Cuesta and Xavier Villarrutia of the politically ineffectual *Contemporáneos* group, which featured mostly conservative authors, and from his successful social networking in Spain. Paz's intellectual eclecticism puzzled political ideologues and literary dilletantes alike. As he recalled in *Itinerario*, even Jorge Cuesta questioned the divergence of his revolutionary passions and poetic affinities.[15]

Martínez (1999) reports that Paz's intervention in *Laurel* offers an example of how a new generation of writers superimposed its tastes, concerns, and vocabulary onto the vocabulary, concerns, and tastes of the generation which had presided over the literary landscape of Mexico since the mid-1920s (89). *Laurel* was also a further ramification of the Second International Congress of Writers in Defense of Culture. This anthology, which reformulated the Hispanic literary tradition to accommodate the

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[15] See Octavio Paz, *Itinerario* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1993) pp. 50–1.

poetry produced by the editors themselves, was published by Séneca, the imprint that José Bergamín directed in Mexico after exiling from Spain where, among other things, he had directed the leftist Catholic revue *Cruz y Raya*. In 1940, Bergamín hired Xavier Villarrutia, Emilio Prados, Juan Gil-Albert, and Octavio Paz to select the poets and poems to be included in the anthology and to produce the manuscript.

The editors of *Laurel* did not demand ideological purity of their contributors, but rather promoted autonomy, accommodated political ambivalence, celebrated the gains of post-Romanticism, and, like their 19th-century *modernista* predecessors, emptied European forms of their content and applied them to the problems of Latin American modernization. The aesthetic sensibility of the poetry produced by Villarrutia, Prados, Gil-Albert, and Paz inflected their editorial practice with the principle of artistic autonomy. This was a controversial position to take at a time when an article on André Breton could be criticized as Trotskyist by academic Stalinists of Latin America mainly because it did not adhere to the aesthetic mandates of the Communist Party.

Laurel is a useful opportunity to grasp how Paz's revisionism is related to his public persona. In the second edition of the anthology (1986), he wrote an epilogue detailing the historical circumstances that led to the most glaring omission of the volume: the exclusion of Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, who was probably the most internationally recognized Latin American poet at the time. Although Paz started working on *Laurel* while he still was writing for *El Popular*, in the epilogue, he revised his early political

orientation by claiming that Neruda had warned him not to select any *artepuristas* for the volume, and demanding that his fellow countryman and literary nemesis, Vicente Huidobro, be omitted from the anthology. According to Paz, over time Neruda exhorted him to exclude any poet who lacked or was perceived to lack political allegiance to the communist cause and its social manifestation, the Soviet Union. Again, we find the anti-Stalinist critic of *El ogro filantrópico* revising the activity of the young poet engaged in political agitation.

According to Paz, one day he decided to stand up to Neruda and defend the "Trotskyists" (a euphemism that orthodox Marxists applied to Surrealists or any dissenters from Stalinist-centered Leninism). In disbelief, Neruda violently recriminated him. Paz would forever be on Neruda's personal blacklist. However, this falling out, Paz suggests, was to be blamed on Stalinism: "Como tantos, Neruda padeció el contagio del estalinismo; hay que agregar que esa lepra se apoderó de su espíritu porque se alimentaba de su egolatría y de su inseguridad psíquica" [Like many others, Neruda suffered the contagion of Stalinism; that leprosy took over his spirit because it fed on his egomania and psychic insecurity] ("Epílogo," 488). Paz's revised account dramatized Neruda's recriminations of his allegedly Trotskyist sympathies while at the same time shrouding his own earlier militancy beneath Neruda's ideological orthodoxy. By relating this rhetorical strategy to his concealment of the poem "¡No pasarán!," we begin to see

how the author, through the management of his public persona, came to attain his authority.

3.1.3 Heretical Eroticism in the Transhistorical Colloquium

Alongside his activity as a poet, delegate, propagandist, and anthologist, let me comment on Paz's public speaking in my desire to prevent this study from oversimplifying the complexity of what today we might call his "interdisciplinarity." As a cultural broker, Paz imported with the same ease as he exported. He translated the European avant-garde and unearthed Mexican history for the West. He assimilated French utopian eroticism and disseminated Aztec mythology. He adhered to avant-garde principles of literary creation and reconfigured the Mexican tradition by hand-picking his precursors. In 1943, on the quincentennial celebration of the birth of Saint John of the Cross, Octavio Paz gave a talk on the poetics of solitude and communion at an event sponsored by José Bergamín's Editorial Séneca in Mexico City. At the time, the young poet was still a marginal voice, working to redefine the national tradition and insert it into a global marketplace while creating an interpretive framework that could be applied to that tradition. Martínez Carrizales suggests that Paz's decision in favor of the autonomy of art is less important than the nuance with which he made that decision, and that the religious tinge of this nuance allowed him to diminish the ideological, political, and doctrinaire values of so-called engaged literature.

Paz's argumentation in this lecture evokes the attitude of Theodor Adorno in his early reflections written between 1944–1947 and collected in *Minima Moralia*. The profound skepticism these writers shared toward the dehumanization of culture and the instrumentalization of reason will help us account for some of the animating factors of Paz's first theory of poetics. As Adorno explains in the fragment titled "Palace of Janus," the concept of progress has always had a dual nature insofar as it developed simultaneously the potential of freedom with the reality of oppression. One result of this situation is that people became more inclined to learn how to control Nature and the organization of society but also incapable of understanding how culture surpassed the integration of the individual and Nature or society as a result of the demands placed on the individual by culture itself. He writes:

> What has become alien to men is the human component of culture, its closest part, which upholds them against the world. They make common cause with the world against themselves, and the most alienated condition of all, the omnipresence of commodities, their own conversion into appendages of machinery, is for them a mirage of closeness. (156)

Like Adorno, Paz was haunted by this threat of dehumanized culture in which the individual remained under the perennial threat of being transformed into an instrument of its own oppression. Such a nightmarish scenario was addressed in Paz's early theory of poetic experience, which may be considered his first substantial interpretive model, in which poetry is described in oracular fashion as a discipline of heresy. For Paz, the poet is a priest without a church who re-sacralizes the world but also a revolutionary who subverts the prevailing order of things to remake humankind

and society. As Martínez Carrizales observes, rather than a *revolutionary*, what Paz had in mind was a *modern* poet for whom modernity was defined by "las actividades visionarias y pasionales" [visionary and passionate activities] (95). His appeal to mysticism aimed to delegitimize the revolutionary and certify the visionary with the prestige of a poet who convoked kindred voices from distant ages. His discourse on literature relied on the idea of autonomy and the legitimacy of its place in the social institutions that make literature possible, the public sphere, which he learned to dominate.

In the talk he gave at the event, "La poesía de soledad y la poesía de comunión" [Poetry of Solitude and Poetry of Communion], Paz spoke of the lost psyche that human knowledge cannot access, the unknowable part that is inseparable from consciousness. This lecture was, as my reader may have intimated, Paz's first major statement registering the influence of María Zambrano's seminal *Filosofía y poesía*, composed and published in Mexico in 1939. All that we are and all that envelops us, he claimed, is infinitely richer and vaster than any set of ideas that tries to contain it (291).[16] Conventions of culture and knowledge constitute an artificial agreement with a false order.[17] Instead of reducing the spontaneity of nature, "scientists" (understood etymologically) mutilate reality's naturalness. The physicist's knowledge of matter is conventional because he isolates its

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[16] This lecture is reproduced in *Primeras letras.* Page numbers refer to that edition.

[17] The criticism of a false order is pervasive among poets of revelation. This false order which was attributed to the rationalized life of industrial society, equipped poets like Paz to activate the concept of "authenticity."

physical properties in an artificial purity, so that he may *utilize* them. Man can only subject reality to the order of language, which is not the order of nature. So, the reality we know is only that part of reality which can be reduced to concepts, and what we call knowledge is but a form of domination. Even when we do not know how to use our knowledge to transform reality, knowledge becomes a thirst for something unsayable. Philosophy, as a form of domination, exists only when this thirst for knowledge becomes insatiable, but, fortunately, the philosophical disposition of domination is not the only way to face reality.

In his lecture, Paz argued that contemplating reality does not require the practical application of whatever knowledge may gained from contemplation. One may contemplate reality without trying to possess it.[18] Rather than trying to *possess* the object of contemplation, the subject may *merge* with it (292). After drawing this distinction, he elaborates a series of dichotomies in his characterization of the unmediated experience of reality. Love, he suggests, is a birth drive (the impulse to reproduce), but also a death drive (the seduction of the abyss and nostalgia for our origin). Similarly, he suggests that reality may be confronted either philosophically or erotically, that two attitudes (decoration and power) manifest as religion and magic, respectively, and that religion, by super-naturalizing the social bond, incarnates the eternity of a society, whereas magic prefigures progress and invention. If the priest pleaded, loved, and knelt in terror before

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[18] This claim clearly echoes the argument against the "violence" of philosophy that María Zambrano made in her Morelia lectures, which she would publish as *Filosofía y poesía* (1939). The first of these lectures was published by Octavio Paz in *Taller*. See María Zambrano, "Poesía y filosofía," *Taller*, no. 4 (1939) pp. 5–14.

the fetish, the magician convoked hidden powers, enchanted Nature, and forced the disenchanted into submission. Visionary poetry is the erotic testimony of sacred experience enunciated by the subject who, from perdition, merges into the whole.

At this point of the argument, Paz realized that if communion is practiced in both religion and poetry, a central distinction must be drawn. Whereas religious communion is socialized into a community of believers, poetic communion is an act of subversion since its relation to the absolute is established by the individual. So, while religion and poetry both seek communion (passing from solitude, through a sacred feast, to an order of innocence), religion is profoundly conservative since it sacralizes the social bond by incorporating society into the institution of the Church. Poetry, he argued, has no mission because it subverts institutionalization and, therefore, has no need for theologians or clerics nor seeks the salvation of man. In Paz's first interpretive model, poetry is a heretical discipline practiced by the religious fanatic who, characterized by his anti-institutional ("independent") disposition, disdains the Church for its bureaucracy and spiritual moderation:

> [La poesía] es una conducta personal e irregular, que no pretenda nada que no sea darnos el testimonio terrenal de una experiencia. Nacida del mismo instinto que la religión, se nos aparece como una forma clandestina, ilegal, irregular, de la religión: como una heterodoxia, no porque no admita los dogmas sino porque se manifiesta de un modo privado y muchas veces anárquico. En otras palabras: la religión es una forma social, y la poesía, un impulso individual. ("La poesía de soledad," 295)
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> Poetry is an irregular, personal conduct that does not aspire to anything except offering us an earthly testimony of an experience. Born out of the same religious instinct as religion, it appears to us as an undercover, illegal, irregular form of

> religion: like a heterodoxy, not because it does not accept dogmas but rather because it manifests in a private and quite often anarchic way. In other words, religion is a social form whereas poetry is an individual impulse.

The rediscovery of Saint John of the Cross by poets of transatlantic modernism was symptomatic of their skepticism toward technological development which came in response to the mechanized combat of the Second World War.[19] At a time when technology threatened to dehumanize culture, coteries of intellectuals who had grown disenchanted with the USSR and Germany believed to find in the Carmelite a strategy for reconstituting the human community. As it turns out, Saint John of the Cross was already following the lead of Fray Luis de León, who had abandoned the Latinate in deference to Castilian vernacular and, thereby, inaugurated a popular tradition of Spanish poetry which emphasized the individual's need to learn by eliminating the mediation of the philologist. For his part, Saint John of the Cross adopted the *copla* and popular song but infused them with spiritual allegory, so that they could be enjoyed by the common people and more discerning readers alike.

When Paz lectured on the sage of Mount Carmel, he already had learned from Rimbaud that poetry aims to re-sacralize life, not to reveal its beauty, which is why he understood poetry to be beyond all moral, ethical, and aesthetic judgements. Since the poet, like the mystic, tends to participate in and express the absolute, his existence is threatening because his practice does not serve an objective of society but rather that of

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[19] Zambrano and Paz share this sensibility. See María Zambrano, "San Juan," pp. 43–60.

the individual. Instead of gathering mysteries for the Church to organize and sanction, the independent poet disseminates them indiscriminately and, therefore, antisocially.

The poetics of solitude and communion "es la revelación de una experiencia en la que participan todos los hombres y todos los seres pero que está oculta por la rutina y la diaria amargura. Los poetas han sido los primeros que han revelado que la eternidad y lo absoluto no están más allá de nuestros sentidos sino en ellos mismos" [is the revelation of an experience in which all men and beings participate but that lies hidden behind the routine bitterness of everyday life. Poets were the first to reveal that eternity and the absolute do not lie beyond our senses but precisely in them] ("La poesía de soledad," 296–7). The poet expresses a dream of totality that reveals the humble human as something more than an instrument, something other than a human resource that closes its eyes to allow the powerful to enrich themselves and fortify their political stronghold. As we will see, this model could be applied with ease to the erotic poetry that Paz himself had written in the 1930s, but as his aesthetic sensibility changed, a dissonance arose between the figure of the poet in his theoretical formulation and the image of the poet that came from his poems. Let me now address how Paz dealt with that dissonance.

3.2 A Sudden Contemporaneity of Things

The heretical eroticism of "La poesía de soledad y la poesía de comunión" provided an interpretive model that could be applied to a great deal of rehumanizing poetry, modern and early modern, but it could be applied with special ease to Paz's own works *Raíz de hombre* and *Bajo tu clara sombra*, published in 1937. However, from the early-1940s to the mid-1950s Paz did not keep the course of eroticism. Instead, the themes of estrangement and otherness dominated his poetry, which he crafted with the tools of French Surrealism into an existentialist investigation of horror and dread – a theme that would lend itself to a Surrealist textual treatment on account of the visionary (nightmarish) journey it produced. A reader who wished to apply the solitude-communion binomial to *Libertad bajo palabra* (1949), *¿Águila o sol?* (1951), and *Semillas para un himno* (1954), would have had to graft a theoretical framework onto those poems out of sheer will.

Indeed, the image of the poet advanced critically by Paz in 1943 no longer coincided with the image that emerged from his most recent poetry. This scenario required a new interpretive model that would address more directly the place of history in modern poetry and that would redefine the "tradition" by allowing new precursors to be selected. With oracular logic, Paz's preoccupation with tradition recast the poet as an interlocutor in a transhistorical colloquium, which provided a new interpretive model that could be applied to the critic-poet's latest stage of development. Presented in *El arco*

y la lira (1956), this retooled model certified Paz's unavoidable influence in the marketplace of ideas and was authorized by the credit he had received from his early interdisciplinary interventions.

Objects assumed a sudden contemporaneity in the poetics of Octavio Paz after the mid-1950s. This had to do with the author's very modern understanding of tradition. Now, "tradition" here does not refer to an object or cultural practice that can be inherited or passed down. It is neither patrimony nor heritage nor even parentage. "Tradition" here evokes a special historical sense, involving the "pastness of the past" and the "presence of the past." T. S. Eliot's impersonal theory of poetry, developed in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," which I have started to outline here, infused Paz's poetics in *El arco y la lira* with an appeal to simultaneism. Eliot famously argued that this historical sense compels the poet to write not only with his contemporary generation, but with a reflective feeling for the tradition as a whole, believing that this whole constitutes a simultaneous order (28). Eliot's project – that of a fellow poet-critic – aimed to restore an order, to explain its endurance, and to show that it can be perceived in authentically modern poetry (such as his own "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"). As a result, Eliot claimed, no poet has any significance on his own but only in relation to dead poets, a phrase that may well make us think of Jaime Saenz before Octavio Paz.

Eliot's model challenged Romantic literary scholarship that was beholden to interpreting the poem as an autobiographical testament of the poet. He called for

criticism to address poetry rather than the poet's biography in an anticipation of the New Criticism. Amid the "the confused cries of newspaper critics" and the repetitious whispers that follow, he worried that (culturalist) poetry could be absorbed by the culture industry – a preoccupation that is perceptible in his description of the poet as a conduit of meaning, that is, "a more finely perfected medium in which special, or very varied, feelings are at liberty to enter into new combinations" (30).[20] Eliot diverted critical attention away from poets and directed it to poetry itself by establishing what he called the "impersonality" of the poetic text, convinced that "the poet cannot reach this impersonality without surrendering himself wholly to the work to be done unless he lives in what is not merely the present, but the present moment of the past, unless he is conscious, not of what is dead, but of what is already living" (33).

In *El arco y la lira*, we see that Paz, too, was convinced that what happens during the creation of a new work of art happens *simultaneously* in all works of art that preceded it; that the past is altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past. This claim turned the mind of the poet into a modernist medium, where countless feelings, words, and images of all ages comingled until enough were present to form a unique creation. For these two poet-critics (who micromanaged the conduct of their readers), the poet no longer had a personality to express but became a "medium" that

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[20] These "new combinations" that debuted in *The Waste Land* reappeared in Paz's "Himno entre las ruinas" and especially in *Blanco*.

channeled impressions and experiences in unexpected ways, mediating the value of literary production in an attempt to restore to poetry its oracular legitimacy. So now, let me address the afterlife of this Eliotian medium of poetry as it appears in *El arco y la lira*, where Octavio Paz incorporated it into a model that equipped the modern subject who is thrown into the world with tools that name only things that are missing.

3.2.1 The Oracular Logic of Poetic Restoration

In Paz's second interpretive model, he suggests that religion and poetry are forms of revelation but stipulates that only poetry appears from within and is authorized by the divine, whereas religion constitutes the revelation of a mystery that appears externally. Accordingly, when Jacob (in Genesis) is visited in his dream at Bethel, the revelation may be considered religious, due to its externality. And, when Augustine of Hippo (in *Confessions*) wonders, "since nothing that exists could exist without you, [O Lord my God] does this mean that whatever exists does, in this sense, contain you?" (22), his revelation may be considered properly poetic, on account of its inwardness. Just as we saw in the case of Zambrano, so too in Paz is this notion of inwardness essential to the proposal of *poetry as a medium*, since it is predicated on the claim that the poet is the "hilo conductor y transformador de la corriente poética" [the cable that conducts and transforms poetic current] (*El arco*, 13), making the poem the meeting place of poetry and the person.

Updating his own theory, Paz now argued that poetry becomes accessible through the poem but does not rely on the poem for its own existence and that the reduction of

poetry to poetic form becomes problematic as soon as we consider form-defying works,[21] because technique is a one-time affair that is useless to anyone besides the poet who discovers it. Like Eliot, Paz believed that each poem is a unique object created with a technique that comes into being only during the creative act, when the artist gives himself wholly to the work, like a priest who takes vows. If the artisan "se sirve de sus instrumentos" [avails himself of his tools], the artist "los sirve para que recobren su naturaleza original" [serves them to recover their original nature] (*El arco*, 23). The poet becomes a dedicated servant whose discipline restores the unifying power of language and protects it against the threat of commodification posed by the culture industry. In this interpretive model, the culturalist poet's *service* to words stands against the lay writer's *utilization* of vernacular – a distinction that did not exist when Octavio Paz wrote "¡No pasarán!," blending the poetic voice with the vernacular of the multitude.

This distinction calls to mind what Theodor Adorno once called "the descent into individuality" in his paper "Lyric Poetry and Society," delivered just one year after the publication of *El arco y la lira*.[22] Adorno famously suggests the poem acquires meaning only in relation to the social text, that poetry's universality is essentially social, and that

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[21] *Aurelia* by Gérard de Nerval, *The Chants of Maldoror* by Comte de Lautréamont, and *Nadja* by Andre Breton, respectively, for Paz were exemplars of poetry's transcendence of form. Alongside Arthur Rimbaud and Marquis de Sade, they represent precursors of the French literary tradition that he selected for a genealogy that he began elaborating in *El arco y la lira* and that he defined more rigorously in *Los hijos del limo*. See Gérard de Nerval, *Aurelia* (Boston: Exact Exchange, 1996); Comte de Lautréamont, *The Chants of Maldoror* (Cambridge: Exact Change, 1994); André Breton, *Nadja* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1960).
[22] The original German version "Reder über Lyric und Gesellschaft" was delivered as a radio address in 1957, revealing this text as a striking call to read the social text of literature at a time when Germany was confronting the task of dealing with its then recent Nazi past.

such social ideas must be derived from the organizing view present in the text. In lyric poetry, he observes a "descent into individuality," where the subject no longer speaks the language of society, and the excluded world rises to full truth through expressions of benign weariness. Poetry that does not speak of alienated things, in turn, produces an effect of "aftershock" – a view that is striking precisely because it is not disenchanted. For Adorno, this interpretative strategy lent itself to modern poets like Baudelaire, in whom the antagonism between expression and communication comes into full view:

> As the contradiction of poetic to communicative language grew extreme, all lyric became a precarious and desperate game; not, as narrow-minded, philistine opinion would have it, because poetry had grown incomprehensible, but because – by means of the pure self-awareness of language as a created art-language, and through its effort to attain its own absolute objectivity, without regard for communicating a narrowed, merely historical, ideologically limited objectivity – it removed itself from the objective spirit, i.e., the living language, and replaced it with an antiquated one, a poetically created surrogate. The elevated, poeticizing, subjectively brutal aspect of subsequent weaker poetry is the price that had to be paid for the attempt to keep poetry objectively alive, undisfigured, untarnished. Its false glitter is a counterpart to the demythologized world from which it extricates itself. ("Lyric Poetry and Society," 63)

The surrogate language of poet-critics like Paz no longer concealed its indifference to communication, because "the living language" of popular speech had revealed its susceptibility to the ideological appropriation of public relations (undemocratic propaganda and capitalist advertising). Culturalist poetry, which can be composed only of "restored" language, does not signal a retreat from society, but rather reveals its greatest degree of social integration precisely when it proclaims the need for restoration. The effect of elevated style resembles that of a quotation drawn not from

another poet but rather from some centuries-old corpus that has gone unnoticed or is irretrievably lost beneath layers of commercial speech.

The construction of this surrogate language in Paz's "restoration project," as it were, was to occur through poetic mediation: "El poema es mediación: por gracia suya, el tiempo original, padre de los tiempos, encarna en un instante. La sucesión se convierte en presente puro, manantial que se alimenta a sí mismo y trasmuta el hombre" [The poem is mediation: thanks to it original time, father of all times, becomes incarnate in an instant. Succession becomes pure present, a spring that nourishes itself and transmutes man] (*El arco*, 25). In this pure present, the sudden contemporaneity of things crystalizes the pastness of the past into a consciousness of what is already living. These claims were based on Paz's anthropological conception of a primordial language, which held that names once corresponded absolutely to the things they signified and that, before the descent into individuality, the relation of humans to language was determined by trust.

In primordial language, the signifier and the signified remained crystalized in the absolute unity of the sign. Modern poetry, on the other hand, largely availed itself of the sliding signifier, such that signification always remained immanent. With this nostalgia for a perceived or imagined experience that could only happen before the violence of philosophy, Paz suggested that in the evolutionary infancy of humans "[h]ablar era re-crear el objeto aludido. La exacta preservación de las palabras mágicas era una de las primeras condiciones de su eficacia" [to speak was to re-create the object

alluded to. The exact pronunciation of the magic words was one of the principal conditions of their efficacy] (*El arco*, 29). The chasm between things and their names widened over the centuries,[23] during which grammar emerged as the first "logical" attempt to establish the names of God and, successively, to determine the meaning of any object, but words rebelled against definition, on account of their living nature and proclivity to evolve semantically in the praxis of speech. A critical attitude toward language, he argued, was the defining characteristic of modernity. The critical distance of humans from the language that named the sacred world indicated a historical necessity. It became the poet's task to preserve the relation of the signifier to the signified – to bridge the abyss that separated the gods from their names. The poet now was charged with restoring to language the significance of its relation to objects.

For Paz, the significance of poetic language derives from its living, common conditions. It must be spoken collectively to survive. However, poetic language is not popular, he argued, and cannot be entrusted to the masses. The populism of the 1930s which culminated in totalitarianisms sowed in the poet a seed of distrust in the multitude which germinated and grew for most of his adult life. Although he conceded that language belonged to the community, not to the poet, he saw the poet's task as mediation in "un juego recíproco de influencias" [a reciprocal play of influences] within the

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[23] This growing distance can be measured philologically. See Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) pp. 79–112.

community, as in a "sistema de vasos comunicantes" [system of communicating vessels] (*El arco*, 40). This model characterized everyday speech as a degraded idiom, sterilized by technocrats, advertisers, and news reporters alike. From this skeptical view on vernacular culture, the 20th century was marked by a glaring absence of prophets, priests, rebels, and saints whose language had yet to be cleaved from its object. According to Paz's oracular logic, the work of restoration fell to the poet, because his "independence" prevented him from being absorbed into the culture industry. This independence was legitimated by a practice of mediation that, in a Romantic turn, returned to language its lost significance:

> El poema funda al pueblo porque el poema remonta la corriente del lenguaje y bebe en la fuente original. En el poema la sociedad se enfrenta con los fundamentos de su ser, con su palabra primera. Al proferir esa palabra original, el hombre se creó. (*El arco*, 41)
>
> The poem establishes the people because the poem retraces the course of language and drinks from the original source. In the poem society comes face to face with the foundations of its existence, with its initial word. When he uttered this original word, man created himself.

Paz worried that mass culture put language at risk of being sterilized into propaganda, fulfilling a twofold commercial and brainwashing function. From the 1940s onward, he fretted that language would petrify into formulaic slogans, a vice to which popular art had fallen victim. As a return of language to its magical state, poetry could prevent the human person from devolving into mere mass. Modern poetry, therefore, required a discipline for the restoration of language. The poet needed to learn how to be a good servant of language: "Cada vez que nos servimos de las palabras, las mutilamos. Mas el poeta no se sirve de las palabras. Es su servidor. Al servirlas, las devuelve a su

plena naturaleza, las hace recobrar su ser. Gracias a la poesía el lenguaje reconquista su estado original" [Each time we are served by words, we mutilate them. But words should not serve the poet. He is their servant. In serving them, he returns them to the plenitude of their nature, makes them recover their being. Thanks to poetry, language reconquers its original state] (47). The interpretive model of *El arco y la lira* differed significantly from the model Paz had proposed in "La poesía de soledad y la poesía de comunión." Rather than an unrestrained, indiscriminate eroticist who strove to merge his psyche with the divine, the poet now became a visionary custodian charged with restoring to language its significance which had eroded under the influence of instrumental reason, industrial rationalization, and bourgeois liberal values.

3.2.2 The Plunge, in Theory

This new method that Paz the critic was outlining provided an interpretive model that more effectively could be applied to the 20th-century avant-gardes of Europe and the Americas and, especially, to the work that Paz the poet had recently published as well as other pieces which soon would appear in the 1960s. Much like María Zambrano in *El hombre y lo divino* (which predates *El arco y la lira* by one year and came out under the same FCE imprint), Paz developed a framework to address a defining factor of modern subjectivity: nostalgia for organicity, for a totality in flux that can be made to work together. Turning to the dark side of being, the domain of dreams, he argued that, although psychoanalysis had identified only neuroses or abnormalities, the

discipline was proof of a human fascination with the sacred. In effect, he claimed that modern nostalgia appeared in the psychology of the unconscious, but also in contemporary affinities for primitive art and the proliferation of research into the occult. These symptoms of nostalgia were at once the testimony of something that was missing.

For Paz, poetry and religion emanated from the same source.[24] However, although the poem could not be dissociated from its objective of transforming man, modern poetry consisted of belligerence against religion, which is the basis of its desire to recreate "the sacred" as an alternative to the rites of institutional religion. If the sacred is a totality and we are a part of it, he asked, how can we penetrate it to understand how it operates and where our place in it is to be found? One way to answer this, he suggests, is by taking "the plunge":

> Pocos realizan la experiencia del salto, a pesar de que el bautismo, la comunión, los sacramentos y otros ritos de iniciación o de tránsito están destinados a prepararnos para esa experiencia. Todos ellos tienen en común el cambiarnos, el hacernos 'otros'. De ahí que consistan en darnos un nuevo nombre, indicando así que ya somos otros: acabamos de nacer o renacer. (*El arco*, 122)
>
> Few attain the experience of the plunge, in spite of the fact that baptism, communion, the sacraments, and other rites of initiation or passage are intended to prepare us for that experience. They all aim to change us, to make us 'others.' Thus we are given a new name, to indicate that now we are others: we have just been born and reborn.

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[24] More than mere anagrams, the "source" in Paz and the "course" in Zambrano are central concepts to their poetics. For Paz, the source represents the possibility of restoring to language its sacred significance. For Zambrano, the course was a conduit that channels the force of vitality. For more on this, see chapter 2.2.2 The River and its Course.

Paz's new theory of poetics was informed by D. T. Suzuki's Buddhist notion of "the other shore"[25] along with Kierkegaard's "plunge" or "leap of faith" into the absurd.[26] This is one of the uncommon instances in which Paz offers explicit attribution, rather than metabolizing his sources, pleased to present himself as an independent understudy of both Suzuki and Kierkegaard. In Suzuki's text, he understood "this shore" to refer to an adherence to the objective world of life and death, and "the other shore," to a releasing of the object in the world, letting it flow endlessly, like water. To take the plunge was to release oneself from the world of absolute objectivity and to let the will intermingle with other forces. In his attempt to show the universality of the plunge in world religions, he mentions the archetypal metaphor of the "soplo" [gust of wind],[27] in which the volition has a paradoxical role, since the subject blown by the wind cannot resist it with his volition, and no matter how ardently he prays to be touched by that wind, the experience always relies on powers external to him.

Similarly, the acts of the poet are instantaneous and irrevocable but presented as though he were inhabited by external forces, possessed by them. This was the same

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[25] See Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Manual of Zen Buddhism* (New York: Grove Press, 1960).
[26] See Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946) p. 324.
[27] Regarding the metaphor of the gust of wind, Paz writes: "Sin movernos, quietos, nos sentimos arrastrados, movidos por un gran viento que nose cha fuera de nosotros. Nos echa fuera y, al mismo tiempo, nos empuja hacia dentro de nosotros. La metáfora del soplo se presenta una y otra vez en los grandes textos religiosos de todas las culturas: el hombre es desarraigado como un árbol y arrojado hacia allá, a la otra orilla, al encuentro de sí" [Motionless, still, we feel ourselves drawn, stirred by a great wind that casts us out of ourselves. It casts us out and, at the same time, pushes us into ourselves. The metaphor of the gust of wind presents itself again and again in the great religious texts of all cultures: man is uprooted like a tree and thrown beyond, to the other shore, to the encounter with himself] (*El arco,* 123).

claim that Zambrano had made in *Filosofía y poesía*, as I mentioned in chapter 2.3.1. The plunge is an act that uproots the poet from the world of objectivity and *throws* him toward the other shore. (In a critical theory reading, Surrealism's performances of automatic writing are more objective than realistic representation because chance takes priority over individual agency, while in Jungian psychoanalysis the collective unconscious is referred to as "objective psyche.") The original source of language is capable of restoring significance to the relation of signifiers to the signified – without the poet ever knowing whether he is being pulled into it as into a whirlpool, or whether he has leapt into it as into a lake at night:

> El salto es al vacío o al pleno ser. Bien y mal son nociones que adquieren otro sentido apenas ingresamos en la esfera de lo sagrado. Los criminales se salvan, los justos se pierden. Los actos humanos resultan ambiguos. Practicamos el mal, oímos al demonio cuando creemos proceder con rectitud y a la inversa. La moral es ajena a lo sagrado. Estamos en un mundo que es, efectivamente, otro mundo. (*El arco*, 125)
>
> The plunge is into the void or into absolute being. Good and evil are notions that acquire another meaning as soon as we enter the realm of the sacred. Criminals are saved, the just are lost. Human acts are ambiguous. We do evil, we listen to the devil when we think we are acting with righteousness, and vice versa. Morality is alien to the sacred. We are in a world that is, effectively, another world.

In Paz's theory of the plunge, the concept of *Geworfenheit* [*thrownness*], central to Martin Heidegger's description of facticity, comes to play a central role. For the German philosopher, "the *thrownness* of this being into its there" described a character of being that is veiled in everyday life but that remains openly disclosed in itself. The being "is thrown in such a way that it is the there as being-in-the-world. The expression of

thrownness is meant to suggest the *facticity of its being delivered over*" (127).[28] "El salto mortal," as Paz calls it, derived from Heidegger's *Geworfenheit*, insofar as in this thrownness, attunement discloses being in the modes of evasion or repulsion (128).

Paz argued that the modern subject who takes a leap into the absurdity of faith experiences disgust and appetite, terror and love, repulsion and fascination. In taking the plunge, a poet faces the supernatural with "asombro" [astonishment] in an experience of otherness. Horror arrests us, he explains, though not because it threatens, but because it is as terrifying as it is captivating.[29] Horror is the 'astonishment' felt when once faces an inaccessible totality. This is a sentiment that Jaime Saenz would feel as well, although the Bolivian's lyric subject tends to incite this feeling of horror through acts of depravity. For Paz,¡In that event which has no duration, when moral values become indiscernible, and the decisions based on them reveal their groundlessness. Much like the Romantic aesthetic theory of the sublime, otherness here is the experience of being repulsed by the abyss that lies beyond a ledge over which we cannot help but lean to catch an overpowering glimpse. The sacred, especially sacred horror, eroticism, and poetry are equally constituted by nostalgia for a primordial organicity from which

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[28] In his footnotes, Paz even cites José Gaos's translation of *Zein und Zeit* [Being and Time], published as *El ser y el tiempo* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1951). Given Paz's tendency to conceal his sources in a projection of the *pioneer*, here he seems to be seeking the authority of Heidegger as much as of Gaos, whose eminence among many Mexican academics endures to this day.

[29] The repulsion-fascination binomial is present in Octavio Paz as well as in Jaime Saenz. In Paz, it operates on a theoretical plane, as a principle in his poetic theory. In Saenz, the binomial is never theorized; rather, it is practiced in his poetry – and perhaps more obviously in his novels – and as a code of conduct in life. For more on this binomial, see chapter 4.3 The Separation Community.

we are cleaved constantly, repetitively as we are made to conform to the individual self-restraint of bourgeois liberal values – nostalgia for an organicity conceived as the original condition to which we always return. For Paz, the sacred is a form of eroticism that escapes us as soon as we try to grasp it. When we try to seize it, "nos encontramos que tiene su origin en algo anterior y que se confunde con nuestro ser," [we find that its origin lies in something anterior that mixes with our being] (*El arco*, 136). The similarities with Zambrano's theory of poetry in *Filosofía y poesía* are noteworthy despite the specific pathways each author may have followed in pursuing their shared intuition. As we will see, whereas for Saenz sacred horror has a shattering effect that intensifies the fraught experience of a subject going through abjection, for Paz the sacred – even sacred horror – has the potential to reveal contingency as the human condition. In Paz's new model, with each word of a poem, the poet now has to travel to this primordial origin, attuned to his thrown mode of being-in-the-world:

> Como la religión, la poesía parte de la situación humana original —el estar ahí, el sabernos arrojados en ese ahí que es el mundo hostil o indiferente— y del hecho que la hace precaria entre todos: su temporalidad, su finitud. Por una vía que, a su manera, es también negativa, el poeta llega al borde del lenguaje. Y ese borde se llama silencio, página en blanco. (*El arco*, 147)
>
> The starting point of poetry, like that of religion, is the original human situation – being there, knowing we have been thrown into that *there* that is the hostile or indifferent world – and the fact that makes this human condition precarious among all others: its temporality, its finitude. By a path that, in its own way, is also negative, the poet comes to the brink of language. And that brink is called silence, the blank page.

3.3 The Poet-Critic and Poetry-as-Criticism

In the years following the publication of *El arco y la lira*, Paz's public persona enjoyed a vast accumulation of prestige, and in the public sphere he was able to express himself without restraint, resulting in a remarkable influence that he exercised on the shape of public discourse in Mexico. With the aid of González Torres's penetrating analysis, let me suggest that the prestige of Paz's countercultural attitude consolidated by the 1960s, when the social modernization of Mexico was under way and a generation emerged to question the political system and promote revolution. 1968 is not only the year when Paz publicly distanced himself from the Mexican State; it also marks a generational, cultural, and ideological rift, which anticipates the new role that the public intellectual would play. The Second World War gave rise to two decades of sweeping social change, including the demographic depletion of the *campesinado* [peasantry], the massification of urban centers, and the emergence of a new literate class that demanded higher education. In Mexico, the post-war years saw the elevation of Soviet prestige, the concealment of the USSR's transactionalism in the war, and the sanitization of its purges in the historical record. In Mexico, the horrors of the war were blamed on the barbarism of global capitalism and on democracy's failure to contain its contradictions.

During Paz's diplomatic career, in Paris and New Delhi, where he reached maturity as a poet and as a critic, Marxist-Leninism lived an enduring afterlife in the Mexican university classroom. Whereas European democracies had been the target of

the Left before the war, in the post-war years Leftists took aim at "U.S. imperialism," adopting the anti-western attitude of the Cold War Soviet Union. Economic planning and the promise of social change attracted such intellectuals in modernizing nations like Mexico, and in academic institutions they proclaimed the need for self-critique, attempting to remodel communism. Nor were they limited to only one remodeling strategy, since Mao Zedong and Fidel Castro offered substantially different visions of what initially had been a more homogenous revolutionary ideal.

In the 1930s, socialism was the paradigm of national planning which offered an appealing alternative to the exploitative system of capitalism. By the 1960s, this had changed considerably. Now socialism represented a way out of the alienating consumerism of wealthy societies toward a reorganization of greater equality. By the 1960s, "socialism" in Mexico described an anti-bourgeois form of individualism. The Leftist radical of the 1960s was more of an individual than the old communists of the 1930s. In the academic community, Marxists tried to expunge their theory of dogmas and immediate political programs, so that, like Althusser and his circle in France, they could consolidate its theoretical method as a tool worthy of social analysis which they employed, to say it with González Torres, in the *Cold War of ideas* (48).

In the history of Mexico, there almost always has been a close relation between the intellectual and the administrative regime. In the 20th century, the Mexican Revolution became the legitimating metaphor used by administrators to encourage

young intellectuals to participate in public service rather than alienating themselves. Public service was eminently patriotic, and the rural schoolteacher was praised as a national hero. Despite the civic fascination that certain intellectual movements had for public service, it was the bureaucratic State that usually sponsored the work of intellectuals who could not find employment in other sectors. Paz's diplomatic career is an example of such state sponsorship, while at the same time it reveals his belief in the structures of governance and his skills at securing the resources required to establish and maintain his prominence in public life. Although some of his later positions obscure this factor, Paz was not averse to the regime that grew out of the Revolution. As González Torres suggests, Paz recognized that this system had guaranteed stability and economic growth and, without ignoring its democratic backwardness, he thought that it still was superior to Latin American dictatorships with socialist façades (54). Post-revolutionary optimism toward the future with its ethos of sacrifice had been an individualist desire to recover the present and exalt concrete life in its historical moment. Subversion, he thought, no longer came from the dispossessed but from relatively privileged intellectuals and students. Such elitism begot rebelliousness not revolution, since it did not vindicate social demands, because it was an attitude of defiance that could be adopted by those who enjoyed leisure and access to culture.

In 1967 Paz's poetry and criticism came to head with the publication of his essays on literature, history, and politics, *Corriente alterna*, and his highly ambitious poem titled

Blanco. *Corriente alterna* formally embodied the critical spirit of his persona in the metaphor of "alternating current" – electric current that can change direction – structurally demonstrating the independence of the heterodox intellectual who puts on display his disregard for convention and ideological purity.[30] The "philological politics" of the poet-critic reveals a practice in which his prestige as a poet (and the knowledge he attains through poetry) sometimes certifies the authority of his critical injunctions on artistic adversaries. *Blanco*, on the contrary, comes from the domains of poetry (criticism, expression, knowledge) and is an example of poetry-as-criticism – poetry that takes the form of a critique of language. Like Mallarmé's *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hazard*, Paz's poem is not only written in the highly poetic surrogate language commonly found in culturalist poetry, but rather places in question the process of signification itself. If the indeterminacy of language turned Mallarmé's poem into a pair of dice that are tossed and for all of eternity tumble without ever landing, for Paz that indeterminacy manifested as a "blanco": a target and at once the white space surrounding it, the signified that the signifier approaches without ever striking, in short, the blank page.

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[30] This critical independence, expressed formally in the title *Corriente alterna*, is evident in the polemical positions that he took in newspapers and magazines. His unpopular defense of Luis Buñuel's *Los olvidados*, written in 1951 and republished in *Corriente alterna* is a good example of his critical independence. See Paz "El cine filosófico de Buñuel," *Corriente alterna* (México: Siglo Veintiuno, 1967) pp. 113–8. See also Javier Herrera, "Octavio Paz y Luis Buñuel: Las cartas de *Los olvidados*," *Archivos de la Filmoteca*, no. 37 (2001) pp. 50–7.

3.3.1 Philological Politics

González Torres (2002) has shown that a study of Paz's "literary politics" (10) can help us grasp his ascent in the marketplace of ideas and gauge his influence on public discourse in the second half of the 20th century. Building on this, I wish to home in on a revealing example of this strategy. In the text, "Revuelta, revolución, rebelión," [Revolt, Revolution, Rebellion],[31] Paz makes the seemingly innocuous philological observation that the Castilian word "revuelta" [revolt] has fallen out of use and that the words "revolución" [revolution] and "rebelión" [rebellion] are now more common. At first sight, he suggests, this seems counterintuitive, implying that "revuelta" ought to be the predominant term. This observation turns out to be an elaborate rhetorical strategy through which he polemicizes the institutionalized Left by casting doubt on the pervasive use of word *revolución*. Within the shell of an anodyne etymological inquiry, the legitimating process of the literary oracular was already under way.

Of the three terms under consideration, Paz explains, *revuelta* is the most popular. In the 17th century, *rebolver* meant "to create a scandal" and "to make enemies." The meanings of *revuelta* multiplied into a "second turn" and "a mixture of different things" – both meanings that derived from the idea of a return associated with disarray. In Spain, a *revuelta* was an ominous threat that could dissolve the distinctions

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[31] For quotations to *Corriente alterna*, I have used the translation of Helen R. Lane (with slight modifications) available in *Alternating Current* (New York: Viking Press, 1973).

of society, returning it to a primitive state of chaos. The word *revuelta* eventually came to signify a "spontaneous public uprising," and while it is unclear when this meaning came into usage, that date is less important than the current preference for the words *revolución* or *rebelión* when one wishes to speak of disturbances and uprisings (*Corriente*, 147). By the 1960s, he observed, *revuelta* only meant "riot" or "unrest." It lacked a clear objective. The *revoltoso* was the intransigent striver for whom nothing ever sufficed – and whose underground *revuelta* caused a stir that created disorder. *Revuelta* no longer entailed a cosmogonic vision but instead signified the chaotic present.

> Para que la revuelta cese de ser alboroto y ascienda a la historia propiamente dicho debe transformarse en revolución. Lo mismo sucede con rebelión: los actos del rebelde, por más osados que sean, son gestos estériles si no se apoyan en una doctrina revolucionaria. Desde fines del siglo XVIII la palabra cardinal de la tríada es revolución. Ungida por la luz de la idea, es filosofía en acción, crítica convertida en acto, violencia lúcida. Popular como la revuelta y generosa como la rebelión, las engloba y las guía. La revuelta es la violencia del pueblo; la rebelión, la sublevación solitaria o minoritaria; ambas son espontáneas y ciegas. La revolución es reflexión y espontaneidad: una ciencia y un arte. (*Corriente*, 148–9)
>
> In order for revolt to cease to be a mere passing disturbance and take its place in history, it must be transformed into a revolution. The same is true of rebellion: the acts of the rebel, however daring they may be, are fruitless gestures if they are not based on a revolutionary doctrine. Ever since the end of the eighteenth century, the cardinal word of this triad has been revolution. Bathed in the light of the violence with a clear purpose. As popular as revolt and as generous as rebellion, it encompasses them and guides them. Revolt is the violence of an entire people; rebellion the unruliness of an individual or an uprising by a minority; both are spontaneous and blind. Revolution is both planned and spontaneous, a science and an art.

The term *rebelión* belonged to a military lexicon that evoked civil war, making the *rebelde* a minority individualist who stands up to an authority in an act of disobedience. This was to be distinguished, Paz argued, from the *revolucionario* who achieves

institutional change violently. The word *revolución*, in turn, belongs to an intellectual idiom that refers to the social turmoil of a majority population, but it comes from philosophy and astronomy. *Revolución* referred to the return of stars and planets to the beginning of their rotation and, accordingly, to the cycle of the seasons. It is a word that contains the idea of a cyclical temporality – the regular repetition of change. Returning to his philological observation, Paz suggests that the disappearance of the word *revuelta* from common usage may be explained by the fact that it expresses the disagreement of people who are dominated by the notion of a sacred authority, revolt as they may against injustice, since the *revuelta* respects the monarch's divine right.

The modern meaning of *revolución* arose in the 18th century, when reason was set forth as a subversive political philosophy by the righteous public intellectual, designating the new virtue of justice that no longer was tinged with the irony of a prince too melancholy to rule. This was antithetical to the defiant *rebelde,* the accursed, tragic, erotic hero whose love transgresses the laws of society. Alongside the *revoltoso*, the *revolucionario*, and the *rebelde*, the "reformista" [reformist] appeared in the 19th-century discourse of Lutheranism as the perfect combination of Protestantism and positivism in an alliance of the two former heresies. Under a decorative façade, Paz argues, the word *reformista* concealed its revolutionary contraband. It was a decent word, not the vitriol of *revoltosos* who lurked in dark alleys or the *rebeldes* who convened in clandestine dens. No, *reformista* was a word that appeared in newspapers.

Paz insisted that the similarities between the *reformista* and the *revolucionario* are greater than their differences: They are intellectuals, believers in progress, rejectors of myth. The new meaning of *revolución* destroyed the old meaning, he argued, and had lost the cyclical temporality inherent in the earlier astronomical 'return.' Whereas it once affirmed the primacy of the past, the term now affirmed futurity with a belief in continual progress, the perfectibility of the human species, and the delegitimization of the tradition. By the mid-20th century, as Paz saw it, the word *rebelión* had absorbed the pre-modern meanings of *revolución* and *revuelta*. By making this claim, he could draw a parallel between the activity of the rebel and that of the "independent" poet, creator of myths, propagator of cyclical temporality. As a poet-critic practicing philological politics, Paz defended poetry by arguing, first, that his revolutionary colleagues did not know what revolution is; that in reality they most closely resemble reformists; and finally, that the poet – as the rebel who embodied the pre-modern meanings of *revolución* and *revuelta* – was the only one of these figures who prevented the cyclical temporality of myth from straightening out, as it were, into linear time:

> El rebelde, ángel caído o titán en desgracia, es el eterno inconforme. Su acción no se inscribe en el tiempo rectilineo de la historia, dominio del revolucionario y del reformista, sino en el tiempo circular del mito: Júpiter será destronado, volverá Queztalcoatl, Luzbel regresará al cielo. Durante todo el siglo XIX el rebelde vive al margen. Los revolucionarios y los reformistas lo ven con la misma desconfianza con que Platón había visto al poeta y por la misma razón: el rebelde prolonga los prestigios nefastos del mito. (*Corriente*, 152)
>
> The rebel, a fallen angel or a titan in disgrace, is the eternal nonconformist. His action is not engraved upon the rectilinear time of history, the realm of the revolutionary and the reformist, but on the circular time of myth: Jupiter will be

> dethroned, Quetzalcoatl will reappear, Lucifer will return to heaven. During all of the nineteenth century, the rebel lives on the margin of society. Revolutionaries and reformists look upon him with the same mistrust as Plato passing judgment on poets, and for the same reason: the rebel prolongs the fascination of myth.

3.3.2 The Domains of Poetry: Criticism, Expression, Knowledge

In addition to practicing philological politics, the poet-critic of *Corriente alterna* argued that criticism, expression, and knowledge constituted the domains of poetry – domains that very accurately described Paz's own writing in the late 1960s. These were the years of the structuralist revolution in Europe when the semiotics of Roland Barthes took the literary world by storm with obsessive linguistic self-reflexivity. In Latin America, the same obsession for the self-reflexive text was nowhere as evident as in the novels of the so-called Boom. The turn to textual self-reflexivity was in the air, and Octavio Paz, who was a Francophile through and through, left traces of that culturalist tendency in the oscillating prose of *Corriente alterna*. Let us take a closer look at the domains that Paz demarcates and relate them to his own production of poetry.

In the essay "Invención, subdesarrollo, modernidad" [Invention, Underdevelopment, Modernity], Paz suggests that the value of a work of literature derives from its novelty, and that the history of literature unfolds as a series of antagonistic movements: "Tradición no es continuidad sino ruptura y de ahí que no sea inexacto llamar a la tradición moderna: tradición de la ruptura" [Tradition is not continuity but rupture, and therefore it is not imprecise to call the modern tradition 'the

tradition of rupture'] (*Corriente*, 19–20). This claim builds on an Eliotonian theory of impersonal poetry, as I discussed in chapter 3.2, and it also anticipates the first chapter of *Los hijos del limo* which takes as its title: "Tradición de la ruptura" [Tradition of Rupture]. Whereas the idea of imitating nature or ancient models animated premodern poetry, modernity was infused with the idea of originality. We see again how deeply European Romanticism shaped Paz's understanding of modernity. For him, it is not that modernity erodes tradition, but rather that the antagonism between antiquity and modernity constitutes the continuity of tradition. He argued that modern literature must always be a heresy, lest it harden, by dint of repetition, into a codified and accepted convention. The exemplar of this ossification process, he jabbed, was the PRI – a monumental finding in linguistics and political science. One domain of modern poetry was criticism since art for the modern is a way of saying "no" to reality.

Criticism was one domain; expression was another. In the essay "¿Qué nombra la poesía?" [What does poetry name?], Paz concedes that abundant similarities exist between poetry, mysticism, and eroticism, but he is concerned with their oft-ignored differences, namely, the difference of "signification." Paz suggested that mystical experience implies a transcendental good, even among atheist mysticisms, whereas the object of poetic activity is language itself: "el poeta nombra a las palabras más que a los objetos que éstas designan" [The poet names words more than the objects designated by words] (*Corriente*, 5). In poetry, meaning is inseparable from the word, whereas in non-

poetic discourse, such as that of mysticism, the meaning denoted by words originates beyond language. Ancient poets were just as attuned to the value of words as modern poets are, but the ancients were less aware of their signification: "El hermetismo de Góngora no implica una crítica del sentido; el de Mallarmé o el de Joyce es ante todo una crítica y, a veces, una anulación del significado" [The hermeticism of Luis de Góngora does not imply a criticism of meaning; that of Mallarmé or Joyce is a primarily a criticism and at times a destruction of the meaning] (idem). The place formally occupied by the gods now was occupied by words. The poem now was freed of external references and its meaning came only from itself, in what the words of the poem said to each other.

Paz then applies this framework to premodern and modern poets – fashioning a transhistorical colloquium – who form cardinal points in the domains of poetry that he selects as precursors of his own poetry. Thus, for him Luis de Góngora could not be read the same way as Stephane Mallarmé, nor could John Donne be read the same way as Arthur Rimbaud. Although a poem by Góngora is saturated with mythological references and marked by excessive linguistic complexity, these difficulties lie outside the poem, making Góngora not obscure but complex. He was a syntactic pioneer and extravagant mythologist, but once the reader references his allusions, defines his exotic vocabulary, and unraveled his convolutions, the meaning of the poem is clear. Regarding Donne, in turn, the difficulties are linguistic as they are with Góngora, but

they also are intellectual and theological. Once these linguistic plays and *agudezas* [conceits] are identified, the meaning becomes clear: "Una vez en posesión de la llave, el poema se abre como un tabernáculo" [Once in possession of the key, the poem opens like a tabernacle] (*Corriente*, 6). In Góngora as much as Donne, the references are external.

He goes on to contrast these early modern examples with the attitude of Rimbaud, which was radically different. Rimbaud's poetry was a criticism of reality and the values that sustain it and at once an attempt at creating a new reality in a visionary order of eroticists. What sets apart the poetry of Rimbaud (and Mallarmé for matter) from that of Góngora and Donne is the internalization of language which no longer symbolizes or attempts to reference external realities. Thus, Paz argued that the modern poet does not speak to the world but to the words he selects in an affirmation of insufficiency. As expression, poetry showed language "adrift" in the process of signification – a domain, as we will see, that is exemplified by *Blanco*. But the domains of poetry, in addition to criticism and expression, also included that of knowledge.

What Paz meant by knowledge may be gleaned from the essay "Conocimiento, drogas, inspiración,"[32] where he describes modern poetry as a form of experimental knowledge, comparing the activity of the scientist to that of the poet. Just as the scientist deals with particles, the poet deals with words, removes them from their natural context

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[32] This essay was first published as "Corriente Alterna," *Sur*, vol. 2, no. 265 (1960) pp. 2–18.

(everyday speech), isolates them in something like a pressure chamber.[33] He observes and learns how to benefit from the properties he discovers in them as does the scientist with his matter. Poetry, for Paz, requires an essential empiricism. Poems and scientific truths have resisted the test of skepticism and the fire of criticism. And Paz points out that poems and scientific truths are quite different than the ideas of poets and researchers, and while artistic tendencies and scientific philosophies come and go, poems and scientific truths endure and prevail. But where science and poetry diverge is in the subject of the experiment/experience. The scientist is an observer who does not participate in the investigation; however, in modern poetry, the subject of the experiment is the poet himself. He is the observer *and* the observed phenomenon: "La poesía moderna es un *conocimiento experimental del sujeto mismo que conoce*" [Modern poetry is an experimental whereby the knowing subject is the object of knowledge] ("Conocimiento," 3). Paz argued that poetry was an experiential form of knowledge and that its true *modernity* consists in its achievement of autonomy. No longer the servant of religion or philosophy, modern poetry constitutes its own legitimate method of exploring the universe: "La poesía es un saber. Y un saber experimental" [Poetry is a form of knowledge, of experimental knowledge] (idem). Determined to establish his countercultural legitimacy, Paz associated this 'experimental knowledge' with the

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[33] This is example of Paz's preference for wearing his learning lightly, since this "chamber" performs the same function as the metaphor of the "catalyst" in Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent."

psychedelic visions produced by such hallucinogens native to Mexico as mescalin and peyote.

In antiquity, psychedelics were used for contemplation, ecstasy, and revelation, he affirmed. Among certain communities in the world, they are still used for this purpose. Paz then offers a *testimony* of his own experience/experiment in India when he consumed edible hashish. This autobiographical account must be taken in its historical context of the 1960s, when drug use was a distinguishing characteristic of the countercultural Left. Paz positions himself to the left of a conservative perspective that would see only taboo in drug consumption; however, he also goes on to demand an appropriate discipline of consumption, arguing that drug use among believers is a rite, whereas among investigators and modern poets, it is an experiment. Selecting his precursors, Paz suggested that Charles Baudelaire represented the first modern poet to address drug use with a philosophical interest.[34] Baudelaire affirmed that drugs intensify our sensations by combining them to reveal life in its totality and to allow us to contemplate it ("Conocimiento," 4). He understood Baudelaire's consumption of psychedelics as a measure taken to reveal the so-called universal correspondences, which amounted to a cosmic analogy, as I discuss in chapter 3.4.2. The idea of

[34] See Charles Baudelaire, *On Wine and Hashish* (London: Hesperus, 2002); see also, Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (London; New York: Verso, 1997).

correspondences, central to interpretive model he later developed in *Los hijos del limo* (1974), received its first formulation in *Corriente alterna*, as we see here:

> La droga provoca la visión de la correspondencia universal, suscita la analogía, pone en movimiento los objetos, hace del mundo un vasto poema hecho de ritmos y rimas. La droga arranca al paciente de la realidad cotidiana, enmaraña nuestra percepción, altera las sensaciones y, en fin, pone en entredicho al universo. Esta ruptura con el exterior sólo es una fase preliminar; con la misma implacable suavidad la droga nos introduce en el interior de la realidad. El mundo no ha combiado pero ahora lo vemos regido por una armonía secreta. (idem)

> Drugs provoke the vision of the universal correspondence of all things, arouse the powers of analogy, set objects in motion, make the world a vast poem shaped by rhymes and rhythms. Drugs snatch us out of everyday reality, blur our perception, alter our sensations, and, in a word, put the entire universe in a state of suspension. This break with the outside world is only a preliminary phase; with the same implacable gentleness, drugs take us to the very heart of another reality: the world has not changed, but it is now seen to be governed by a secret harmony.

The poet-critic of *Corriente alterna* positioned himself against cultural forms which emerged from the linear time of revolution and attributed to the poet the capacity to propagate mythology and its cyclical temporality. He argued that poetry provided a method to pursue a life of organic totality in a desacralized age when the names of the gods had been lost and the sacred relation of language to its object needed to be restored by the independent artist who was immune to ideology, the poet whose domains were criticism, expression, and knowledge. This was the work of the poet-critic and counts as a distinguishing feature of Octavio Paz's activity in the field of cultural production during the 1960s. While he took up this position, he also advanced an audacious form of "poetry-as-criticism," a profoundly theoretical type of poetry that aspired to incarnate a

literary heteroglossia while his usual readers in Mexican universities were protesting in the public square and creating real pluralism by demanding dialogue from the repressive government of Gustavo Días Ordaz. So, let me turn to this major work of poetry-as-criticism which would receive the title of *Blanco*.

3.3.3 Poetry-as-Criticism in *Blanco*

Poetry-as-criticism appeared in 19th-century France as the delegitimization of the language of the dominant culture (Baudelaire) and as the purification of the language of the marketplace (Mallarmé), both of which responded to once sacred speech that now was degraded by instrumental reason. As Jonathan Culler (1989) has observed in his work on modern consolations of negativity in literature, there is a need to ask what is created or transformed by the negative categories employed by modern poets. This question is especially prescient when it comes to the poetry of *Blanco.* We are reminded that Baudelaire's sympathies lied with the degraded loser, the tainted outcast, the contaminated *chiffonnier* [ragpicker], and, accordingly, that he was delighted to play the satanic angel who possessed an infernally feverish imagination. The search for a "pure" language (a language of purification) confronted the reader with a textual shock, a linguistic surprise, and an affront to the hollow values of his bourgeoise taste.

The negative categories on which *Blanco* is constructed is the manifestation of poetry-as-criticism that calls attention to the gap between language and its objects, by disrupting conventional processes of signification. Poetry-as-criticism was a restorative

proposal that could console the subject who longs ardently, fanatically – even satanically – for an imagined experience of totality that predated the violence of philosophy. It was an attack on the biographical fallacy that had existed since Romanticism and at once it was a proclamation of the inaccessibility of the author's personality through literature. In *Blanco*, the literary oracular was developed as a poststructuralist response to the attitude of New Critics who separated the speaker from the author but presumed a consolidated coherence between the speaker and the cohesive moment of the text. The depersonalization of the poem undermined its quality as a work of art. Jacques Rancière has suggested that such depersonalized poetry steps into "the succession from religion," where religion is understood as the elevation of the human to greatness within a community attuned to the value of greatness. The task assumed by depersonalized poetry is not to reappropriate the sacredness of "celestial content" much less demystify such content for the good of humanity:

> Poetry, in short, must not constitute a new religion, not even that of humankind. It must, reaching further back than the religion of music, return us to the origin of all religion as such, to the 'poems immanent to humanity in its original form.'[35] But these, humanity's original poems, are not myths buried in the collective unconscious; they are forms-of-world that are to be resuscitated by the ordering of words. The poem geared to serving this function is itself subject to a strict set of conditions. It can no longer recount stories in the old style or describe what nature suffices to produce, nor by any means replace the description of characters, feelings and objects with the enunciation of philosophical messages. . . But, by turning away from representation as from dissertation, the poem is unable to abdicate the privilege of speech and thought for the ineffability of song. And if it has the instantaneousness of a vanishing act, it is nevertheless not to be

[35] See Stéphan Mallarmé, 'Crisis of Verse,' *Divagations* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press) p. 210.

> identified with the pure *happening* of the living artwork, with the effusion of the community presenting itself to itself. (*Politics of the Siren*, 43–4)

What Rancière observes in Mallarmé is also evident in the depersonalized poetry of *Blanco* by Octavio Paz, a manifestation of poetry that is characterized by its critical attitude toward reality. In *Un coup de dés* and *Blanco*, if the whiteness of the page outlives the poem inscribed on it, engulfing the poem in silence, this activity must be addressed as the vanishing act that it is, the appearance of a 'pure happening' crafted as oracular poetry. Such an act can be seen in the poem's title. Before he decided to title his poem *Blanco*, Paz considered *Sunyata*, a Sanskrit word for "emptiness," but he worried that a title in Sanskrit would seem pedantic to Hispanic readers, an amusing concern, given the poem's headiness and complexity.

Blanco refers to "emptiness," "indeterminacy," yet it also is the "blank sheet," the empty page, evoking the pre-linguistic phase of poetry, a silent conjuring, a sudden whiteout. Added to that, a "blanco" is also a "bullseye," a mark, a target, resulting in a paradox: *the indeterminate space of the blank page is also the target at which language takes aim*. Was this not the indeterminacy that theorists like Derrida called the *différance* of language? Paz was especially adroit at metabolizing his sources and exercising great discrimination in selecting the sources he chose to reveal. This practice added value to his status as a pioneer. During the height of the vernacular print industry, he wanted to publish his highly theoretical poetry-as-criticism in the form of a scroll to preserve the uninterrupted dispersion of language.

Although for practical purposes he settled on a book format that connected pages contiguously, in such a way that they unfold from the book into an extensive single sheet, the material design of this "art book" reflected an anxiety over the disintegrating forms of traditional cultural production, at a time when the magazine dominated the literary field. In *Blanco*, words, phrases, and images are strewn across the page in multiple font types, in black and red ink, like fragments swayed by a surge of genealogies, dispersing and multiplying the voice of the subject, whose speech no longer is sequential. The poetry of *Blanco* asks to be read as an imperfect transcription of a crowded public square, where the multiple, overlapping, and intersecting voices formulated what I will call a "literary demos." Aznar Soler (1987) and Santí (1998; 2009) have alluded to Paz's probable attraction to the "Ponencia colectiva" [Collective Presentation][36] that was read by Arturo Serrano Plaja at the Second International Congress of Writers in Defense of Culture which Paz attended. It was signed by many members from the *Hora de España* group who later exiled to Mexico and regrouped around *Taller* and Editorial Séneca. Paz's attraction to their intervention in the conference, however, must be distinguished from his poetry-as-criticism if we are to understand what was at stake in *Blanco*.

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[36] After the conference, the "Ponencia colectiva" was published in *Hora de España*, no. 8 (1937) pp. 83–95. In the minutes of the conference, the paper is signed by António Sánchez Barbudo, Ángel Gaos, Antonio Aparicio, Arturo Serrano Plaja, Arturo Souto, Emilio Prados, Eduardo Vicente, Juan Gil-Albert, José Herrera Petere, Lorenzo Varela, Miguel Hernández, Miguel Prieto and Ramón Gaya. See Serrano Plaja et al., "Ponencia colectiva" in Soler M. Aznar et al., *II Congreso*, pp. 185–95.

The Spanish collective offered a lengthy justification for the plurality of their authorship and publicly recognized that this "collective" presentation could be confused for a political stunt, the illusion of unity, but no: Though joined together for cultural reasons, what united them was *human* and lay beyond class distinction. Miguel Hernández came from the humble *campesinado*; Juan Gil-Alberto, from the refined bourgeoisie.[37] Like Paz in "Revuelta, rebelión, revolución" of *Corriente alterna*, the collective recognized the "reformist" inflection of modern revolutionaries and rejected poetry that describes the goodness or strength of workers, because workers are far more complex in their humanity than art propaganda asserts.

In *Blanco*, on the other hand, the political act of the "ponencia colectiva" is aestheticized into a literary heteroglossia, a multiplicity of voices convened in a transhistorical colloquium, and an autonomous work of art. *Blanco* was not conceived as a testament of mimesis, much less a political intervention. It does not claim to imitate reality, but to create reality by undermining a fundamental presupposition about the determinacy of reality. In *Blanco*, the reader does not penetrate the objects of the poem as much as he is shocked by a signification process that thrusts him into self-doubt and

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[37] In the minutes we read: "[S]omos distintos y aspiramos a serlo cada vez más, en función de nuestra condición de escritores y artistas, pero tenemos de antemano algo en común: la Revolución española que, por razones de coincidencia histórica nace y se desarrolla simultáneamente en nuestr a propia vida. O mejor: nacemos y nos desarrollamos simultáneamente con el nacimiento y el desarrollo de esa Revolución" [We are different and aspire to ever greater difference, in function with our condition as writers and artists, but beforehand we have something in common: the Spanish Revolution which, for reasons of historical coincidence is born and grows with our own life. Or rather: we are born and grow simultaneously with the birth and growth of that Revolution] (Ibidem, pp. 186–7).

alterity. Consider, for example, the parallel stanzas, separated by a caesura that eventually vanishes, fusing two lines into one. This fusion, however, does not nullify the signification of the text ordered by the caesura, but revitalizes the relations of signification by multiplying the voices of the poetic subject in a rebellious assertion of a literary demos, a collective voice that exists only in writing, resembling what Jean Luc Nancy called "literary communism."

This deliberate polyvalence is exaggerated proof that the empirical subject has passed to the poetic subject, who is born into *otherness*, an idea that Paz postulated in *El arco y la lira*, as discussed in chapter 3.2.2. The multiplicity of the poetic subject antagonizes the reader, subverting the conventions of reading by reformulating the process of signification in accordance with a poetic intuition. This subversive practice, pioneered by Dadaists, Cubists, and Futurists in the 1910s,[38] experienced a resurgence that coincided with the linguistic turn in literary theory. Paz's poetry-as-criticism is part of this resurgence, as is the poetic constellation *Galáxias* by Haroldo de Campos, who was Paz's close interlocutor during this period and the Portuguese translator of *Blanco*.[39] In Paz's poem, the subversion of conventions is produced by the directionality of the

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[38] For example, the *Calligrams* of Apollinaire, the collages of Hannah Höch, and the manifestos of Marinetti.
[39] See Haroldo de Campos, *Galáxias* (São Paulo: Editora 34, 2004). For the Portuguese "transcreation," see Octavio Paz and Haroldo de Campos, *Transblanco: Em Torno a Blanco de Octavio Paz* (São Paulo: Editora Siciliano, 1994). For more on their collaboration on this project, see Octavio Paz, *Blanco*, vol. 2 (Madrid: Ediciones del Equilibrista: Colegio Nacional, 1995).

verse, the multicolor (black/red) font, and the use of italics. The plurality of the poetic subject emerges through these revitalized relations of signification:

me miro en lo que miro	*es mi creación esto que veo*
como entrar por mis ojos	*la percepción es concepción*
en un ojo más límpido	*agua de pensamientos*
me mira lo que miro	*soy la creación de lo que veo*
watching I watch myself	*what I see is my creation*
as though entering through my eyes	*perception is conception*
into an eye more crystal clear	*water of thoughts*
what I watch watches me	*I am the creation of what I see*

(318–9)

The caesura (yet another "blanco") emerges halfway through each line and distributes syntagmata into separate stanzas while holding them in tension. The result is at least unsettling. A reading that proceeds horizontally across each line of the page exists simultaneously with one that proceeds vertically from one line of the same stanza to the next. The reader must choose the direction of the reading. Rejecting one option over another cannot avoid recognizing the existence of the excluded term. What is placed under scrutiny is signification itself and the relation of the subject to language. The eventual disappearance of the caesura increases the syntactic tension of the line without dissolving the heteroglossia into a univocal subject:

te precipitas en tus semejanzas *yo soy tu lejanía*
caes de tu nombre a tu cuerpo *el más allá de la mirada*
en un presente que no acaba *las imaginaciones de la arena*
caes en tu comienzo *las disipadas fábulas del viento*
derramada en mi cuerpo *yo soy la estela de tus erosiones*
tú te repartes como el lenguaje *espacio dios descuartizado*
tú me repartes en tus partes ***altar*** *el pensamiento y el cuchillo*

you drop through your likeness *I am your remoteness*

you fall from your name to your body ***the furthest point of seeing***
in a present that never ends ***the imaginings of sand***
you fall to your beginning ***scattered fables of wind***
spilling on my body ***I am the stela of your erosion***
you divide me like parts of speech ***space quartered god***
you divide me into your parts ***altar of thought and knife***

(324–5)

If the poet-critic of *Corriente alterna* claimed that modernity is defined by a critical attitude toward reality, the poetry-as-criticism of *Blanco* was a subversion of the conventions through which meaning is made in language. It is criticism aimed at the practice of reading and at once poetry that was critical of its reader. This was an unprecedented proposal in the history of Mexican poetry, but it must be understood as a project that was made possible by the author's domination of the institutions of literature for at least the previous two decades.

By 1962, when Paz received his diplomatic appointment in the Mexican Embassy in India, he already had published *El laberinto de la soledad* (1950), *¿Águila o sol?* (1951), *Semillas para un himno* (1954), *El arco y la lira* (1956), *La estación violenta* (1958), his first major collected poems in *Libertado bajo palabra* (1960), and *Salamandra* (1962). As a critic, he had proposed a first theory of poetics in "La poesía de soledad y la poesía de comunión" (1943) and then a second, more comprehensive interpretative model in the vastly influential *El arco y la lira* (1956). This limited run art book was the major poetic work that resulted from his years in India.[40] The timing of its publication, however,

[40] The first edition of *Blanco* had a limited run of 579 copies.

could not have been worse, since its release at the end of 1967 meant that one of his most theoretically ambitious poetic works started circulating among Mexican intellectuals during the fraught months leading up to October 1968. Not only did this mean that *Blanco* would not receive its anticipated reception; it presented a problem of public relations, since the pluralist demands of *Blanco* are not legible in the way that they are in more popular and widely consumed literature for academic revolutionaries.

In the political climate of 1968 Mexico, *Blanco* seemed frivolous, extravagant, an escapade deaf to the demands for dialogue issued by university students who suffered the repression of the State's military force. Despite his cherished position in New Delhi, where the fully matured poet wrote some of his greatest work, Octavio Paz cut ties with the Mexican State immediately after the Tlatelolco massacre. Facing an ethical crisis and a public relations crisis, he resigned from the diplomatic service, publishing his letter of resignation in the newspapers, demonstrating an unambiguous resistance to the ramped bureaucratic Caesarism, a refusal that many of his prestigious contemporaries did not make.[41] His personal media campaign publicizing the resignation, in turn, highlights his concern that his public persona could be discredited if he was perceived to support or ignore the repressive measures of the government. On an ethical level, resigning favored the good of Mexican society at a personal cost to his person. On a public relations level,

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[41] Among prominent Mexican intellectuals who did not distance themselves from the State following the event were Martín Luis Guzmán, Jaime Torres Bodet, Rosario Castellanos, and Miguel León Portilla.

this appeal to an ethos in the form of a disavowal was an investment in his prestige as an internationalized, "independent" intellectual.

On October 3, 1968, Paz wrote a letter to the Cultural Program Coordinators of the Games of the XIX Olympiad, declining (for the second time) their invitation to participate in the World Meeting of Poets which would be held in mid-October. Paz recognized that these invitations were attempts to legitimate the State's repressive politics with the authorization of his prestigious public persona. He reiterated his rationale for declining the invitation, namely, that he was not the appropriate person to attend the event or to write a poem of commemoration; but then in an ironic gesture, he explained that the recent turn of events changed his mind. Although he would not attend, he enclosed a poem he had written to commemorate the games and asked the organizers to see that it reached the poets in attendance. Knowing that his gesture was an affront veiled as a request and determined that his poem "México: Olimpiada de 1968" find its Mexican readership, Paz sent it to several newspaper editors, flexing his media might. Published in *Siempre!* toward the end of October, the poem is an invective against State violence and a deposition in which the poet declares for the public record his independence from the State. The final stanza reads:

> (Los empleados
> municipales lavan la sangre
> en la Plaza de los Sacrificios.
> Mira ahora,
> manchada
> antes de haber dicho algo
> que valga la pena,

la limpidez.

(The municipal
employees wash the blood
from the Plaza of the Sacrifices.)
Look at it,
stained
before anything worth saying
was said:
the cleanliness.

Among his friends who received a copy of the poem was José Blanco, to whom Paz in an accompanying letter foreshadowed the thematic content of "Teoría de la pirámide" [Theory of the Pyramid], later included in *Posdata*. In that letter, Paz referred to the massacre as "el ritual azteca" [the Aztec ritual] of October 2nd, likening it to the sacrifices chronicled by Bernal Díaz during the Conquest. Two weeks later, the Secretary of Foreign Affairs accepted his resignation, and, toward the end of the month, he and his second wife Marie-José Tramini travelled from New Delhi to Europe. News of the resignation of this highly visible, "independent" intellectual from Mexico was widely applauded internationally and in no time this credit further guaranteed his domination of cultural institutions in the form of prizes and appointments.[42]

For the next decade, Octavio Paz traveled from one elite academic institution to the next, where he would revise his theory of poetics to achieve greater coherence with

[42] Over the twenty-five years after his resignation, the cultural capital of Paz's public persona was validated by such high honors and awards as the Gran Águila de Oro (Festival Internacional del Libro) (1979); Premio Miguel de Cervantes, Spain (1981); Premio Internacional de Literatura Neustadt, University of Oklahoma, 1982; Premio de la Paz del Comercio Librero Alemán, Germany (1984); Premio Internacional Alfonso Reyes (1985); Premio Internacional Menéndez Pelayo (1987); Alexis de Tocqueville Award, European Institute of Public Administration (1989); Premio Ollin Yolitztli, México (1990); Premio Nobel de Literatura (1990); Premio Príncipe de Asturias (1993); and the Gran Cruz de la Legión de Honor de Francia (1994).

the poetry-as-criticism he had just written, turning up the volume of his criticism of exclusive democracies and totalitarianisms. In 1969, he was hired as a visiting professor at the University of Pittsburgh, and then was invited by the University of Texas – Austin to give the annual Hackett Memorial Lecture. On that occasion, he delivered "México: la última década" which ended up being an outline of *Posdata*. From Texas, this trajectory continued to the United Kingdom in 1970, when, supported by the advocacy of George Steiner, he received the distinguished one-year appointment as Simón Bolívar Professor of Latin American Studies at Cambridge University and fellow of Churchill College, where he wrote *El mono gramático*. While he was finishing his service at Cambridge, Harvard University offered him the prestigious position of Charles Eliot Norton Professor of Poetry for 1971–1972 and then professor of comparative literature in 1973–1980. It was during the Norton Lectures that, in the international spotlight, Paz retooled his interpretive model of *El arco y la lira* into a theory based on the concept of analogy. Eventually, this turned into the book *Los hijos del limo* (1974). So, let us turn our attention to this retooled interpretive model and ask how this writer in defense of analogy has recast modern poetry and refashioned his persona as a public intellectual.

3.4 Sacrifice in the Public Square: A Writer in Defense of Analogy

This picture of Paz's ascent in the marketplace of ideas has now come into view. As a young man, he agitated in support of the Second Republic of Spain and the

Communist party, before losing hope in the revolution, retreating from politics, and growing critical of socialist bureaucracies and totalitarianisms. His life in literature and public service marked the continuation of a tradition that had been inaugurated by post-revolutionary policy, which promoted the idea that progressive political change was possible insofar as access to education was increased and civic engagement was made homologous with patriotism. Immersed in a life of cultural production and promotion, from an early age Paz learned to dominate the institutions that make literature possible by writing poetry, polemical articles, editing magazines and anthologies, and giving public lectures. He made his trajectory well-known to his readers in autobiographical accounts and notes he appended to his poetry, curating his public image to coincide with the image of the poet formulated in his latest interpretive model. His poetry was celebrated nationally and internationally, and multiple phases of it were observable, outlining the type of trajectory that is reserved for canonical figures.

Through the 1950s and 1960s, Paz actively engaged in virulent arguments over art and society in Hispanic newspapers and journals, while the prestige of his successful publishing record as a poet certified the polemical positions that he took against intellectuals whose aesthetics differed from his. The State repression of the Díaz Ordaz government in October 1968 was a line that Octavio Paz chose not to cross, and he resigned from his position in New Delhi. His resignation from the State-sponsored position and its economic benefits resulted in a series of prestigious international

lecturing positions and over time copious awards, epitomizing the social phenomenon of the habitus advanced by Pierre Bourdieu (1993), whereby acts of self-abnegation (such as self-imposed austerity) paradoxically produce an accumulation of symbolic capital which, in the long term, converts to economic capital.

With this ascent in view, in the remainder of this chapter I will pay focal attention on the Norton Lectures that Paz gave at Harvard University in 1974. These lectures formed the basis for his last major statement of poetic theory: *Los hijos del limo*, which was published simultaneously as *Children of the Mire* by Harvard University Press. I wish to scrutinize Paz's claims, first, that the cyclical time of myth, which belonged to antiquity, transformed into a successively unfolding historical temporality with the ascent of Christianity, and second, that 18th-century poets were the first to declare that society was founded on analogy (metaphor).

What was to be gained by insisting that modern poetry be understood in this "analogical system," this world-as-rhythm, a world comprised of correspondences, where the mythologizing poet's subversive eroticism transgressed the laws of society to join in passion bodies from different ranks of the social hierarchy? Furthermore, since Paz seems to have wanted it to be known that his defense of analogy derived from the theory of passionate attraction developed by French utopist Charles Fourier and that he discovered Fourier thanks to André Breton, what significance does this attribution have

in a corpus whose author almost always metabolizes his sources? Why was it so crucial that the figures of Fourier and Breton stand as guideposts in Paz's theory?

3.4.1 Analogy as Modern Religion

Building on the model he set forth in *El arco y la lira*, Paz argued that a critical attitude toward language was the defining characteristic of modernity. He described this critical distance as the gap between names and the objects they signified. As I explained in 3.2.2, Paz saw in modern poetry the possibility of restoring significance to the relation of the signifier and the signified, and therefore the possibility of bridging the gap that separated the gods from their names, in a literary activity aspiring to that of a spiritual revival. Like Zambrano, he saw Christianity, among other things, as the persecution of the pagan gods, the demigods, and the *genii loqorum*. It was an institution that "convirtió a los [dioses] que no pudo aniquilar" [converted the gods that it could not destroy], changing some into demons that it employed in a "burocracia infernal" [infernal bureaucracy] and others into angels who rose up in the hierarchy: the historical appearance of "la razón crítica despobló al cielo y al infierno, pero los espíritus regresaron a la tierra, al aire, al fuego y al agua: regesaron al cuerpo de los hombres y las

mujeres" [critical reason depopulated heaven and hell, but the spirits returned to earth, to air, to fire, and to water – they returned to the bodies of men and women] (58).[43]

Paz believed that "enlightened" reason had extinguished a sense of *anteriority* from human life, and that the 'time before time', as it were, the first eternally selfsame beginning, had been degraded into a successively unfolding historical temporality. Glossing Jean Jacques Rousseau, he attributed the foundation of historical society to the privatization of property and joked that the degradation of this primordial time into history, progress and civilization was inaugurated on a day when, for the first time, someone said, 'This is mine,' and found people naïve enough to believe him.

The irony, of course, is that this return to a time before the rupture entailed a rupture of its own – a break from that successively unfolding temporality. Paz argued that the 18th-century critique of religion dismantled the Christian foundation of society, and that the degradation of eternity into historical time enabled poetry to return to its origin with its mythologizing function, resuming its role as the veritable foundation of society. Crucially, he insisted that Romantic poets were the first to proclaim poetry's historical and spiritual anteriority and that this applied equally to official religion and to philosophy. The Romantics were the first to claim that society was founded on poetry.

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[43] I have used (with slight modifications) Rachel Phillips's translation, *Children of the Mire: From Romanticism to the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974). In my discussion, page references correspond to Octavio Paz, *Los hijos del limo: Del romanticismo a la vanguardia* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1974).

For Paz, William Blake in this regard was the most illustrative example of Romanticism's modernity. Was Blake a Romantic at all? It may not be so clear, he suggests, because the author of *Songs of Experience and of Innocence* did not worship nature as many Romantics did. For Blake, the world of the imagination was eternal whereas the world of generation remained finite and temporal, revealing his commonalities with the Gnostics, but his exaltation of erotic desire and pleasure distanced him from Neoplatonist morality. Despite Blake's self-proclaimed Christianity, his Christ, rather than a Christian savior, likened "un titán desnudo que se baña en el mar radiante de la energía erótica" [a nude Titan who bathes in the glowing sea of erotic energy] (*Los hijos*, 81).

In a gesture not lacking a degree of literary provocation, Paz went on to suggest that Blake's conception of Christ more closely resembled his depiction of Satan in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, a figure whose body is a gigantic cloud of lightning. This meant that poetry was serving its central mythologizing function in the transgression of the prevailing moral system. Blake's poetry was a criticism of the idolatry of reason and a forewarning of the threats posed by an unmitigated admiration of progress. Whereas T. S. Eliot had determined Blake's mythology to be indigestible and syncretistic, like a

private religion of heteroclite myths and beliefs presented as fragments,[44] Paz on the other hand, argued that the same could be said of most modern poets (Eliot included):

> Ante la progresiva desintegración de la mitología cristiana, los poetas—sin excluir al poeta de *The Waste Land*—no han tenido más remedio que inventar mitologías más o menos personales hechas de retazos de filosofías y religiones. A pesar de esta vertiginosa diversidad de sistemas poéticos—mejor dicho: en el centro mismo de esa diversidad—, es visible una creencia común. Esa creencia es la verdadera religión de la poesía moderna, del romanticismo al surrealismo, y aparece en todos los poemas, unas veces de una manera implícita y otras, las más, explícita. He nombrado a la *analogia.* (*Los hijos*, 83)

> Faced with the progressive disintegration of Christian mythology, poets – not excluding the poet of *The Waste Land* – have had to invent more or less personal mythologies made up of fragments of philosophies and religions. In spite of this diversity of poetic systems – rather, in the very center – a common belief can be discerned. This belief is the true religion of modern poetry, from Romanticism to Surrealism, and it appears in all poets, sometimes implicitly but more often explicitly. I am talking about *analogy*.

Romanticism, like Surrealism, was for Paz a transatlantic movement for creative as well as political freedom since he hardly factored in the many contributions by reactionary Romantics such as the Cuban-born Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda or the massively influential Spaniard Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer, himself a literary precursor of the left-of-center liberal Luis Cernuda. To come back to the quotation just given, as a religion without an institution, modern poetry could no longer be contained in the domains of criticism, expression, and knowledge, as it could in *Corriente alterna*; now it was recast as a form of "autoconocimiento" [self-awareness] and "autocreación" [self-creation]. What proceeded from this claim was the elaboration of an alchemical theory of

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[44] See T. S. Eliot, "Blake," *The Sacred Wood,* pp. 137–43.

poetics which is strikingly similar to the theory set forth by María Zambrano four decades earlier.[45] In both cases, the reader is thought to repeat, in the act of reading, the poet's experience of self-creation.[46] His rationale was that an ancient belief in the power of words persisted in modern poetry as a magical operation destined to transform reality. This analogical vision, he claimed, was a Romantic inheritance, "una visión más sentida que pensada y más *oída* que sentida" [a version more felt than thought and more *heard* than felt], in which the world is conceived as a rhythm, a web of correspondences, "una sintaxis cósmica" [a cosmic syntax], and a prosody, the regrouping of signs in accordance with a universal rhythm (*Los hijos*, 95).

He claimed that the analogical vision survived the early modern period as an idea (not a practice) among occultists and libertines of the 17th and 18th centuries, only to be translated by the English and German Romantics into the *world-as-rhythm*: "Los filósofos habían pensado al mundo como ritmo; los poetas oyeron ese ritmo. No era el lenguaje de las esferas, aunque ellos lo creían así, sino el de los hombres" [The philosophers had thought of the world as rhythm; the poets heard the rhythm. It was not the language of the spheres – although they thought that it was – but the language of

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[45] See María Zambrano, "Por qué se escribe," *Revista de Occidente*, vol. 12, no. 132 (1934) pp. 318–28.
[46] Zambrano's notion of alchemy, which seems present in *Los hijos del limo* of Paz, explicitly bestows the poet with the power to imbue the poem with magical properties: "Comunidad de escritor y público que, en contra de lo que primeramente se cree, no se forma después de que el público ha leído la obra publicada, sino antes, en el acto mismo de escribir el escritor su obra. Es entonces, al hacerse patente el secreto, cuando se crea esta comunidad del escritor con su público" [The community of the writer and his readership, contrary to what one believes at first, is not formed after the readers have read the published work, but rather before, in the act of the writing his work. It is then, as the secret is made patent, that the community of the writer and his readership is created] (Ibidem 327). My translation.

men] (96). Poetry conceived as a magical operation that was destined to transform reality grew out of Romanticism, but the analogy between poetry and magic, he argues, lived its afterlife in the irrationalist attitude of modernism – and especially Surrealism. For Paz, modern poetry had inherited from English and German Romanticism an analogical system in which each work is unique and at once a translation of other works.

3.4.2 Metaphor, or the Translation of the Cosmos

The link between Romanticism and Surrealism may not be as self-evident as Octavio Paz makes it appear. Why does he surmise that Romanticism went underground with the triumph of Realism, only to reemerge in Surrealism as a secret knowledge transmitted through a discipleship? Why does he want to believe in this continuity? In considering these matters, we may recall that Romantic commonplace of the anguishing lyric subject who experiences "the sudden epiphanic apperception" (*Los hijos*, 116) of a sublime hidden reality which is invariably impossible to express or represent, as Philip Silver observes in the poetics of Luis Cernuda. Through this conflict of the sublime expressed as language's incapacity to name it as such, one can glimpse the image concealed behind transitory appearances. Silver raises a salient question:

> Of what precisely is this an image? Of the oneness of all there is, a pledge that the entities we daily perceive are at least remnants of an exploded whole. Moreover, in the best romantic tradition *the poet mediates in this conflict* on behalf of mankind. But instead of striving to close the divide, as in the pastoral mode, insistence on the conflict itself is the means of expressing it. (117) [my emphasis]

The relevance of Cernuda's mediating figure to Paz's defense of analogy is not exclusively structural. Paz deeply admired Luis Cernuda, a poet who already had gained notoriety when he met him as a young man in Spain. Like Paz, Cernuda was a post-Romantic, culturalist poet who in his youth was civically engaged in community outreach (Misiones Pedagógicas) and political activism (*Hora de España*), rejecting fascism without the crutch of communist rhetoric. Cernuda also refused to allow his public figure to be accommodated under Francoism, a decision not unlike the one that Paz made in October of 1968 when he left the Mexican Diplomatic Service. Moreover, Cernuda had immersed himself in English and German Romanticism and received international recognition in the form of academic appointments at Glasgow and Cambridge, serving as a role model not only for his orientation in poetics and politics, but also his capacity to navigate cultural institutions.

The proposal of an analogical system also helped maintain coherence between the rhetorical strategies of Paz's criticism and the poetic works (including *Blanco* and *El mono gramático*) he had published since the appearance of his previous interpretative model. On one hand, the new model of *Los hijos del limo* added greater coherence to the relation of his poetry to his public persona; on the other, it allowed him to construct a cultural lineage that would culminate in his generation, where he became a protagonist of his own literary history. In *Los hijos del limo*, Paz reclaimed the figure of Charles Fourier, whose notion of "passional attraction," he argued, had been minimized by

official critics until André Breton discovered in him the poetic principle of analogy and, in *Ode à Charles Fourier*, declared the utopist a magnetic center of the 20th century.

It is not hard to see that Fourier was also a way for Octavio Paz to problematize the theory of minoritarian rule without evoking the idiom of Marxism – a rhetorical strategy that distinguished the independent artist from intellectuals accommodated by (and most certainly, willingly accommodated to) the bureaucratic State created and fostered by the PRI. This strategy of selecting Fourier over Marx appears to have been calculated on the part of Paz, since he used his writings on Fourier as advanced publication materials in *Plural* two years before *Los hijos del limo* came out.[47] The centrality of his statement on Fourier to the new model, taken together with his early release of this statement, suggests that this constructed parentage was strategic.

Paz claimed that analogy reconciled antithetical terms without suppressing them and, more importantly, that it had appeared among primitive peoples and civilizations at the dawn of history, reappeared in Greek antiquity, again at the end of the Roman empire, and since early modernity has branched into secret religions and underground sects. In this updated model, modern poetry is the heir of this tradition, as analogy's persistence has attested: "La historia de la poesía moderna, desde el romanticismo hasta nuestros días, es inseparable de esa corriente de ideas y creencias inspiradas por la

[47] See Octavio Paz, "Fourier y la analogía poética," *Plural*, no. 12 (1972) pp. 47–9.

analogía" [The history of modern poetry, from Romanticism to our days, is inseparable from that trend of ideas and beliefs inspired by analogy] (*Los hijos*, 100–1).

The occultist tradition of the 17th and 18th centuries issued social criticisms that were *revolutionary* to the extent that they were "libertaria y libertina" [libertarian and libertine]. This binomial infused the proposal of universal analogy with a criticism of moral values, since analogy was based on the principle of eroticism, as it had been when he spoke of "La poesía de soledad y la poesía de comunión." But unlike the subject who yearns to *merge* with reality, unleashing the terrible *queja* or shattering complaint as Zambrano would have it, in this newly proposed system bodies and souls unite and separate in accordance with the laws of attraction and repulsion which govern the heavens. The eroticism that Paz saw in Fourier was astrological, alchemical and, at once, subversive, because it contradicted the discourse of progress and order by transgressing social laws to join bodies together organically, irrespective of their social rank:

> La figura de Fourier es central lo mismo en la historia de la poesía francesa que en la del movimiento revolucionario. No es menos actual que Marx (y sospecho que empieza a serlo más). Fourier piensa, como Marx, que la sociedad está regida por la fuerza, la coerción y la mentira, pero, a diferencia de Marx, cree que lo que une a los hombres es la atracción apasionada, el deseo. La palabra *deseo* no figura en el vocabulario de Marx. Una omisión que equivale a una mutilación del hombre. Para Fourier, cambiar a la sociedad significa liberarla de los obstáculos que impiden la operación de las leyes de la atracción apasionada. Esas leyes son leyes astronómicas, psicológicas y matemáticas, pero también son leyes literarias, poéticas. (*Los hijos*, 102)
>
> The figure of Fourier is as central to the history of French poetry as it is to the history of the revolutionary movement. He is no less contemporary than Marx – and I suspect will become more so. Like Marx, Fourier believes that society is ruled by force, coercion, and lies; unlike Marx, he believes that what unites men is passional attraction: desire. The word *desire* does not figure in the vocabulary

> of Marx. This omission amounts to a maiming of the human person. For Fourier, to change society means to free it of those obstacles which inhibit the operation of the laws of passional attraction. Those laws are astronomical, psychological, and mathematical, but they also are literary, poetic laws.[48]

In defense of analogy, Paz argued that Fourier had been the subject of critical minimization when he had not been ignored altogether by commentators of the official establishment. Even Charles Baudelaire, whose poetry was created out of these "correspondences," standing at a critical distance from Christian sin repudiated Fourier publicly, harshly. Harsh as they were, Paz prodded with conceit, these repudiations were *impassioned* and, therefore, comprised Baudelaire's reversed admiration for Fourier (*Los hijos*, 103). Wrongfully abandoned, the French utopist needed to be recovered from the shadows of modern history, where he had been relegated by the discourse of the institutionalized revolution. This was an opportunity to credit Breton for the recovery. Paz celebrated Breton for being the first to show that the French utopist represented one of the great attractions of modernism, in which "el pensamiento revolucionario y el pensamiento poético se cruzan: la idea de la atracción apasionada" [revolutionary thought and poetic thought cross: the idea of passional attraction] (*Los hijos*, 103).

The political ambivalence of French Surrealism resulted from its members' shared hatred for the mechanistic thinking of bourgeois pseudo-intellectuals whom they

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[48] Note that Phillips' English translation on occasions adds quotes of Fourier that do not appear in the Spanish and entirely omits, among others, these significant portions of the text: "The word *desire* does not figure in the vocabulary of Marx" and "Those laws are astronomical, psychological, and mathematical, but they also are literary, poetic laws."

endeavored to shock and whose moral foundations they shook with the unrelenting criticism of interwar Europe. The first wave of French Surrealism, beginning with the first *Manifeste du surréalisme* (1924) and ending with the pamphlet *Un Cadavre* (1930), ended just before the declaration of the Second Spanish Republic. Even after Breton and others joined the Communist Party and declared their political affiliations in the *La Révolution Surréaliste* (1929), Surrealism always diverged from the camp of "engaged," "revolutionary," "social" writers. Breton's cultural activity was too political for some members of the movement, while his commitment to the autonomy of art made him suspect in the eyes of orthodox communists. After being denied the opportunity to speak at the Congress of Writers for the Defense of Culture in 1935, Breton left the Communist Party, became an outspoken opponent of Stalinism, and was the first among French intellectuals to denounce the infamous show trials against Trotskyists in Moscow. Breton and Paz shared this swift disillusion with communism.

In the summer of 1945, André Breton and his future wife, Elisa Binhoff, traversed the North American West, stopping in Nevada, Arizona, and New Mexico. The unrestrained proliferation of consumer culture haunted the French poet's imagination as he contemplated the vestigial ghost towns of the gold rush, "with their abandoned houses and banging doors, their theaters still showing posters from the last century" (160). The indelible event of this journey, however, was his encounter with the Pueblo Indians. Traveling through the villages of the Shungopavi, Wolpi, Zuni, and Azoma, he

"became convinced of their inalienable dignity and genius, which contrasted so sharply and movingly with their miserable living conditions" (161). Breton was dismayed that appeals for reparations for the enslavement of African and Asian communities of the United States had excluded the indigenous, whom he deemed the most exploited of all. Looking beyond Marx to Fourier, he discovered an erotic civilization and the belief that community could be formed on the pleasure-principle.

In a 1946 interview,[49] Breton described his ambition to prevent Fourier's erasure from history, and he defended his effort, despite the machinations of Vichy propagandists who sought to co-opt the utopist's public persona. Breton was attracted to Fourier's attempt to universalize the theory of correspondence in his proposal of cosmic analogy, the world conceived as a hieroglyph that required interpretation, which was precisely where the proposals of modern poetry and social reorganization converged.[50] All this was already contained in Breton's *Ode à Charles Fourier* which bears directly on the significance that Paz attributes to Fourier. The selection of Tomás Segovia's translation of Breton's *Ode* for the magazine *Plural*, precisely in the issue prior to the one

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[49] This interview with Jean Duché was published in *Le Littéraire* (October 5, 1946), then collected and translated by Mark Polizzotti. See André Breton, *Conversations: The Autobiography of Surrealism* (New York: Paragon House, 1993).

[50] Breton explains: "But what captivates me most of all, in Fourier, in connection with his discovery of *passional attraction* … and his attitude of *absolute doubt* toward traditional modes of knowledge and action, is his attempt to furnish a hieroglyphic interpretation of the world, founded on the analogy between human passions and the products of the three natural realms. Here, Fourier is making a cardinal junction between the concerns that have animated poetry and art since the beginning of the nineteenth century and plans for social reorganization that run a strong risk of remaining embryonic if they refuse to take these concerns into account" (207).

in which Paz's statement on Fourier appeared, suggests the careful planning of the author-editor to provide his readers with the interpretive tools he wanted them to use in their evaluation of Breton's work. For Paz, the world is comprised not of things but signs that organically participate in continual change, a perpetual metamorphosis, where each text is a translation of another text *ad infinitum*. Similarly, in Breton's *Ode,* Fourier showed that nature and the psyche are integral components of the cosmos and that the human passions construct a natural glyph that must be deciphered:

> Because if the rattlesnake was one of your pet aversions at least you never doubted that the passions which morality represents as the most unworthy aberrations of the mind and the senses constitute an invisible cryptogram which man must decipher
>
> And because thinking beyond doubt that nature and the human soul are derived from the same model
>
> You promptly set about looking for analogies in the vegetable garden[51]

3.4.3 The Selection of Precursors: Paz in the History of Surrealism

The relation of French Surrealism to the poetics of Octavio Paz is complex and multi-layered, since it manifests aesthetically in his poetry, critically in his essays, and on a promotional level through literary histories in which he autobiographically steps into that narrative as one of its protagonists. In the interest of avoiding reductionism, we may consider Breton one of Paz's "precursors" to the extent that we rid the word "precursor" of all connotations of polemics or rivalry, as Jorge Luis Borges (1976) once proposed in reference to Franz Kafka: "El hecho es que cada escritor crea sus

[51] The pages of Breton's poem are not numbered.

precursores. Su labor modifica nuestra concepción del pasado, como ha de modificar el futuro" [The fact is that each writer creates his own precursors. His work modifies our conception of the past, as it is to modify the future] (89–90). Examining Paz's selection of precursors offers yet another perspective on his oracular logic of mediation and therefore will fall under scrutiny for the remainder of this chapter.

Paz often reminded readers of his articles that Surrealism, the most advanced of the avant-gardes, was a not a strictly European affair, alluding to the Surrealist invasion of Mexico in the late 1930s and early 1940s, when numerous practitioners of this vein fled the war-torn continent and converged on a country that also was simultaneously offering refuge to political exiles from Spain. These were the years when Wolfgang Paalen began publishing his journal *Dyn* and the International Exhibit of Surrealism was held in the capital. It was the Mexico of post-war delirium, a mélange of revelry and despair, vision and delusion, like the melancholy intoxication of Geoffrey Firmin in Malcom Lowry's novel *Under the Volcano* (1947) – a novel, we should note, which Paz liked to reference in relation to this time.

It is easy to forget, however, that at the historical moment when Surrealism invaded Mexico, Octavio Paz was put off by their "Trotskyist" politics from his desk at the newspaper *El Popular*, where he agitated for the communist cause. As we learned, Paz abruptly modified his position in the mid-1940s, and, for the next three decades, became one of Stalinism's most unrelenting critics in Mexican culture and one of

Surrealism's primary promotors. The author's essays tend to obscure this modification by describing his appearance in its history as a parentage. His selection of the Surrealists as his precursors inscribed him in the literary lineage of poets who prized organicity over instrumentality – set forth in *Los hijos del limo* – which surfaced in pre-Socratic antiquity, reappeared transformed in primitive Christianity, propagated its heterodoxy in Spanish mysticism, survived the violence of "enlightened" reason in Romantic gnosticism, and in modern poetry emerged as the crisis of western civilization seen through the surreal vision of irrationalism. This lineage of organic seers followed a cosmic rhythm and sometimes went underground, into the shadows of history, when (and where) it passed from one historical phase to the next, thereby requiring transmission, mediation.

Through this lineage, Paz could follow Breton's lead and affirm – with Fourier and against Marx – that passion, desire, and love (not class solidarity) represented the only hope for retaining some form of being-in-common. Over the years, the author cultivated this lineage by commenting in magazines about the Surrealist movement's salient figures and their most controversial proposals.[52] These articles showcasing the centrality of Surrealism to modern aesthetic perception also inscribed their author into

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[52] See Octavio Paz, "El surrealismo," *Las peras del olmo* (México: Imprenta Universitaria, 1957) pp. 163–81; "Inspiración y escritura automática" and "El verbo descarnado" both incorporated into *El arco y la lira.* From New Delhi, Paz published "André Breton o la búsqueda del comienzo," *Nouvelle Revue Française*, no. 172 (1967). He devoted texts to Remedios Varo and Luis Buñuel in *Corriente alterna*, and he dedicated a book-length study to Marcel Duchamp.

its history, and although it is true that his supposed comradery was never reported by the French Surrealists, this does not mean that he did not choose them as his precursors, over and over again, until his last days, while at the same time failing to recognize that several earlier Latin American authors played an important role in the French literary system.[53]

This selection, as I said, did not occur in criticism and poetry alone, but also in forms of cultural promotion, which is perhaps nowhere so evident as in "El poema circulatorio" (1973) which he wrote for *El arte del surrealismo* exhibit in Mexico City, a show sponsored by the Museum of Modern Art. We know, from his own account, that this poem was painted on the wall of a spiraling gallery that led to the retrospective, which means that anyone who wished to attend the exhibit quite literally had to pass through the poetry of Octavio Paz as through a threshold. This physical manifestation of the conduit highlights the multimodality of this cultural phenomenon that I have called the literary oracular. Like many Surrealist creations, the poem was equal parts poetry and publicity, a bricolage of dissonant images and a roster of fellow travelers: André Breton, Benjamin Péret, Remedios Varo, Luis Buñuel, Wolfgang Paalen, Leonora Carrington, César Moro, Antonin Artaud, Alice Rahon, and Alberto Gironella:

el surrealismo
pasó pasará por México

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[53] As late as 1996, two years before he died, Paz published *Estrella de tres puntos: André Breton y el surrealism* (Mexico City: Vuelta, 1996).

espejo magnético
síguelo sin seguirlo
es llama y ama y llama
allá en México
no éste
el otro enterrado siempre vivo (79)

surrealism
passed will pass through Mexico
magnetic mirror
follow it without following it
it's flame and loves and calls
over there in Mexico
not this one
the other one always buried alive

(*Poemas*, 621)

Many of Paz's critical essays are devoted to elucidating the aesthetic theory of French Surrealism rather than polemicizing it, as had occurred during the 1920s and early 1930s. What distinguishes Octavio Paz from most Latin American poets of his generation was his preoccupation with appending to his theory of Surrealism a literary history in which his poetry and public persona played if not central, at least indispensable roles. Paz's autobiographical writing about Surrealism and the Surrealists themselves ensured that this relation would be registered for posterity as a lineage traced back to the passion of André Breton's "orden de caballería" [order of chivalry] on their "*quête du graal*" [quest for the grail] and not as a mere literary affinity.[54] While this explicit affiliation increased the Mexican poet's prestige by associating his work with an

[54] See Octavio Paz, "Andre Breton o la búsqueda del comienzo," *Estrella,* p. 61.

elite group that, as a critic, he had hailed as the new standard-bearer of modern analogy, it also reflected how deeply the proposals of Surrealism and the authority of André Breton weighed on writing. His defense of analogy – although aimed to undermine the authority of intellectuals accommodated by the eminently prosaic, bureaucratic State – also reflected a desire to be read among canonical authors:

> Breton fue uno de los centros de gravedad de nuestra época. No solo creía que los hombres estamos regidos por las leyes de la atracción y la repulsión sino que su persona misma era una encarnación de esas fuerzas. Todos los que lo tratamos sentimos el movimiento dual del vértigo: la fascinación y el impulso centrífugo. Confieso que durante mucho tiempo me desveló la idea de hacer o decir algo que pudiese provocar reprobación. Creo que muchos de sus amigos experimentaron algo semejante… en muchas ocasiones escribe como si sostuviese un diálogo silencioso con Breton: réplica, respuesta, coincidencia, divergencia, homenaje, todo junto. Ahora mismo experimento esa sensación. (*Estrella*, 68–69)

> Breton was one of the centers of gravity of our age. It is not just that he believed that men are governed by laws of attraction and repulsion but that his person was the incarnation of those forces. Everyone who dealt with him felt the dual movement of vertigo: fascination and centrifugal impulse. I confess that for a long time I lost sleep over the idea of doing or saying something that could provoke a reprobation. I believe that many of his friends experienced something similar… On many occasions, I write as if I were having a silent dialogue with Breton: rejoinder, response, agreement, divergence, homage, all combined. At this very moment I am experiencing that sensation.

4. Mining, Mineralization, and the Abject: Underground Revelations of Jaime Saenz

The absence of historical references, allusions, and quotations in nearly all the poetry of Jaime Saenz has invited readers to view him as an independent literary outsider whose work exemplifies the autonomy of art and the ability of an individual author to represent single-handedly his nation's cultural tradition from that eccentric position.[1] He is unique among Bolivian authors in that he has been made part of a cosmopolitan republic of letters by a growing cohort of admirers in Peru, Argentina, Spain and the United States, among other countries. Saenz himself promoted the tendency to cast himself as an eccentric literary genius by denigrating the practice of criticism in interviews he gave and in prefaces he wrote for his students' books.[2] With the objective of setting cultural hierarchies off balance and blurring, if not erasing, commonplace binomials, I wish to cast suspicion on the supposed originality of Saenz's poetry and suggest that his profuse metabolization of the aesthetics of Tellurism has elevated his status as a literary pioneer. By retracing the intellectual history of Tellurism, I examine the characterization of the poet as a medium, who became possessed by delirium when he rejected the social conventions of bourgeois liberal values and

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[1] The exception to this claim is Saenz's poetic *Bruckner* (1979). However, although Saenz evokes the Austrian composer Anton Bruckner with some semblance of historical accuracy, the historical figure quickly becomes a paradigm for artistic creation. See Jaime Saenz, *Bruckner; La tinieblas* (La Paz, Bolivia: Difusión, 1978).
[2] For example, see the prefaces Saenz wrote to *Ciudad desde la altura* (1980) by Guillermo Bedregal and to *Asistir al tiempo* (1975) by Blanca Wiethüchter. See also Edgar Ávila Echazú's interview with Saenz, "Crear su propio lenguaje. Entrevista a Jaime Saenz," *Hipótesis*, vol. 2, no. 2 (1977) pp. 67–75.

embraced the *genius loci* or spirit of the land. In this logic of mediation, the poet's exaggerated love for an unbridled anti-order convinced him that instrumental reason would dominate even spiritual affairs if he did not proactively assume the role of custodian. For as much of an outsider as Saenz may seem to be, in reality he belongs to a *community of the literary oracular*, since the work of the poet as an instrument of the divine is homologized with the work of the cultural custodian who mediates between pre-reflective immediacy and the unreflective subject of mass culture. The telluric strain of visionary poetry is a longstanding praxis in Latin America from Simón Bolívar's apocryphal "Mi delirio sobre el Chimborazo" to Pablo Neruda's "Alturas de Macchu Picchu" to Subcomandante Marcos's ventriloquizing of his oracular pronouncements through the wildlife of the Lacandona forest. Saenz is as much a practitioner of this lyric mode as Octavio Paz is. Let me expand on this point with a brief anecdote which shows Saenz's implicit interest in alternately erasing and making visible the traces of his precursors – another feature he shares with Paz.

In a recent account published in *Página Siete*, H. C. F. Mansilla[3] recalled his 1983 visit to Talleres Krupp, where he found himself among Saenz and his disciples.

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[3] Hugo Celso Felipe Mansilla (1942–) is a prominent Bolivian social theorist and public intellectual whose work applies Frankfurt School critical theory (especially that of Theodor Adorno) to problems proper to so-called Third World countries. He is a corresponding member of the Real Academia Española, Academia de Ciencias de Bolivia, and Academia Boliviana de la Lengua. He has received visiting professorships around the world and enjoys a prolific publication record, equally in German and Spanish. Major works in Spanish include *El carácter conservador de la nación boliviana* (Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia: Editorial El País, 2004), *Introducción a la teoría crítica de la sociedad* (Barcelona: Editorial Seix Barral, 1970), *Los tortuosos caminos de la*

Objecting to the notion that Saenz's circle was a progressive organization that promoted intercultural exchange, Mansilla describes a place that demonstrated the poet's admiration for a strong, severe, and disciplined Germany that no longer existed and that he was sure he had observed first-hand when he visited Berlin on a military delegation in 1939. On a wall hung a large, red, German flag from the 1933–1945 period, with the swastika in the center. The entire scene could have taken place in Roberto Bolaño's novella *Estrella distante* (1996), which deals with a small coterie of aspiring young Chilean poets and their charismatic mentor before they all go their separate ways both ideologically and existentially, with the rise of neo-fascist violence and literary propaganda in 1970s Chile taking center stage for much of the story. Mansilla reports that the students were quick to defend the "positive" elements of German national socialism (its supposed popular solidarity and messianism) without accounting for the human atrocity of the holocaust. Then, as if in passing, he contended that their anti-bourgeois stance toward such eminent intellectuals as Guillermo Francovich[4] was

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modernidad (La Paz, Bolivia: CEBEM, 1992), *Tradición autoritaria y modernización imitative (*La Paz, Bolivia: Plural Editores, 1997).

[4] Guillermo Francovich Salazar (1901–1990) is perhaps the most recognized authority of Bolivian intellectual history in the 20th century. He was a professor of philosophy at Universidad Mayor de San Francisco Xavier (1922–1928), before serving as rector of that institution (1944–1951). In 1976 he was inducted into the Academia Boliviana de la Lengua and received the Premio Nacional de Cultura. His vast body of work put continental philosophy in conversation with Bolivian social reality and Andean mythology. His major works include *Los ídolos de Bacon* (Sucre, Bolivia: [Universidad de San Francisco Xavier], 1942), *La filosofía en Bolivia* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, 1945), *Todo ángel es terrible* (México: Impr. Universitaria, 1959), *Restauración*

undermined by the fact that they all admitted to never having read him. Saenz himself, according to Mansilla, dismissed the philosopher in resignation: "De noche todos los gatos son pardos" [In the dark, all cats are grey].[5]

It is hard to take Saenz at his word and believe that he did not know or was indifferent to Francovich's work, especially *La filosofía de Bolivia* (1945), where the philosopher described "una mística de la tierra" and highlighted none other than Franz Tamayo, the same Tamayo whom Saenz would lionize in *Felipe Delgado* and in Talleres Krupp.[6] On the other hand, there are certain benefits to believing Saenz, even when he dissimulates. For the moment, let us believe his indifference to Guillermo Francovich. Let us also suppose that he thought little of Humberto Palza, Roberto Prudencio, or Fernando Diez de Medina for that matter.[7] If we grant that Saenz was unaware that

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de la filosofía (México: Editorial Orion, 1967), and *Los mitos profundos de Bolivia* (La Paz, Bolivia: Editorial Los Amigos del Libro, 1980).

[5] See H. C. F. Mansilla, "Una visita a Jaime Saenz," *Página Siete*, 12 May 2019. My translation.

[6] Saenz famously championed Franz Tamayo in *Felipe Delgado* (La Paz, Bolivia: Plural, 2016) pp. 139–55. He also includes Tamayo's "Creación de una pedagogía nacional" (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1979) among the curriculum of Talleres Krupp in his retrospective prologue to *Ciudad desde la altura* (La Paz, Bolivia, 1980) by his student Guillermo Bedregal.

[7] These three represent major figures of Bolivian nationalism in the first half of the 20th century. Humberto Palza Soliz (1900–1975), poet, novelist, and essayist, is best known for his anthropological-philosophical works *El hombre como método* (San Francisco, CA, 1939). Roberto Prudencio Romecín (1908–1975) fought in the Chaco War before founding and directing the influential magazine *Kollasuyo* (1939–1975), in which he published literary and polemical works associated with the Tellurist movement, including many of his own essays. Fernando Diez de Medina (1908–1990) was a prolific and multifaceted public intellectual who wrote novels, plays, poetry, and essays, and militated during the Chaco War and in the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR) following the National Revolution of 1952. His best-known works include *Thunupa* (La Paz, Bolivia: Librería la Universitaria, 1947), *Pachakuti y otras páginas polémicas* (La Paz, Bolivia, 1948), *Nayjama* (La Paz, Bolivia: Gisbert, 1960), and *Teogonía andina* (La Paz, Bolivia, 1973).

Tellurism had ever been theorized and practiced *at the same time* that he started writing, then the concept of *genius loci* would seem to reveal itself in his poetry as an unavoidable metabolization of Tellurism. Whereas Romanticism dared to disavow tradition in the name of originality, post-Romantics like Saenz belong to a tradition of renunciation.

Jaime Saenz stands in an historical community of modernism that grew out of the Tellurist discourse of the land. The theoretical framework of Tellurism, however, was animated by the irrationalism of Germany – an inheritance that can easily go unnoticed given the firmly nativist positions of intellectuals like Humberto Palza and before him Franz Tamayo. Albarracín has argued that while Tamayo was in Germany as a young man, he believed to have found a way to condemn the enslavement of Bolivia's indigenous majority. His thinking was profoundly shaped by Nietzsche and Fichte who, each in his own way, were committed to exalting life with a philosophy capable of breaking away from the exculpations of reason which ailed 19th-century Germany as an oppressed nation in the heart of Europe. The other line of German irrationalism that animated the framework of Tellurism came from Count Hermann Keyserling, an immensely popular figure in Latin America thanks in part to his tempestuous association with Victoria Ocampo and other Argentine intellectuals, who described "minerality" as a devolution of the self into a primitive state of spiritless senility. Adherents of Tellurism retooled this negative concept into the alienated subject's

virtuous reintegration into a pre-reflective order, and, following the lead of Tamayo, they passed it off as a product of Bolivian nationalist culture.

In this context, it appears that in poetry Jaime Saenz could not escape the discourse of Tellurism. Minerality, as both a negative concept (Keyserling) and a positive concept (Tamayo), was always a concern of the modernist poet who struggled with what Georg Simmel called "the tragedy of culture."[8] After Tamayo had argued for the existence of a *genius loci* of Bolivia, the task then became a matter of tapping into the source, identifying who was best suited for that mediation, and establishing a discipline for the practice. Saenz answered that call in the middle of the century with a proposal of his own: He renounced the materialism of capitalist culture and the spiritual indifference of an emergent consumer class, calling for the literary revival of religious fanaticism that entered the domain of the abject.[9]

This renunciation of instrumental reason took the form of a "plunge," a resigned, spontaneous confrontation with reality which could not be explained in words or attained by reason. The plunge came to describe the discipline of mediating what

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[8] According to Simmel, the process of modernization resulted in a surplus of "objective cultural products" (religion, rituals, art, literature, philosophy) which overwhelmed the individual's subjective abilities, by presenting more options than one could possibly experience in a lifetime. "Within this structure of culture there now develops a cleavage which, of course, is already prepared in its foundation. It makes of the subject-object-synthesis a paradox, even a tragedy" (39). See Georg Simmel, "On the Concept and the Tragedy of Culture" [1911] in *The Conflict in Modern Culture and Other Essays* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1968) pp. 27–46.

[9] Javier Sanjinés has described Saenz's aestheticization of "the rural indigenous cultures of the Andes as the non-rational 'otherness' that invades the urban system and its order" (160). See Javier Sanjinés, "Subalternity and the Articulation of Culture in the Bolivian Andes," *Dispositio*, vol. 19 no. 46 (1994) pp. 147–64.

Tamayo called "national energy" and Keyserling "minerality," but in Saenz this mediation was never theorized, never contemplated, only expressed. Since the *genius loci* now flowed through poetry, making the poet shudder, he felt the need to channel it, to let it name through him the truth of an old faith as a renunciation of bourgeois liberal values. Whether or not we believe Saenz (or Mansilla), it does not seem unwarranted to ask: what is the status of this modernist medium, this mediator of the *genius loci*, this "ángel solitario y jubiloso," this practitioner of the literary oracular?

4.1 Minerality and Modernism: Oracular Legitimacy in Muerte por el tacto

Guillermo Francovich enjoys the distinction of having recognized the reorientation of Bolivian cultural production that had taken place during the first half of the century. In *La filosofía de Bolivia* (1945), which came out one year after Zambrano's *El pensamiento vivo de Séneca* with the same River Plate publisher (Losada), he observed that this "mística de la tierra" [mysticism of the land] was a system of beliefs in the land's possession of a spirit which acts through human beings, establishing individual life forms and social relations. Such practitioners as Palza and Prudencio argued that the spirit of the land engendered "tipos culturales con fisionomía tan propia como los ambientes geográficos que las han producido" [cultural types with a physiognomy as unique as the geographical conditions that have produced them] (Francovich, *La filosofía*, 155–6). The Andean geography of Bolivia was considered exceptional, and the humans who inhabit it, equally so. Andean civilization was represented as the residue of

primeval cultures which these nostalgic modernists imagined among the ruins of Tiahuanaco. Francovich understood this admiration for the native landscape to be as exuberant as the admiration for the life and work of primitive inhabitants, which meant that if the tragic subject of modernism could reestablish his primary admiration for the land, he could produce a regeneration of cultural forms in the future. For Francovich, Tamayo was the exemplar of this anthropo-geographical discourse.

In reality, Tamayo had elaborated a theorization of this "spirit of the land" in the contentious cultural ecology of Bolivian liberalism in 1910.[10] In his debate with Felipe Segundo Guzmán over the future of public education, Tamayo (like John Dewey) famously argued against education that was inattentive to social conditions, and he accused the white minority political class of "pedagogical bovarysm," adopting the felicitous phrase of Jules de Gaultier.[11] In no less than fifty-five opinion columns, which he claimed to have spent no more than fifty-five hours writing and which he published in *El Diario* of La Paz over the span of three months (and later collected as *Creación de la pedagogía nacional*), Tamayo insisted that the Aymara majority had always been the base

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[10] The debate over liberal education reform during the first two decades of the 20th century has received significant critical attention. For a strong contextualization of Tamayo's intervention, see Marta Irurozqui Victoriano, "¿Qué hacer con el indio? Un análisis de las obras de Franz Tamayo y Alcides Arguedas," *Revista de Indias*, vol. 52 no. 195 (1992) pp. 559–87; and Blithz Lozada Pereira, *La educación del indio en el pensamiento filosófico de Franz Tamayo* (La Paz, Bolivia, Universidad Mayor de San Andrés, 2010). For race in education policy, see Brooke Larson, "Forging the Unlettered Indian: The Pedagogy of Race in the Bolivian Andes," *Histories of Race and Racism* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2011) pp. 134–56. For reform development and implementation, see Esther Allón Soria *et al.*, *Miradas retrospectivas a la educación pública en Bolivia* (La Paz, Bolivia: Universidad Mayor de San Andrés, 2009).

[11] See Jules de Gaultier in *Le Bovarysme, la psychologie dans l'œuvre de Flaubert* (Paris: L. Cerf, 1892) and translated by Gerald M. Spring as *Bovarysm* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1970).

of Bolivian society and had endured the worse forms of exploitation with the most admirable resilience, which he attributed to an unbridled force that they inherited from the land:

> La tierra hace al hombre; y es en la tierra que hay que buscar la última razón de su pensamiento, de su obra, de su moralidad. Cuando se dice tierra patria no solamente hay en ello un símbolo paternal, sino que realmente existe una relación generativa entre el suelo y el hombre. Físicamente, el hombre está hecho de las sales del suelo en que vive y genera. La poética ficción de que cada uno lleva un retazo de cielo patrio al fondo del alma es una realidad. *Humus, homo*. (*Creación*, 82)

> Man is made out of the land; and it is in the land that one must seek the foundational logic of his thought, his work, his morals. When one says 'fatherland,' there is not only a paternal symbol, but a truly generative relation that exists between the soil and man. Physically, man is made of the salts of the soil he lives on and generates. The poetic fiction that every person possesses a piece of our nation's heavens at the bottom of his soul is a reality: *Humus, homo*.

Tamayo argued that this relation was not always evident in physiological features but remained ever present in the "national character." Drawing a parallel, he claimed that the temerity attributed to European descendants in the United States was not of English origin, but rather was propagated by indigenous people of the north: "La Europa tradicional no ofrece nada semejante: la piel roja sí; y en este caso, no existiendo el genio de la especie, existe el genio del lugar: *Genius loci*." [The European tradition has nothing similar to offer: the redskins do; and in this case, in the absence of a spirit of the species, there exists a spirit of the place: *Genius loci*] (idem). Tamayo was convinced that a direct parallel could be drawn to Bolivia on account of the latent energy of the land. Whereas in the colonial era, the mestizo was seen as a degenerate, someone stained by the land, stigmatized by it, to the republican thinking of Tamayo the mestizo was the

only subject who *fought and thought*, who possessed the resilience of the most exploited and the intelligence of their exploiters. The mestizo was the only subject in possession of national energy. Now, this national energy, this unifying character, developed by Fichte in his *Addresses to the German Nation*, was uncritically accepted by Tamayo for adaptation to the specific needs of Bolivia, where mestizaje held the promise of a true national culture. Such racialized nationalism based on hybridity recalls the "cosmic race" of José Vasconcelos insofar as this theory raised miscegenation to the status of a national ideal; but whereas Vasconcelos argued from the locus of the white and creole elite in favor of the downtrodden mestizo, Tamayo, who also argued for the mestizo ideal, embodied that ideal as an urban elite mestizo *letrado*.

If Fichte's idea of "national energy" was imported by a Bolivian nationalist, a quarter-century later it became a Bolivian concept discoverable to a German theosophist. Hermann Keyserling's Bolivian epiphany at the beginning of *South American Meditations* remains one of the great revelations of transatlantic modernism. He provides a testimony of a spiritual transformation he experienced during his visit to Bolivia, where he fell quite ill. Stricken by what was probably altitude sickness, in the midst of his suffering, he suddenly was possessed – not unlike Bolívar in "Mi delirio sobre el Chimborazo" – by the revelation that he *is* the land:

> During that illness I felt myself to be a part of the Cosmic Process as intimately as the embryo, were it endowed with consciousness, would experience itself as an element of super-individual organic evolution. Then did I realize: among other things, I am Earth and pure force of the Earth. I am Earth not merely understood as material; this non-ego is an essential part of that which I experience myself to

> be. In the melting-pot of the puna, the constellation of earthly elements which I myself incarnate, wrestled with other earthly elements of a power far greater than my own. [...] As I was struggling in the melting-pot of the puna for my identity, my own Minerality awoke and reached my consciousness. And then I learnt to understand in a new sense that longing for Death, which ever and again seizes me with the compelling force of a vertigo. Death, viewed from earthly consciousness, means liberation. (*South American Meditations*, 14–5)

Keyserling's testimonial exhibits an outlandish imaginary, insofar as it describes inhabitants of the Andes, "those souls of bronze," as actually mineral in nature. In fact, he wildly claimed that early Alto Peru (as Bolivia was then referred to) was populated by dwarfs, Catachthonian miners and smiths, who were creatures older than humans. On his literary tour through the Andes, Keyserling thought that Bolivians lacked spirit, and he characterized the *senility* of those bronze dwarfs as "mineral" in nature: "Indeed, does not everyone in whom Spirit is not predominant become mineral, as with age he draws nearer the Earth?" (17). Minerality, for Keyserling, was a negative value associated with the loss of the cognitive faculties, a stupefaction, a numbness. He fantasized that Andeans had not domesticated the llama, but on the contrary, that the llama had been the midwife of primitive Andeans and, in this way, was "the prototype of the responsible housekeeper," evoking a vision of the first mother of the world (18).

We may smile wryly at this primitivist imaginary, but what seems really remarkable is that Keyserling accidently seduced Palza into thinking that the geography of the Andes predestined its inhabitants to an exceptional historical function.[12] What

[12] See Humberto Palza, *El hombre como método* (San Francisco, CA, 1939).

Keyserling had in mind was quite different. He thought that the telluric was a degraded reality that must be combatted and overcome. For Palza and Tamayo, on the other hand, the spirit of the land acted directly in humans as a mobilizing force capable of producing a nationalist compensation. Palza's Tellurism was a European idea presented as autochthonous to Bolivia. As Albarracín argues in *Las meditaciones de Palza*, whereas no one in Europe militated in the name of the telluric, in Bolivia an avant-garde stepped forth to proclaim that the land exercised an essential force on the tragic subject of modernism, and while Keyserling inadvertently created this possibility, these mystics of the land tended to omit from their discussions his writings on Bolivia (53).[13] Palza transvaluated the value of "minerality," so that it signaled the bond between the Andean subject and the land he occupied. As we will see in the ensuing analysis, the myths of universal terror, the destructive power of the puna, the minerality of man, and the terrestrialization of the spirit all served Jaime Saenz as rationale for renouncing bourgeois liberal values with the aim of restoring a lost faith in the redeeming power of the *genius loci*.

4.1.1 Discipline of the Plunge

Muerte por el tacto (1957) echoes the violent provocation of Saenz's first book, *El escalpelo* (1955), which relied on the evocation of an instrument designed for corporeal excisions as a metaphor for the plume, the writing utensil that severs language from the

[13] See Roberto Prudencio Romecín, *Ensayos históricos* (La Paz, Bolivia: Juventud, 1990) pp. 7–15.

author. It relied on the instrument's medical meaning and a dark sense of humor – Saenz was after all a marvelously morbid humorist. The long poem *Muerte por el tacto* is a "death by touch" to the extent that "tacto" refers to the tactile sense, evoking a "death touch" through the habitus of a black magic practitioner. However, "tacto" is also operative as "prudent behavior," "measured restraint," "tactfulness," rendering the equally valid and typically ironic "death by precaution." Tact, respectability, social convention, these Saenz condemned as commercial, superficial, and spiritually hollow: *son la muerte*, the worst precaution of all.

For Saenz, the *genius loci* was an idealized erotic anti-order that existed in a distant time which had been interrupted by the ascendency of bourgeois liberal values. Like Keyserling, he thought that Bolivian geography predisposed Andeans to an extraordinary connection to the land, but, like Tamayo and Palza, he attributed a positive value to minerality. On the other hand, since Saenz was more loyal to a transhistorical colloquium than to a nationalist compensation, as Tamayo and Palza were, minerality gave him the language to name a discipline that could mediate between the spirit of the land and the spirit of capitalism which saw in the land only the potential of commercial mineral extraction. The discipline has taken the form of "the plunge" and, accordingly, turned Jaime Saenz into a poetic miner, a veritable "underground man," a post-Romantic *maldito* who, as Zambrano has said of Lautréamont, felt condemned

because he longed for a mythical paradise that he had no room for in himself even if he could find it, which he could not.[14]

In its disavowal of instrumental reason, the plunge was a form of resignation, a discipline of facing things as they are.[15] The subject who takes the plunge no longer aims to transform life in the presence of truth but only to gaze at all that is transitory in life without ever looking away, knowing that one day he too will have to write his last will and testament. The plunge was a discipline of submerging into the base of the social structure where the resilient poor Aymara majority remained enthralled in their labor through a channel that was inaccessible to the tragic subject of modernism. However, this discursive submergence into the land instigated a crisis of representation. In this way, by the midpoint of the 20th century, the mediating logic of the *genius loci* produced a so-called death of the author, a poetry in which "el lenguaje deviene acontecimiento" [language becomes event] (Wiethüchter 2002, 151). This submergence can be observed at the beginning of *Muerte por el tacto*:

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[14] See María Zambrano, "La confesión, como género literario y como método II," *Luminar* 6, no. 1 (1943) pp. 20–51, esp. 45–51.

[15] The social text of the plunge can be appreciated in Saenz's "Letters to Bertha" which may have been letters of a juvenile love affair, or may have been a literary enterprise, an epistle, since the author of those texts calls into question the legitimacy of his own authorship. On November 5, 1942, Saenz wrote: "Y así, sucesivamente, hasta que hubo un momento en que tenía, necesariamente, que venir una variante fundamental en mi vida: o sumergirme en forma total y absoluta en un caos de horror y desesperanza, anonadarme paulatinamente, o, en virtud de una causa que forzozamente tenía que ser emocional, renacer plenamente a la vida, sentirme tal como soy, vivir en forma sincera y noble con relación a mí mismo y al mundo circulante" [And so it went, until the moment came, when I had to face the dilemma: either plunge totally and absolutely into the chaos of horror and hopelessness in gradual astonishment, or, in virtue of a cause that necessarily had to be emotional, be born again completely into life, feel that I am as I am, live sincerely and nobly in relation to myself and to the world around me]. See Jaime Saenz, "Cartas a Bertha," *La Mariposa Mundial* no. 18 (2010) pp. 156–61, esp. 157.

es necesario que escriba una carta para poder ver mejor la luz de las cosas
luego de leerla alumbrado por el antiguo vuelo de mis amigos muertos
es necesario que recuerden todos su amor a la música, su sosiego y su desdicha,
y su propensión a la risa así como las arquitecturas que urdían cuando podían hacer lo contrario
y su lamento, el lamento que ya fue analizado sin usar la substancia humana,
sin planes, sin palabra ni consulta, pero con ademanes repetidos bajo la mirada
que caía desde un pedestal diseñado en otro tiempo para ensalzar a los mendigos, a los valientes y a los inventores del azúcar y del resorte
y sus proyectos,
los rigurosos alegatos en favor del desquiciamiento, de un anti-orden, para el retorno profundo al verdadero ordenamiento

I must write a letter to see the light of things more clearly
after reading it enlightened by the ancient flight of my dead friends
they all must remember their love for music, their sighs and their misfortune,
and their propensity for laughter along with the architectures they concocted when they could have done the opposite
and their laments, the lament that already was analyzed without using the human substance,
without plans, without a word or counsel, but with repeated gestures under the gaze
which fell from a pedestal designed in another age to lionize the beggars, the brave and the inventors of sugar and elastic
and their projects,
the rigorous pleas in defense of madness, of an anti-order, for the profound return to the true ordering

(80)

The gaze of the "dead friends" is cast from a pedestal in the distant past, monumentalizing the valor of the most exploited and elevating the category of madness [*desquicimiento*] to a redemptive function capable of merging the disenchanted subject into an idealized "anti-order," with an eroticism that Arthur Rimbaud once described,

paradoxically, as a "rational disordering of *all* the senses" (XXX). Likewise, in Saenz, the lyric subject's vocation is awaiting "la revelación integrada por los ríos y la esencia de la música y por el desaliño de la vida" [the revelation comprised of rivers and the essence of music and the disarray of life] (*Muerte por el tacto*, 91). The literary oracular is at work in the subject's access to this state of "rational disordering," this "desaliño de la vida," which was made possible by the plunge, by an assault on expositional discursivity and by a crisis of representation. As Maurice Blanchot argued a decade earlier:

> Literature does not act; but what it does is plunge into this depth of existence which is neither being nor nothingness and where the hope of doing anything is completely eliminated. It is not explanation, and it is not pure comprehension, because the inexplicable emerges it in. And it expresses without expressing, it offers itself to what is murmured in the absence of speech. (340)

From this perspective, truth in poetry is never sought and seized, but reveals itself as organicity which becomes accessible when life is discovered spontaneously in poetic disarray. It is a truth with which one comes into contact but cannot seek, a sudden jubilation that overwhelms the solitary poet whose withdrawal from the conventions of social life and commerce has stirred in him strong historical affiliations. In Saenz, Tamayo's "national energy," Keyserling's "minerality," Francovich's "mysticism of the land," and the Tellurism of Palza and Prudencio were conflated with a postmodern position toward authorship which transferred the voice of the lyric subject to the voice of language itself, in such a way that the organic life force emanating from Bolivia's extraordinary geography received the religious denomination of "júbilo." It was an enthusiasm, delirium, the ecstatic shudder that flows through the poet, possessing him,

which is why it could be expressed but not explained. On the structural level, this "júbilo" is a concept quite similar to the "delirio" of Zambrano; however, unlike the Spanish philosopher the Bolivian poet attributed this state to a power emanating from the land. Saenz understood the poet to be a medium, whose exaggerated love for the *genius loci* convinced him that instrumental reason would dominate even spiritual affairs if there was no custodianship, no conduit and its loyal protector. For as much of an outsider as he may seem to be, in reality Saenz belongs to a *community of the literary oracular*, since the work of the poet as an instrument of the divine has become homologous with the work of the cultural custodian who mediates between an organic way of seeing which predated the mechanization of reason and the blindness of the unreflective subject represented in mass culture.

4.1.2 Channeling through the *entrañas oscuras*

The desire to restore an old faith that had been lost to the capitalist logic of the marketplace emerged in 20th-century poetry as an oracular practice. As Bolivia entered the second half of the 20th century, the value of the *genius loci* had been put in peril by the ascendent bourgeois liberal values and the increasing awareness that weaker nations strengthened themselves by conforming to the demand of material progress in the World-System of extractivist capitalism. This gradual shift away from romanticized Tellurism occurred concurrently with the growth of a new class of readers literate in Spanish and the growth of the vernacular print industry. As magazines and newspapers

came to be consumed with greater voracity than books, the literary field of production grew crowded and the writer was desacralized, as the spiritually adept poet was suddenly contending with the lay reporter. The poetics of revelation in Saenz reflects this anxiety that the legitimacy of the oracular could be lost forever if left unprotected.

Saenz thought that oracular legitimacy could be restored in the figure of a *modernist mystic* – an abject, underground man who by choice lives in the depths of the *urbe,* in the resilient substratum, where the telluric forces of the region pulse. He believed this superman had to know the secret language of things,[16] that he was counted among the few who have the training and the will to face things as they are, to name the ineffable, to envision a restored whole of which the subject of mass culture can identify only a fragment. The lyric subject is not just the voice of the street, but the mineralized voice of the land. In this Andean geography, as mountainous as it is urban, this meant that the poet could also be the voice of the city's darkest corners, its taverns, where his religious fanaticism dissimulated as vulgar drunkenness, and vice versa.[17] The cultural production of the literary oracular was not only the outcome of Saenz's self-fashioning

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[16] The idea of a magical language capable of expressing enigmas is also explored in *Los papeles de Narciso Lima-Achá*, when a giant abyss appears to swallow the world, and Narciso and Huanca speak only in Aymara, which is said to be able to name the unnamable, a capacity absent in Castilian. What is more, they hold the superstition that speaking Castilian courts disaster. See Jaime Saenz, *Los papeles de Narciso Lima-Achá* (La Paz, Bolivia: Instituto Boliviano de Cultura, 1991) pp. 38–51. The myth of Aymara as a secretly primordial language capable of expressing reality more truthfully than any other dates back at least to the 19th-century philology of Emeterio Villamil de Rada's *La lengua de Adán y el hombre de Tiaguanaco* (La Paz, Bolivia: Ministerio de la Educación, Bellas Artes y Asuntos Indígenas,1939).

[17] This is abundantly clear in the tableaux vivant "Una bodega." See Jaime Saenz, *Imágenes paceñas* (La Paz, Bolivia: Difusión, 1979) p. 123. For more on the motif of the tavern, see Luis Antezana, *La bodega de Jaime Saenz* (La Paz, Bolivia: Espacio Simón I. Patiño-CESU-Nuevo Milenio-Imago, 2005).

as a unique interpreter of natural phenomenon (especially catastrophes); on the contrary, it also was the creation of his commentators (Wiethüchter 1975; Blanco Mamani 1998; Monasterios 2001) who received that authorial self-representation uncritically and promoted it as an alternative to the cultural imperialism of western modernity.

As in the poetry of many conservative intellectuals of Saenz's generation, the discourse of radical solitude – a marked withdrawal from the concerns of society and a submergence into the problems of modern subjectivity – always had to deal with the problem of the "people." In Saenz's poetry, there is often such a 'rebellion of the masses,' as it were. The retreat of the poet is encroached upon by the "people." In *Muerte por el tacto*, this takes the form of "clusivity,"[18] when the poetic subject adopts the first-person plural, and the "we" of the poem does not refer to "you, I and possibly others" but to "you, I and not certain others." People who do not take the plunge are not granted access to this modernist minerality, because they deny solitude, entangled in everyday life. More afflicted by vertigo than by claustrophobia, "people" ignore the possibility of their own inexistence:

> Conocemos a las gentes pero sólo tal cual son y no las sabemos tal cual no son pese a que carecen de la facultad de no ser porque no saben que pueden no ser o ser

[18] The term "clusivity" refers broadly to the distinction in descriptive grammars between inclusive and exclusive linguistic expressions. See Elena Filimionova, *Clusivity: Topology and Case Studies of the Inclusive-Exclusive Distinction* (Amsterdam; Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2005).

saben en toda su magnitud mis amigos muertos y yo hablo de ellos con seguridad y orgullo
son mis maestros

We meet various people but only as they are and we don't know them as they are not even though they lack the faculty of not being because they don't know that they can be or not be
my dead friends *know* in the full extent of the word and I speak of these friends confidently and proudly
they're my masters

(82; emphasis added)

The "gentes" of the poem are an unthinking body that floats along, coming into contact with the poet in a series of indifferent encounters that do not reveal an inner essence. They are what Ortega y Gasset called "mass man," mass because they are swept along by the tides of history in the wakes produced by extraordinary men. Yet rather than lacking the secret knowledge possessed by the lyric subject, what these "gentes" lack is will power, since they live "cautamente entre sí [y] no prefieren alaridos" [cautiously among themselves and do not care for the shrieking] (*Muerte*, 83). The precautious allow this lyric subject to set himself apart. He does not inhabit the city, but rather contains it: "[s]algo encorvado a contemplar el interior de la ciudad y uso del tacto desde mis entrañas oscuras/ en el secreto deseo de encontrar allá, allá el medio propicio para hacer que el mundo sea envuelto por el olvido" [hunched over I go to behold the inner city and I make use of tact from my guts/ secretly desiring to find there the ideal means to envelop the world with oblivion] (*Muerte*, 81).

The "entrañas oscuras" manifest the poet's logic of mediation in a celebration of the gaze of the child, the exemplary believer in his own unlimited capacity, a gaze that

keeps the world magical and uncontaminated by pragmatism. The naiveté of the child's gaze is idealized by the poet who longs for the lost faith of the *genius loci* which was inaccessible to the alienated subject of modernism and which the poet could feel in his guts. He evokes this innocence in a *costumbrista* portrait of urban life, populated by bakers on the corners, women in the doorways, an animal trotting down a cobbled street – when suddenly the entire scene is radically internalized through the symbol of the "entrañas oscuras":

> juzgo conveniente alabar la esencia de aquel anciano y detenerme cuando el ayudante del hornero le hace muecas descriptivas
> al animal que pasa fugaz ante la sonrisa de la viejecita del dintel
> en fin, adoro las voces claras, los trenes y las ciudades
> y por todo lo que digo
> adoro mis entrañas oscuras
>
> I deem it convenient to praise the essence of that old man and linger when the baker's helper makes descriptive faces at him
> at the animal who rushes by before the smiling old maid in the doorway
> in a word, I adore clear voices, the trains and the cities
> and given all that I have said
> I adore my dark innermost recesses
>
> (84)

Everyday life deserves adoration insofar as it directs the subject inward, toward his "entrañas oscuras," (recesses, guts, entrails, but also caverns, dens), which is counted among the principal metaphors for inwardness in the tradition of Hispanic mysticism, from Saint John of the Cross to Unamuno and Zambrano.[19] Saenz is fond of exploiting

[19] For examples of the predominance of this metaphor in the poetry of in the early modern Hispanic tradition and its 20th-century reinvention, see Miguel de Santiago, *Antología de poesía mística española* (Barcelona: Verón, 1998).

the metaphor's anatomical meaning at the service of the grotesque, so that the image is not merely the most hidden regions of the soul ("the innermost recesses," which Saint Teresa of Avila famously and honorifically called "moradas del castillo interior" in the book of that title), but also the human bowels, an image of human viscera that would offend the prudence of bourgeois culturalists. In his 1976 prologue to Rigoberto Paredes's collection of Andean myths, Saenz again recurred to the metaphor of the "entrañas" in a form of primitivism more explicit than what we find in *Muerte por el tacto*: "Con una prodigiosa energia que fluye del cosmos y que confluye en sus entrañas, el indio, que en plenitud es lo que realmente puede llamarse un ser civilizado, en el más alto sentido de la palabra, nada tiene que ver con la mera sobrevivencia, pues conviene saber que el indio es prácticamente eterno" [With a prodigious energy that flows from the cosmos and converges in his innermost recesses, the Indian, who in his plenitude is what can be called a truly civilized being, in the loftiest sense of the word, has nothing to do with the plight of survival, since the Indian, let us recall, in practice is eternal] (8–9).

Saenz learned early on how to harness Tamayo's "national energy" as a consolation for his own anxiety over mid-20th-century social change and a reorganization of values by internalizing the *genius loci* so that its truth could be extracted from the body as in a ritual sacrifice, which he described in *Bruckner*, where the act of writing – the creation that is made and unmade – has the sole objective of "desentrañar la revelación del júbilo personificado" [disemboweling the revelation of

jubilation personified] (13). Once the *genius loci* no longer had to be defended in a nationalist discourse that exalted the resilient indigenous majority who lived in close proximity to the land, poetry could lay claim to it by elevating the lyric subject's inwardness to the status of religious fanaticism – jubilation – as an anti-imperialist critique of instrumental reason.

The mediator was no longer a discerning cultural critic, but simply the mouthpiece of the latent energy itself which passed through his "entrañas oscuras," endowing him with oracular legitimacy, authorizing him to compose a poetry of the absolute future, a poetry whose "maker" is himself an instrument of the divine. Saenz recurs to the absolute future tense through the second two movements of *Muerte por el tacto*, evoking the tone of the diviner, whose messianism held the promise of integration into the longer-for totality: "Cuando encuentre mi alma, otros serán los ruidos y otros los acicates que me conduzcan a un camino para el encuentro final con el mundo" [When I find my soul, the noise will be different and different the incentives that lead me down the path to the final meeting with the world] (85).

In the absolute future, the poetic subject is a conduit, having abandoned "lo inútil" [the useless], where the value of "utility" has been inverted. What is referred to now as "inútil" suggests the kind of activity that is motivated by the logic of the marketplace. Its opposite, which the poem advocates, disavows that logic in a bid to restore a spiritual sensibility that had eroded under the regime of bourgeois liberal

values. The subject awaits the day when there will be no need to speak at all and his relation to reality will be absolute, when "no habrá palabras y el silencioso mundo vivirá solamente para ser sentido —desaparecerá la maligna diversidad y todo será uno solo para ser sentido por uno solo" [there will be no words and the silent world will live only to be felt – malignant diversity will disappear, and all will be one to be felt by one alone] (*Muerte*, 86).

4.1.3 The Jubilant Angel

Through his own self-fashioning and his commentators' uncritical reception of it, Saenz mineralized the Bolivian poet into a modern *curandero*, an urban medium, a modernist sage. The *genius loci* now was vigilantly guarded by the anti-bourgeois religious fanatic, equally antagonistic against enlightened intellectuals and agents of the global economy, an *Übermensch* who emerged from dark alleys, since he is a "custodio del callejón" and blood-relative of the *aparapita*.[20] The oracular legitimacy of this mediator is supremely manifest in his admonitions of the nonbeliever in *Muerte por el tacto*, the individual who is committed to civil society, a professional career, industrial modernization, global commerce, the democratization of politics, and so on. Taking a page from Nietzsche's critique of Christian morals and bourgeois conformity, the poem argues that these are forms of self-deception which amount to a cowardly strategy to avoid *life* – to avoid, that is, the adventure and risk elements of an existence which

[20] See Jaime Saenz, *Imágenes*, pp. 111–3.

ideally should be, in Nietzschean fashion, devoted to conquering and self-conquest – devised by someone who would prefer the stability of deceit over truth that demands change: "te estás yendo burlonamente/ pero antes abre algo y ve qué pasa" [you carry on mockingly/ but first open something up and see what happens] (88). This act of revealing, this opening up, is the literary oracular at work.

> hay que neutralizar los límites y las limitaciones con un poco más de perejil
> y tener el secreto de los tallos
> y conocer el sentido del cuerpo
> y hacer que de los volcanes salgan cosas más razonables
> e invocar para que el alma esté menos distante —tenga más confianza en uno
>
> one must neutralize the limits and the limitations with another dash of parsley
> and hold the secret of the stalks
> and know the meaning of the body
> and make volcanos spew something more reasonable
> and invoke so the soul draws nearer – and is more trusting of us
>
> (89)

The poem accuses the nonbeliever in "tacto" of lacking the resolve to face the absolutism of reality, the will to live in resignation, to come into contact with an organic totality capable of restoring values which have eroded under the regime of instrumental reason. This was not a metaphysical problem, but a problem of volition. Poetry in Saenz had to legitimate itself as a dare to deny the logic of western capitalism with the religious fanaticism of ritual land wordship. The mediator was fashioned with an oracular capacity unavailable to the nonbeliever who refused to take the plunge and who remained attached to a bourgeois life of commerce and consumption. Although the nonbeliever claimed to have seen, the subject accuses him of seeing only himself and of

averting his gaze precisely when his self-perception disintegrated before his eyes: "te has palpado y te acordaste de tus sueños pero no querías saber" [you touched yourself and remembered your dreams, but you didn't want to know] (*Muerte*, 90). What the nonbeliever refused to accept is that the truth of the old faith in the spirit of the land now possessed the modern poet, whose disavowal of bourgeois liberal values made him look mad in a nation beset by a delayed modernization.[21]

This mineralized subject of the literary oracular is an underground man, whose life is a plunge, and whose poetry is the byproduct of his will to integrate into a totality without altering the order of things. This post-Romantic illness of *malditismo* spread to the urban subject whose struggle to maintain legitimacy in the field of cultural production could not find support in the religious institution of the church on account of its moderation. Poetry had to take the place of religion in an act of heresy, as occurred with the Romantics, but unlike the Romantics it now did not manifest in the lamentations of an ignored prophet; instead, it elected to empty itself of intentionality to make room for the jubilation which would announce the old faith in the redeeming power of an erotic anti-order. The nonbeliever remained entangled in his life project, whereas the lyric subject denied himself intentionality, convinced and trying to convince others that only through resignation could one make oneself possessable, as it were, by the *genius loci*. The minerality that poetry expressed as "the disarray of life" was

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[21] For the poetic treatment of the figure of the madman, see Jaime Saenz, *Imágenes*, p. 169.

nourished by the technique of collage, which juxtaposed disjointed, heterogenous, unharmonious images:

> Estoy cada vez más enfermo que todo, más enfermo que un colibrí.
> Los días, las lunas y las moscas aparecen forjados en la colina pálida que recorre
> —deja que esa espada esté en mis sueños
> esté en mis pobres sueños de ángel solitario y jubiloso
>
> I am ever sicker than everything, sicker than a hummingbird. The days, the moons and the flies appear carved into the pale hill traversing
> —Let that sword be in my dreams
> in my poor dreams of a solitary and jubilant angel
>
> (92)

Collage offered itself as a technique for that paradoxical *rational disordering of the senses*, that expression of disarray crafted as if it had been captured during an unmediated encounter with the incommensurable. More a mystagogue than a proper mystic, the lyric subject fashions himself as a "solitary and jubilant angel," an oracle who shudders before apocalyptic visions, since like the Romantic he was convinced that the world took notice of him only when it was about to end. From its earliest utterance, jubilation has denominated a state of frenzy, whether it is the joyous call to someone who returns, an exclamation celebrating manumission, or the return of alienated lands.[22]

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[22] The etymology of the term sheds light on the redemptive function that Saenz assigns to it. In Vulgar Latin, *iubilum* derives from the verb *iubilare* which meant "to shout or call to someone in joy." Added to this, recent scholarship has suggested that *iubilare* gave rise to *iobileus* [jubilee]. The "iu-" is an Indo-European root that designates an exclamatory interjection, such as the joyous cries or whistles of rural dwellers. The *-bilare* derives from the Hebrew "yobel" (and by extension, the shofar or ram's horn) which refers to the sound of a horn and appears in Leviticus 25:11: "So you are to consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty in the land for all its inhabitants. It shall be your *Jubilee*, when each of you is to return to his property and to his clan." For more on this, see Mallory, J. P. and D. Q. Adams, *The Oxford Introduction to Proto-Indo-European and the Proto-Indo-European World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

"Júbilo" (as both *jubilation* and *jubilee*) is the delirium of the underground man, whose plunge into the absolutism of reality convinced him that his channel to the spirit of the land had to be protected against a new technocratic social order and the dominance of instrumental reason.

The lyric subject dares the reader – the nonbeliever – to live in resignation, to give in to things, without trying to alter the order of the cosmos. Since the dare has not worked and the stubborn nonbeliever refuses to resign, the "solitary and jubilant angel" chastises him for his ignorance. What the nonbeliever fails to see and what the lyric subject refuses to look away from is "una totalidad ciega y callada" [a blind and mute totality]. This antagonism, far from threatening to break down the relation between the seer and the nonbeliever, actually guarantees the stability of their formal relation, insofar as "justifican [los] jubilosos la vida para que otros duerman" [the jubilant justify life so that others may sleep] (*Muerte*, 92–3).

The accusation that concludes the poem returns to the nonbeliever's volitional debility, his fear, his precaution: "te tocas y no hay/ tienes miedo —sabes que no habrá/ formulas una sonrisa para la vida/ y ensayas tu tacto/ desconfías" [you touch yourself and there isn't anything/ you're scared – you know there will not be anything/ you formulate a smile for life/ and rehearse your tactfulness/ you distrust] (*Muerte*, 93). Tact turns out not to be the realization of an intuition, but what the nonbeliever rehearses in preparation for reality, hesitating, lingering in the anticipation of coming into contact

with something greater than himself. Tact is the worst precaution of all, a defensive mechanism not born out of the subject's stronger sense of self, but of the societal interdictions and repressive mechanisms imposed on him. Tact proves that a life more authentic than the everyday does not anxiously wait to be discovered. Voluntarist through and through, the poem decries the nonbeliever's lack of self-confidence, which is considered cowardice by the jubilant angel who, defending oracular legitimacy against bourgeois liberal values, found consolation in sowing seeds of instability in the conviction that reality does not need to be revealed.

4.2 The Separation Community: The Abject in Recorrer esta distancia

I began this chapter by showing how the language of Jaime Saenz's early poetry did not escape the "mineralized" rhetoric of Tellurism or the feeling of defeat, which, following the Chaco War and prior to the National Revolution, oriented a generation of Bolivians to question the legitimacy of the Republican-Liberal political class. Poetic revelation in the writing of Saenz is an opportunity to observe how a land-based irrationalist position toward literature and cultural production emanated from the concept of "júbilo," that is, ecstasy possessing the subject whose world is about to end.[23]

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[23] The concept of ecstasy is equally prevalent in the thought of María Zambrano in *Filosofía*, p. 18 *et seq*. Additionally, discussions on ecstasy in ahistoricist, religious, and or traditionalist circles of literary modernism saw high points in contributions from Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience* (Albany: State University of New York, 2014); Maurice Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community* (Barrytown, NY: Station Hill Press, 1988), and Lugwig Klages, *Of Cosmogonic Eros* (Munich: Theion, 2018). For critical perspectives on those conversations, Jeremy Biles and Kent Brintnall, *Negatives Ecstasies: George Bataille and the Study of*

As we saw in Zambrano and Paz, and as we now observe in Saenz, poetry is conceived as a practice of mediation between an organic totality that could exist only before the violence of instrumental reason and an alienated subject who experiences reality as an inaccessible externality. At a time when the culturalist poetry of urban *modernistas* had been drowned out by the chatter of reporters, who were literate but not *letrados*, the poet transformed into an oracular sage who acted as a conduit of the *genius loci* in a nation undergoing dramatic fits of social change in an imbalanced modernization. Like any cultural mediation, this literary project required specific forms of distinction. How was the lyric subject to set himself apart from those individuals who were supposed to be beneficiaries of his mediation? And what was to be done with the individuals who vowed to follow the sage and assume a discipleship? Let us turn to the theme of separation, as it appears in Saenz's writings from the 1970s, in pursuit of these questions.

4.2.1 Separation, Distinction, and the Abject

In an undated letter to Stefan Baciu, recently reproduced in *La Mariposa Mundial*, Saenz extols the virtues of Tristán Marof, the nom-de-plume of Gustavo Adolfo Navarro, who had delivered to Baciu a copy of Saenz's book of poems *Aniversario de una*

Religion (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015); and Nitzan Lebovic, *The Philosophy of Life and Death: Lugwig Klages and the Rise of a Nazi Biopolitics* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), pp. 79–110.

visión. Saenz writes of the supremely noble Marof, a man alien to envy, bold in action and brave in feats, who never hid anything from anyone – alas, one of the few people with whom Jaime Saenz could tolerate a conversation. Marof knew the world. He knew the hidden secrets of the world which are accessible only to individuals who have sunken into a veritable abyss or successfully raised their head aboveground. If only everyone acted with such disregard for social conventions, Saenz fancied, authentic reality would be more readily accessible.

What begins as celebration of Marof's moral virtue, distinguishing him from individuals who do not uphold his moral standards, soon reveals its socializing function insofar as the ethos attributed to Marof is shared by Saenz. What's more, Saenz counts Baciu among the heroic exemplars of authenticity. This rhetorical strategy positioned the Romanian in the same discipline as the author, who took aim at his enemies, complaining that they were too small to be honest and too cowardly to be sincere. As Saenz explains, faced with this scenario, he finds recourse in the secret weapon of humor:

> Hay que tener una fuerza casi sobrehumana par contrarrestar los efectos de esta bien organizada y encubierta conspiración. Claro que es el humor uno de los principales componentes de esa fuerza casi sobrehumana. El humor es conocimiento, en el más alto sentido. ¡Él que escribe lo que le da la gana, el que no teme a nada ni a nadie, el que no transige, el que escupe sobre las convenciones, sobre los grupos, los cenáculos y peñas está perdido! No tiene perdón. Y como a uno le interesa un comino que lo perdonen o que dejan de perdonarlo, y como ni siquiera los mira de reojo, la cosa se vuelve de lo más chistoso. (165–6)

> One must have an almost superhuman strength to counteract the effects of this well-organized and concealed conspiracy. Of course, humor is one of the principal components of that almost superhuman strength. Humor is knowledge, in the highest sense of the word. He who writes whatever he feels like writing, who fears nothing and no one, who is uncompromising, who spits on conventions, especially on groups, on coteries and clubs – he's lost! He's unforgiveable. And since he could care less whether they forgive him or don't forgive him, and since he doesn't even glance at them out the corner of his eye, the whole affair really becomes quite hilarious.

These are lines that would have been endorsed by Nietzsche's Zarathustra or Dostoevsky's underground man, but the rhetoric of this passage deserves our close attention beyond the identification of this lineage: it signals the subject's separation from a definable set of cultural practices, and at the same time it reveals that the aim of this separation is to redefine the terms of group association, of living in community with others. Saenz's acclaim of Marof in his letter to Baciu does more than commemorate; it sets forth a voluntarist axiology with which Baciu is assumed to accept. The distinction is made on ethical grounds. The fact that Baciu is absorbed into the position of the individual who determines these values – the author – is not fortuitous. This rhetorical strategy strives at a form of being-together but defines itself vis-à-vis repulsion, radical separation, a form of distinction so intense it provokes laughter.[24]

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[24] The relation of humor to the abject, in the context of this metaphorical underground, recalls an early passage of Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*: "I used to be in the civil service. But no more. I was a nasty official. I was rude and took pleasure in it. After all, since I didn't accept bribes, at least I had to reward myself in some way. (That's a poor joke, but I won't cross it out. I wrote it thinking that it would be very witty; but now, having realized that I merely wanted to show off disgracefully, I'll make a point of not crossing it out!)." See Feodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground* (New York: Norton & Co., 1989) p. 3.

In *The Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva suggests that laughter, especially when it is piercing and anguished, is one of the ways that abjection is placed or displaced.[25] Shrill is the laughter in the writing of Saenz, where the reader faces the unmistakable signs of a subject who respects no borders, no rules, concerning himself primarily with what, drawing on Kristeva, I will call "a deep well of memory that is unapproachable and intimate" (*The Powers*, 6). The lyric subject of Saenz's poetics of revelation performs and repeats a radical separation every time he strays in the willed manifestation of a negation.[26] Similarly, Blanca Wiethüchter (2002) has observed this tendency in Saenz's eponymous protagonist of the novel *Felipe Delgado*, who presents the reader not with a form of knowledge but rather a systematic negativity, "el poder del no" [the power of No] (160).

Kristeva's theory of the abject equips critical analysis of Saenz's project to restore to modern poetry its right to oracular authority with a set of tools that can address the lyric subject's typically frustrated relation with others, his predilection for perversion, corruption, and self-inflicted pain. Epitomized as these traits are by the antihero of that novel, observations have been made only in passing and only in the context of the novel. Indeed, a rigorous examination of the power of horror in the poetry of Saenz calls upon

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[25] It is worth asking how laughter, in the forms of mockery and self-effacement, may reflect a traditionalist mode of criticism that historically has taken the form of literary satire.

[26] For more on the concept of separation, see Blanca Wiethüchther, "Estructuras de lo imaginario en la obra poética de Jaime Saenz," *Obra pøética* (La Paz, Bolivia: Biblioteca del Sesquicentenario de la República, 1975) pp. 316–25, esp. 317.

criticism today. Therefore, let me address the topic of abjection and expand the scope of the question to include the poetry of *Recorrer esta distancia*, first published in 1973.

Structured as a paradigmatic "voyage," not at all uncommon in Saenz's long poems, *Recorrer esta distancia* relies on a modernist framing device in which the lyric subject declares that he is about to depart on a psychological journey: "Pienso recorrer esta distancia descansando en algún lugar" [I think about crossing this distance while taking a rest somewhere] (187).[27] As Hugo Friedrich observes, this framing device counted as one of symbolism's major contributions to modern poetry.[28] By the time this device reached the pen of Saenz, the journey had become endless. There was no longer a destination. Now, the lyric subject journeys on a night that refuses to break into day: "una noche interminable como la inmortalidad" [a night endless as immortality] (idem). This traveler senses the danger of his enterprise and anticipates the power exerted on him by an object whose form is degraded. This "pseudo-objectness," as Kristeva calls it, appears in Saenz's poem as "el cansancio de las cosas" [the weariness of things] (194). Things may grow weary of being held on to, yet the subject still contends that they must be seized – and he relishes the violence with which he is torn away from them.

Animated by the search for redemption in failure, the subject cannot resist the attraction to horror and risks everything whenever he crosses the line and sets himself

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[27] I quote from the more readily available version of *Recorrer esta distancia* in *Obra poética I*, pp. 197–210.
[28] This framing device was well documented by Hugo Friedrich in *The Structure of Modern Poetry: From the Mid-Nineteenth to the Mid-Twentieth Century* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974) pp. 39–68.

apart in a movement of radical separation. As Kristeva describes, "the more he strays, the more he is saved" (*The Power*, 8). Whereas for Octavio Paz, horror in the form of the sacred represented the possibility of revealing contingency as the human condition, for Saenz it offers a method, albeit predestined to fail, by which the subject may face the absolutism of reality, as one is drawn by the undertow toward a crashing wave. As I mentioned above, Wiethüchter (2002) identified this "extravío" [misconduct, straying] in *Felipe Delgado*, who is "un héroe moderno, de hazañas irrisorias realizadas en el extravío" [a modern hero of risible feats performed in misconduct] (160).[29] She shows that the power established by the subject is not the power of knowledge but the power of systematic negation, repulsion, radical separation. This negativity which permeates Felipe Delgado offers the most socialized appearance of the abject through manifestations of corruption.

Kristeva's description of abjection in the novels of Louis-Ferdinand Céline warrant a brief gloss on account of their striking applicability to the poetry of Saenz. The abject individual is perverse because he neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule, or a law; instead, he turns them aside, misleads, corrupts; uses prohibitions to his advantage, the better to deny them. The abject kills in the name of life – a progressive despot; lives at the behest of death – a regular visitor in the municipal morgue; curbs the

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[29] See Blanca Wiethüchter, *Hacia una historia crítica de la literatura boliviana. Vol. 1.* (La Paz, Bolivia: PIEB, 2002).

other's suffering for his own profit – a cynic (and a psychoanalyst); establishes narcissistic power while pretending to reveal the abyss – an artist who practices his art as a "business" (*The Powers*, 15–6). In Saenz as in Céline, the subject's attraction to all forms of corruption and even putrefaction includes construing himself – his body and his bowels as much as his soul – as the receptacle of every refuse. His "entrañas oscuras" may indeed contain an entire nocturnal city and the coal-stained railroad tracks. Such are some of the social and existential manifestations of the literary abject.

4.2.2 Decent into the Underground

In *Recorrer esta distancia*, the lyric subject does not perform the risible failures of a modern tragic hero, but rather sets himself apart by admonishing the foolhardy optimist, the hard-working coward, the self-satisfied derelict, the blinded polemicist, and so on. The lyric subject is repulsed. For him the greatest abomination is that everyone else is not as repulsed as he. In this poem, the voyage that structures this radical separation manifests as a descent into the wells of memory but also into the pits and veins of mountains that are still in the process of being created – a voyage, essentially, into the ground. Mineralization holds the promise of restoring to life the organicity of transcendent experience. In the poetry of Saenz, revelation goes underground. The subject submerges into the abyss that lies beneath social norms, prohibitions, laws, as a miner descending into the core of a mountain. Like Dostoevsky's underground man, Saenz's lyric subject cannot resist the temptation of indulging in

taboo, breaking with conventions, committing crimes, especially if the outcome is to his own detriment.[30]

By the time the Romantic idea of organic totality reached Saenz, it had transmuted into a prehistoric matriarchy or female land spirit (Pachamama) by Franz Tamayo, whose theory of a *genius loci* was built on the framework set forth by Swiss philologist Johann Jakob Bachofen in *Das Mutterecht* [Mother Right].[31] Saenz metabolized this tradition and fused it with two principal myths of Bolivian culture: the *Myth of the Stone*, dating back to the 14th century Kolla people, a creation myth in which early Andean people were said to have been stones that became human; and the *Myth of Cerro Potosí*, the site of inexhaustible wealth extraction which captivated the early modern European imagination.[32] The penetration of the land in this poem reflects an attempt to revitalize the Kolla myth and delegitimize the later speculative metaphor. Put another way, in the poetry of Saenz, mining is a spiritual exercise. In *Recorrer esta distancia*, the disenchanted subject is imagined on the surface of things, in an inauthentic reality. He must descend into the mantel of the earth, as if he were turning back into stone, since herein lies the possibility of spontaneously accessing an organic totality:

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[30] See Deborah A. Martinsen, "Narrators from Underground," *Studies in Slavic Literature and Poetics*, no. 58 (2013) pp. 261–74. See also Alina Wyman, "The Specter of Freedom: Ressentiment and Dostoevskij's Notes from Underground," *Studies in East European Thought*, vol. 59, no. 1 (2007) pp. 119–40.
[31] See Joseph Mali, "The Reconciliation of Myth: Benjamin's Homage to Bachofen," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 60, no. 1, (1999) pp. 165–87. See also Nitzan Lebovic, "The Beauty and Terror of Lebensphilosophie: Ludwig Klages, Walter Benjamin, and Alfred Baeumler," *South Central Review*, vol. 23 no. 1 (2006) pp. 23–39.
[32] Guillermo Francovich has provided an immensely useful analysis of these discursive formations in *Los mitos profundos de Bolivia* (La Paz, Bolivia: Los Amigos del Libro, 1980) pp. 9–30 and 67–84.

> Toda concavidad en el seno de la tierra, toda oscuridad que descienda, se quedará para siempre.
>
> (Si eres brujo, ríete. Mas si no lo fueses, y te dicen que el diablo te persigue, no te rías.)
>
> Con los años que discurren y los giros de estos mundos y las luces recibidas contemplando las estrellas puedo darme cuenta de las cosas.
>
> Toda alma se diluye en las aguas torrenciales con el alma universal.
>
> Every concavity at the core of the earth, all darkness that falls, will remain forever.
>
> (If you're a witchdoctor, laugh. If not, and they say the Devil is chasing you, don't laugh.)
>
> Over the years and the rotations of the earth and the lights I've received while contemplating the stars I can take stock of things.
>
> Every soul dilutes into the torrential waters of the universal soul.
>
> (189)

What the subject takes stock of is his own fanatical desire to seize upon objects that collapse into pseudo-objects. Being-together for him is a community of radical subjectivities presided over by the absolute universal. Advancing a line of inquiry that is traced back to Romanticism, Saenz asked how life could retain "significance" beyond the manufactured consent of technocratic capitalism and the Eurocentric prejudice of positivist science. If the *tremenda* [primordial terrors] were still accessible, despite the desensitizing effects of a modernizing society, then one could bestow upon the *officium* of the poet the responsibility of channeling terror into the heart of his reader.

This irrationalist option demanded the testimonial structure of the ecstatic experience of an erotic anti-order. This structure was formed under the sign of "júbilo," the fanatical enthusiasm evoked by an immanent end. As we saw in the cases of Zambrano and Paz, the promise of organicity is made by the oracular poet who claims to see what remains invisible to others. Visionary poets possess this exclusive character;

when revelation goes underground, they wear this curse as a badge of honor. Their shared ability to exercise exclusivity joins them together. The lyric subject, therefore, is an implacable judge. Although this sanctimony appeared in *Muerte por el tacto*, where the nonbeliever was accused, prosecuted, and ultimately dared to subject himself to the danger of the plunge, in the fourth poem of *Recorrer esta distancia* it reappears as the habitus of an oracular sage who pronounces ascetic commandments:

> Los grandes malestares causados por las sombras, las visiones melancólicas surgidas de la noche,
> todo lo horripilante, todo lo atroz, lo que no tiene nombre, lo que no tiene porqué,
> hay que soportarlo, quién sabe por qué […]
> Si no tienes qué comer sino basura, no digas nada.
> Si la basura te hace mal, no digas nada.
> Si te cortan los pies, si te queman las manos, si la lengua se te pudre, si te partes la espalda, si te rompes el alma, no digas nada.
> Si te envenenan no digas nada, aunque se te salgan las tripas por la boca y se te paren los pelos de punta; aunque se an[i]eguen tus ohos en sangre, no digas nada.
>
> All the deep discomfort caused by shadows, the melancholy visions that come at night,
> all that is horrifying, that's atrocious, that has no name, that has no rationale,
> it must be tolerated, who knows why […]
> If you have nothing but garbage to eat, don't say anything.
> If the garbage makes you sick, don't say anything.
> If they chop off your feet, if they burn your hands, if your tongue rots, if you break your back, if you crush your soul, don't say anything.
> If they poison you don't say anything, though you may cough up your guts and your hair may stand on end; though your eyes may fill with blood, don't say anything.
>
> (190)

The tests enumerated in this list evolve in their level of difficulty as well as in their degree of severity, until they become hyperbolic at the end, when passing such a

test would entail suicide. The commandments set forth a literary discipleship between the reader and the lyric subject going through abjection, the deject, who above all else demands silence from others: any complaint would exacerbate his repulsion but hearing no complaints at all would prevent him from attaining a form of association based on the shared ability to exclude. The provocative tone of mockery, the piercing laughter, highlights what otherwise might be mistaken for strictly ecclesiastical sanctimony. What appears here is the ironic posture of a subject whose shrill laughter is directed at individuals who are not going through abjection.

The lyric subject here decries that others seem lacking in expressing their repulsion, taunting their undiscerning disposition. But, their complacency nourishes his disgust. The "unrepulsed" earn the lyric subject's derision insofar as they abide by social conventions that are structured by bourgeois liberal values, such as pursuing a career to make a living, using the scientific method to study phenomena, employing social etiquette to avoid uncomfortable situations or undesirable conflicts. Mockery of the unrepulsed works to legitimize the mandate of the subject in this literary discipleship. The deject who mocks the unrepulsed feeds their self-satisfaction to his own monstrous loathing. He cannot tolerate them or exert his poetic force without them.

4.2.3 Seeing the End of the World

The catalog of spiritual tests which the lyric subject commands of the uninitiated is based on the presupposition that the subject himself has passed them. He does not

need to explain that he has; *explaining* would be the sign that he has not passed them. Instead, he asks the reader to bear witness to a presentiment that flows through him: "Presiento un lóbrego día, un espacio cerrado, un suceder incomprensible, una noche interminable como la inmortalidad" [I foresee a bleak day, a closed space, an incomprehensible event, a night endless as immortality] (194). The subject penetrates that closed space, submerging into it, forgetting all he knows, in a rehearsal of the descent into a subterranean *topos* of revelation which has captivated the poetic imagination since antiquity.

Although the lyric subject's presentiment is concerned with the mysterious enchantments of the world, it is limited to a description of the portal through which the vision is revealed, without describing the vision itself, since the vision resists representation. We saw this Romantic inheritance in the claims of poetic restoration made by Octavio Paz in *El arco y la lira*. One's significance in the world, which fades away amid the bustle of modern life, and which spontaneously appears in an organic totality, is expressed through the subject's declared failure to name that integrating whole. Such a sudden moment of transformation, when fragments in flux spontaneously come together, appears in the poem in and through a deep crack at the bottom of the sea, where "se puede mirar a través de las aguas una profunda fisura" [a deep fissure can be seen through the water] (idem).

This "fissure" evokes the "passage" described by Mary Ann Caws in relation to the Surrealist voyage. She observed that, with Surrealism, the passage was imagined no longer as a swinging door but rather a cracked wall (or here, a fissure in the seafloor), which permits the *incursion* of texts in other texts and the *excursion* from a text to the extratextual.[33] As a conduit between moments, situations, and states, this "fissure" is the place of ritual and psychological transformation, the moment of shift and displacement of sentiment, on-boarding the reader as a passenger and evoking all the figures of traversal. Thus, in Surrealism as in the poetry of Saenz, the passage is filled with what Caws has called the ceremonials of liminal experience – patterns of the state of being-on-the-threshold. As we will see, in Saenz this experience is used to legitimate the discipline of the literary oracular. In the lines that follow, the subject enters such a liminal state in which an inauthentic world is about to be dismantled and scenes of jubilee appear in the distance:

> Se puede percibir, por el olor de las cosas y por las formas que ellas asumen, el cansancio de las cosas.
> En lo que crece, en lo que ha dejado de crecer, en lo que resuena, en lo que permanece, en lo que no permanece, en el aire silencioso, en las evoluciones del insecto, en los árboles que murmuran,
> se puede adivinar el júbilo de un próximo acabamiento.
>
> One can perceive, in the odor of things and the forms they assume, the weariness of things.
> In what grows, in what grows no longer, in what echoes, in what remains, in what remains no longer, in the silent air, in the movements of bugs, in the whispering trees,

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[33] See Mary Ann Caws, *A Metapoetics of the Passage*: *Architextures in Surrealism and after* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1981) pp. 11–14.

one can glimpse the jubilee of the next ending.

(194)

The vision can be glimpsed but never contemplated at length or seized entirely by the subject who strays. When things grow weary of being held on to and reveal to the subject their pseudo-objectness, he is cut loose to submerge into the abyss and to face the *tremenda,* the primordial terror of reality's absolutism. The significance of this world is felt only when it is about to end, but the end in fact never arrives, and the subject is left to strive deliriously, as if against jealous gods. The Romantic inheritance of these lines can be appreciated in Hans Blumenberg's discussion of "significance" in *Work on Myth*, where he describes one of Romanticism's important contributions to the philosophy of history as "the consolation of the guarantee that mankind did not have to be deprived entirely, in its substance and its potential, of what it had once been" (61). Among the ways that significance may arise, the most germane to the poetry at hand comes as the result of what Blumenberg calls "the relationship between the resistance that reality opposes to life and the summoning up of energy that enables one to measure up to it" (76). As he himself notes, a similar observation had appeared in *The Philosophy of Money* by Georg Simmel who described significance in its functional form:

> Objects are not difficult to acquire because they are valuable, but we call those objects valuable that resist our desire to possess them. Since the desire encounters resistance and frustration, the objects gain a significance that would never have been attributed to them by an unchecked will. (67)

The post-Romantic vision of *Recorrer esta distancia* is directed by a subject who recognizes the value of this "resistance and frustration" and, accordingly, pursues a

course of action that will deny him, reject him, or even destroy him. This post-Romantic descent into the underground describes the pursuit of a lyric subject who is not a subject at all, but rather a "deject" who feels compelled to search for the lost names of a faded significance, with the foreknowledge that those names are unsayable and that, try as he might to utter them, the only sound will be "el resuello, sin principio ni fin" [gasping, without beginning or end] (*Recorrer esta distancia*, 194–5). For this reason, while it remains evident that the predominant structure of this poem is the vision that occurs on a journey, through a passage, taken by a subject who is going through abjection, I want to specify that as a vision it must be understood as *apocolypse* in contrast to the Platonic formulation of *aletheia* or the self-evidence of truth. Observe, for example, what the lyric subject does once he reaches the wellspring of the *tremenda*:

> En las profundidades del mundo existen espacios muy grandes
> —un vacío presidido por el propio vacío,
> que es causa y origen del terror primordial, del pensamiento y del eco.
> Existen honduras inimaginables, concavidades ante cuya fascinación, ante cuyo encantamiento,
> seguramente uno se quedaría muerto.
> Ruídos que seguramente uno desearía escuchar, formas y visiones que seguramente uno desearía mirar,
> cosas que seguramente uno desearía tocar, revelaciones que seguramente uno desearía conocer,
> quién sabe con qué secreto deseo, de llegar a saber quién sabe qué.
>
> In the depths of the world very large spaces exist
> —a void presided over by the void itself,
> which is both cause and origin of primordial terror, thought, and echo.
> There are unimaginable depths, concavities whose allure and enchantment surely would kill me.
> Sounds I'd sure like to hear, forms and visions I'd sure like to see,

> things I'd sure like to touch, revelations I'd sure like to have,
> with who-knows-what secret desire to arrive at who-knows-what.
> (202)

Having bored into the core of the earth (fusing the epic schemata of a descent into the *inferos* and a descent into the depths of the mine shaft), whose depth grows ever deeper since the mountain continues to rise, the motivation of the journey remains just as unclear as its ultimate aim. This unnamable experience of the end is not dependent on the constitution of any being. It is an endless forgetting, a repeating plunge into the abyss, and for this reason it is distinguished from the Platonic revelation of truth since this concept of "unconcealment" or self-evident truth is posited by a being. As Kristeva reminds us, in the vision of the end there is no being, but rather a deject incapable of constituting a being, who in tragedy or folly may combust or explode in the universal collapse. "It is indeed a vision," she explains, "to the extent that sight is massively summoned to play a part in it, broken up by the rhythmic sound of the voice. But it is a vision that resists any representation. . . The vision of the ab-ject is, by definition, the sign of an impossible ob-ject" (*The Powers*, 154). This peculiar end of the world – an end, let us note, that is not properly the end but rather the vision of the end – deserves a closer examination.

As we have seen in *Recorrer esta distancia*, the post-Romantic subject feels the significance of a world when it takes notice of him, which happens only when it is about to end, in the liminal near-death experience. Accursed, because he is possessed by a primordial transcendence that flows through him and dispossessed insofar as he has no

room for it within himself, he nonetheless sees the end of the world as an exercise that can lead to an organicity of experience and, because he is as charitable as he is perverse, he believes it his duty to strike fear in the heart of his reader, so that they too may have this experience and enjoy similar benefits. The resonance of Rimbaud and Lautréamont in this instigation will not be lost on readers of transatlantic modernism, even if Saenz preferred not to discuss in public the influence of their *malditismo* on his poetics.

In the rhetoric of this poetic instigation, "life" and "death" are elevated as superior objects over the undesirable, subjective experiences of "living" and "dying": "Y yo digo que uno debería procurar estar muerto./ Cueste lo que cueste, antes que morir. Uno tendría que hacer todo lo posible por estar muerto" [And I say that one should strive to be dead. No matter the price, before he dies. One must do everything possible to be dead] (*Recorrer esta distancia*, 203). Valuable on account of its power to annihilate, death must be procured because this liminal experience can make a totality in flux come together, if only for the instant of a revelation. This helps explain the profusion of grim, morbid, dark places in the poetry of Saenz, such as "las bóvedas que se abren debajo de los mares" [the vaults that open beneath the sear], along with "las cavernas. . . las grutas. . . las fisuras, en los antros interminables" [the caves. . . the grottos. . . the endless caverns] (204).

In the vision of the end of the world, rational thought is a disturbing light which shares its transitory character with the act of living. On the other hand, "life" – not

"living"– is the ungraspable object that tantalizes this poetic subject going through abjection: "Qué tendrá que ver el vivir con la vida; una cosa es el vivir, y la vida es otra cosa./ Vida y muerte son una y misma cosa" [What might living have to do with life; living is one thing and life is another./ Life and death are one and the same thing] (205). What makes life and death "one and the same" is the absolute nature of the subject's desired encounter with either existential realm, which he sees as calling upon him and soliciting his active response. A principal axis of Saenz's poetics, this longing for a literary experience without limits wherein his gaze upon death as much as upon life gets him closer to opportunities for revealing the unrevealed, already appeared in *Visitante profundo* – "Quiero la muerte, pero no el morir" [I want death, but not to die] (*Obra poética I,* 128) – and would reappear further elaborated in *Felipe Delgado*, where the intoxicated protagonist, in defense of underground life, announces: "A mí no me interesa vivir. Lo que sí me interesa es la vida; yo no vivo para vivir. Yo miro a la vida, mientras vivo, y la vida me mira a mí. Para eso vivo, no para vivir" [I'm not interested in living. What interests me is life: I don't live just to live. I gaze at life while I live, and life gazes back at me. I live for that, not just to live] (310).

4.2.4 The Social Correlate of the Literary Abject

This discussion on abjection in oracular poetry of transatlantic modernism has highlighted a radical separation performed by a repulsed subject, who strays in misconduct, crossing a limit whenever an object reveals its nature as a pseudo-object –

an object that cannot be seized. I showed how abjection takes the form of an endless journey and that, in Saenz's poetics, this journey is imagined as telluric subsidence, reimagining the *inferos* no longer as an inferno but as a fissure deep beneath the sea which leads to the earth's core, symbolizing a transcendent font of vitality. That fissure was shown as a passage that unleashes on the subject the primordial terrors of the mineralized underground, reflecting the post-Romantic concern, which Saenz shared with Zambrano and Paz, that this organicity of experience would be lost unless the oracular sage mediated the world's "significance" through poetic revelation.

The separation I have described in the aesthetic text of *Recorrer esta distancia* has its social correlate in Jaime Saenz's activity as a cultural promotor in La Paz during the 1970s, when his visionary poetry earned him the admiration of the Bolivian youth and the attention of cultural brokers in the dictatorship of Hugo Banzer. Saenz was gaining notoriety in official and unofficial spheres. His poetry insulted so profoundly the bourgeois taste of Paceño *letrados* that it earned their admiration. Unlike other Bolivian poets of international renown, like the *modernista* Ricardo Jaimes Freyre or the late Tellurist Fernando Diez de Medina, Saenz chose not to straddle the profession of poetry and a career in diplomacy or public service. On the other hand, like Jaimes Freyre and unlike Diez de Medina, he wrote poetry for an intellectual elite rather than the new popular literate class. For his poetry to reach readers attuned to the conventions of culturalism, it needed to be rejected as illegible or illegitimate by a popular majority.

The first readers to admire the transgressive nature of Saenz's work were young, aspiring, middleclass, cosmopolitan poets-to-be who found in him something of a modern *curandero*, an urban bard who wrote of a hidden truth not because he possessed it but because it possessed him. In the 1970s, public recognition of Saenz's importance as a poet was inescapable (even though evading recognition contributed to his poetry's prestige), and as a new generation of young writers began to self-publish their books, Saenz authorized those artisanal volumes with the eccentric distinction of his prologues. Not long thereafter, Saenz's poetry also was recognized as a significant contribution to Hispanic literature writ large by cultural brokers of the Banzer regime, who published the poet's first *Obra poética* (1975) in the prestigious Biblioteca Sesquicentenario de la República imprint. These parallel incursions in official and unofficial cultural spheres deserve further attention. So, let me recast this inquiry and ask, how did Saenz's practice of cultural promotion – in the form of prologues he wrote for younger poets – relate to his own production of oracular poetry and the discipline he set forth in his writing?

Let us begin with his prologue to *Asistir al tiempo*, the first book of Blanca Wiethüchter, self-published in 1975. Although she has risen to a prominent position in Bolivian culture as a poet and critic, in 1975 Wiethüchter was an ostensibly unknown, 28-year-old aspiring writer.[34] A prologue from Jaime Saenz would authorize her work by

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[34] For principal works of poetry, see Blanca Wiethüchter *Madera viva y árbol difunto* (La Paz, Bolivia: Ediciones Altiplano, 1982), *Territorial* (La Paz, Bolicia: Ediciones Altiplano, 1983), and *La piedra que labra otra piedra* (La Paz, Bolivia: Ediciones del Hombrecito Sentado, 1998).

transferring to her some of his symbolic capital, legitimating her poetry through an endorsement that framed her work as the product of a discipline, which he advanced in his own poems, of transmitting a hidden significance through poetic revelation. In his prologue to *Asistir al tiempo*, Saenz does not offer a critical perspective of Wiethüchter's poetry or even a celebratory presentation of the author, as is common in first books, but instead he writes what may be considered the closest example, out of all his writings, of a "manifesto," insofar as the art manifesto has religious origins.[35]

Extending the Romantic sentiment of anti-mechanicism, Saenz decries the blindness of mass culture which has conformed to a scientific regime of life that maintains domination by promoting indifference. This "hundimiento de la realidad" [subsidence of reality] refers to the disappearance of an organic totality, sunken under the values of progress, order, and positive reason. Bourgeois liberal values, he argues, in their capacity to desensitize the masses, led to the decline of religion and the rejection of tradition. Under the sign of positive science and liberal politics, the poet's inner voyage was interrupted – "cancelled" as we might hear today – when mysteries and miracles lost significance in a modernizing process, the true violence of which was the excision of the holy and the satanic from the modern spirit.

> Con la aventura de la electrónica metida en los recovecos de la mente y que preside a todo trance el diario vivir la razón va ganando terreno insensiblemente.

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[35] Martin Puchner has deftly shown the religious origin of the manifesto genre, prior to the militarization of its terminology. See *Poetry of the Revolution: Marx, Manifestos, and the Avant-Gardes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006) pp. 12–21.

> De tal manera, que en la actualidad la causa de lo irracional adquiere particular significación en cuanto la razón pretende oponerse a la realidad de la que precisamente el poeta se nutre. Las costumbres están siendo socavadas y, si se quiere, suplantadas de hecho por meras normas en consonancia con los dictados del progreso científico al servicio de la expansión mercantil. Las cosas y los objetos, los cuales según consta a todos van desapareciendo de nuestras manos, virtualmente han dejado de existir, con la aparición de artículos así llamados desechables que se tiran cómodamente a la basura luego de haber sido utilizados. (8)

> As electronics venture into every nook and cranny of the mind and dominate living at all cost, reason imperceptibly keeps gaining ground. Thus, at present the cause of the irrational acquires particular significance insofar as reason aims to oppose the reality on which precisely the poet feeds. Customs are being undermined and, let's say, supplanted in fact by mere norms in accordance with the dictates of scientific progress at the service of commercial growth. Things and objects, which as anyone can tell are disappearing from our hands, virtually have stopped existing, with the appearance of so-called disposable items that one comfortably throws in the trash after using them.

Saenz's skepticism toward technological modernization originated, at least in part, in the realization that in his time Bolivia was largely seen by the world powers primarily as fertile ground for extractive capitalism and cheap unskilled labor. Bolivia evinced everywhere the scars of the violence exerted on its traditional ways of living. The benefits of increasingly globalized commerce were hard to see in an Andean nation that was still struggling to build an infrastructure and establish a fully incorporated democratic State. Expressing this skepticism in the prologue to *Asistir al tiempo* conveyed to readers not only that Wiethüchter was an emerging poet who ought to be read, but rather that her poetry offered an authentic cultural object uncontaminated by the commodity-fetishism of modernization. Saenz worried that if once meaningful customs could decline into empty social norms and if everyday items were becoming disposable,

then there was nothing to prevent books from becoming expendable too. The thought that microfiche repositories would replace physical libraries horrified the zealous poet who feared that, in an age of unfettered capitalism, human beings would become equally disposable.

Inherent in this anxiety is the presupposed illiteracy of "el hombre común" [common man] who cannot see how his life pursuits, guided by instrumental reason, only further entrenched significance in a world indifferent to the individuals who inhabit it. However, for Saenz the problem is not that "common man" had stopped accessing such significance for himself, but rather that technocrats were displacing the former custodians of spiritual life:

> Como consecuencia de las teorías y esquemas destinados al consumo y que precisamente a diario se urden con el deliberado propósito de amedrentar y ofuscar al hombre común, resulta cada vez más difícil comprender el lenguaje sencillo y directo. El hombre común, no obstante de habérsele privado del acceso a la realidad, paradójicamente tiene que creer que todo cuanto se le dice es fiel reflecto de ésta. Alegres seres pletóricos de un optimismo que da asco, en su calidad de portavoces de una propaganda tecnológica proclaman la posición privilegiada del hombre moderno. (9)
>
> As a consequence of the theories and outlines for public consumption, which are daily concocted with the deliberate objective of intimidating and obfuscating the common man, simple and direct language becomes ever more difficult to understand. Even though he is deprived of access to reality, the common man paradoxically must believe that everything he is told is a faithful reflection of reality. These merry beings with an abundance of disgusting optimism, in their capacity as spokesmen of technological propaganda, proclaim the privileged position of modern man.

This is a paragraph that Octavio Paz, himself a critic of consumerist society, would have endorsed wholeheartedly. Showing his disenchantment with the

incrementally technologized world and speaking before an audience of poets-to-be, Saenz raised the banner of spontaneous, uncontrived simplicity over the "disgusting optimism" of instrumental reason. In the passage just quoted, we find a particularly degraded manifestation of this faith in progress for its own sake, i.e. the "theories and outlines for public consumption," a postmodern simulacrum of prosperity wherein the advertising for more and more progress replaces the need to name the tangible improvements in the lives of those communities experiencing socio-economic exclusion. Instead, Saenz proclaimed the right to be unreasonable and to look back with nostalgia upon the organically structured societal networks of yesteryear whose participants were intricately connected – emotionally, spiritually, and materially – to the soil they literally treaded upon as well as to the nation's physical and human geography. It goes without saying that this was a regressive utopia.

Through the categories of delirium, neurosis, and madness, in this and other passages Saenz mediates between the imagined organicity of transcendent experience, for which he finds inspiration in pre-capitalist and pre-industrial societies, and the alienating ideology of progress and order. As a cultural mediator, he shepherds traditional life forms away from the violence of modernization, yet as an oracular poet of abjection, he loathes the sheep, the unrepulsed, unreflective subjects represented in mass culture who give their uncontemplated consent to the alienating world of global capitalism. The right to irrationality is one of the ambivalent protections of the literary

oracular. Saenz's poetry and cultural promotion constitute a register of instances when that right was exercised.

The same year that Saenz wrote the prologue to Wiethüchter's *Asistir el tiempo*, he also published his *Obra poética* in a volume that included Wiethüchter's study, "Estructuras de lo imaginario," the master's thesis she wrote on Saenz's poetry at the Sorbonne under the advisory of towering scholar of poetry and the avant-garde Saúl Yurkievich. Wiethüchter's scholarly treatment of Saenz's poetry offered more than the structuralist readings it advertised; it set forth his oracular poetry as a cultural object worthy of academic rigor and enlarged its magnitude materially, increasing the book's page-count by over 30 percent, which transformed an elegant yet modest "collected works" into a formidable tome that could stand up on its own and hold up alongside the "great books" of a State imprint that reinvented the national cannon. The self-publication of Wiethüchter's book with the prologue by Saenz, during the same year as the State publication of his book with her study, amounts to more than literary backscratching: It illustrates how cultural capital accrued by the disavowal of economic capital (self-publications are never intended to sell) in practice is an investment that yields financial gain. This was the thinking of Pierre Bourdieu (1996) in his well-known study of Charles Baudelaire's publishing history of *Les fleurs du mal*, and I would suggest

that it brings into focus as well what is at play in Saenz's activities of cultural promotion.[36]

Between 1975–1976, "Biblioteca Sesquincentenario de la República" published an extensive list of well-designed, hardbound books with titles from nationalist historians, political theorists, social critics, military officers, along with contemporary novelists and poets whose literary production was accommodated by the Banzer dictatorship to project an image that paradoxically combined military force and cultural tolerance.[37] Alongside the political tracts of white-gloved strongmen, tragic tales of the Chaco War, racial theories of education, and musings in ethno-mythology, the oracular poetry of Saenz may seem anathema. However, aren't the legitimacy of autocracy and the legitimacy of revelation based on the same demanded right to be irrational? Doesn't every caudillo have something of an oracular sage in him to the extent that he

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[36] See Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996) pp. 47–85.

[37] Without offering a comprehensive catalogue of the series Biblioteca Sesquincentenario de la República, let us note that, in addition to Saenz's *Obra poética*, it included interpretative cultural studies such as *Selección de ensayos sobre temas nacionales* (1975) by Fernando Diez de Medina and *Ensayos sobre la realidad boliviana* (1975) by Mariano Baptista Gumucio; the early ethnographic study of Rigoberto Paredes, *Mitos, supersticiones y supervivencias populares de Bolivia* (1976), prologued by Jaime Saenz; Tamayo's *Creación de la pedagogía nacional* (1975) discussed earlier this dissertation; as well as political theorizations of nationalism such as *La vida social en el coloniaje* (1975) by the historian Gustavo Adolfo Otero and *Estrategia del altiplano* (1975) by the right-wing general and former sergeant in the Chaco War Juan Lechín Suárez. The series also included military histories and political biographies, such as *La revolución del 25 de mayo de 1809, recomposición* (1975) by Emilio Fernández; *El presidente Daza* (1975) by Enrique Vidaurre Retamoso; *Bautista Saavedra* (1975) by Eugenio Gómez; *Historia de la villa imperial de Potosí* (1975) by Nicolás de Martínez Arzanz y Vela; and *Cristóbal de Mendoza, el apóstol de los guaraníes* (1976) by Hernando Sanabria Fernández. Among these titles the series also included the pastoral poetry of *Los ríos peregrinos* (1976) by Hernando García Vespa and *Cántico traspasado* (1976) by Óscar Cerruto, along with the Chaco War novel *La laguna H3* (1975) by Adolfo Costa du Rels.

commands the masses through compelling, staged messages whose effect on the people seems all the greater the more the caudillo succeeds in thaumaturgically concealing his reiterated recourse to coercive *pleins pouvoirs*?

4.3 Ad majorem Dei gloriam: Poetic Remodeling of Anton Bruckner

As we have seen, the genre of the "prologue" helped Saenz achieve rhetorical objectives that could not be achieved by his poetry alone. This discovery deserves further consideration to the extent that it may contribute to an understanding of the interplay of poetic revelation and cultural mediation in the social sphere. As we turn to the topic of Anton Bruckner – truly monumental in the poetic universe of Saenz – let us begin in the prologue the poet wrote for the posthumous *Ciudad desde la altura* (1980) by his student Guillermo Bedregal, who had participated in Talleres Krupp in the early 1970s. Bedregal wrote *Ciudad desde la altura* shortly before his premature death in 1974, and the first edition prologued by Saenz served as a sort of memorial. In that prologue, aside from a heartfelt sketch of the young poet's life, Saenz distinguishes himself from the literary critic, unlike a writer like Octavio Paz who always insisted on being poet *and* critic at the same time. Instead, Saenz fondly recalled Bedregal's participation in his writing workshops, named Talleres Krupp after the German industrial giant, but the focus of the anecdotal reference falls on the "exercises" that Saenz assigned to his students:

> En los Talleres Krupp se tenía que saber de todo: desde coser un botón hasta soldar un anafe de bomba, y desde conocer las sinfonías de Bruckner hasta componer un reloj. Y uno tenía que ser capaz de hacer y deshacer, y tenía que leer la obra pedagógica de Tamayo. La humildad, la soberbia y el humor, el fanatismo religioso y el culto del más allá eran condiciones indispensable, amén de la ponderación del tiempo misterioso que viene del cielo y una ciega confianza en los sentidos para percebir debidamente las formas y las cosas, los olores y los mundos a falta de lo cual nadie podía atreverse a escribir ni siquiera una linea por más que se creyera poeta (16)
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> At Talleres Krupp, one had to know how to do everything: from sewing a button to welding a gas burner, and from knowing the symphonies of Anton Bruckner to putting together a clock. And one had to be capable of making and dismantling, and reading the pedagogical writings of Franz Tamayo. Humility, hubris and humor, religious fanaticism and the Cult of the Beyond were indispensable conditions, based on the contemplation of mysterious time that comes from the heavens and on a blind trust in the senses to perceive duly forms and things, odors and world. Absent of that, none [of the students] dared to write a single line of poetry, no matter how great a poet he thought he was.

The anecdote in this prologue sets in motion several rhetorical strategies. It gives an informal prehistory of the creation of the book in overtly plebeian vernacular,[38] distinguishing the humble author of the prologue from a verbose, pedantic critic. It also confers legitimacy on Bedregal through the symbolic act of authorization, as also occurred in the prologue to *Asistir al tiempo*. Saenz's contribution to the authorship, as it were, transferred to *Ciudad desde la altura* symbolic capital in the form of prestige. But in this transfer, Saenz was able to consolidate his domain at the center of the literary underground of Cold War La Paz, even after his *Obra poética* had been published by the

[38] The matter of linguistic realism in the writing of Saenz has yet to be addressed. The case of this plebeian vernacular (*voz pueblerina*) is very pronounced in the speech of the characters Huanca and Juan de la Cruz Oblitas of *Los papeles de Narciso Lima-Achá*. In the case of those two characters and in the case of the lyric subjects of his long poems, it is worth asking how the value of vernacular is derived in a cosmopolitan cultural ecology.

Biblioteca Sesquicentenario de la República. By writing prologues to his students' books, Saenz paradoxically legitimated his own eccentric status as Bolivia's national literary outsider.

Let us return to Saenz's poetry, but this time with a meta-pedagogical approach, examining a central topic that, according to his account, he introduced at the meetings of Talleres Krupp, namely, the music and persona of 19th-century Austrian composer Anton Bruckner. Saenz's autobiographical writings show how significant an influence classical music exercised on his poetics. In an early letter – if indeed it was a letter and not a poem – he found inspiration in the contrast between the angelical melodies of Mozart that floated from a phonograph he played in a morgue and the failed beauty of the corpses he contemplated, admiring the infinite suggestion of their beauty.[39] Late in life he reflected on hearing Bach for the first time at a live performance in Berlin during the Third Reich.[40] Bruckner, on the other hand, was in a league of his own. Since Saenz turns Bruckner into a veritable paradigm of poetic creation, I will ask in the pages that follow, why was Saenz drawn to Anton Bruckner? What rationale might explain the

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[39] See Jaime Saenz, "Cartas a Bertha," *La Mariposa Mundial*, no. 18 (2010) p. 161. Saenz revisited the event years later, describing a poem – supposedly titled "Mozart y morgue" – which he claimed to have written to commemorate this revelation and to have carried it with him so often, reciting it every chance he had, that eventually it disintegrated. Whether this informs our understanding of his biography more than it reveals the self-reflexivity of his poetics remains to be determined. For this "autobiographical" account, see Jaime Saenz, *La piedra imán* (La Paz, Bolivia: Huayna Potosí, 1989) pp. 81–9.

[40] See Jaime Saenz, *La piedra*, pp. 27–32.

centrality of his music and persona in the underground revelations of the literary oracular?

4.3.1 The Bruckner Problem

By all accounts, Jaime Saenz appears to have been a classical music enthusiast. In his writings as a young man this appreciation starts to emerge, and it endured for the next forty years. Saenz was always fond of classical music, and, like Franz Tamayo, he was a Germanophile. He took up the persona of Bruckner in his long poem *Bruckner* (1978) and in a prose poem written that same year, "En la abadía de San Florián" [In Saint Florian Monastery], which was published posthumously in *Tocnolencias* (2010). So, why Bruckner and not Mahler? Why not Strauss or Wagner? On the other hand, Saenz's love for all things German is symptomatic of a stance that he and his coterie were prone to take against what in those days was called Yankee imperialism. Until now, however, the critical reception of Saenz's poetic Bruckner has obviated the relevance of the poem's social text. Even the poet's dedicated commentators tend to ignore the sociohistorical context of the poem, as occurs in the essay "Hacer y cuidad" (1986) by Luis Antezana, who suggests that *Bruckner* is:

> una reflexión poética sobre el sentido del hombre que emprende la tarea de desentrañar el mundo por medio de una obra artística. La obra es un proceso de construcción; ella no implica la construcción de un objeto (cuadro, verso, o sinfonía) sino, sobre todo, la construcción de un *mundo* y, en este caso, conviene entender que la palabra *mundo* supone un orden (interior) para los acontecimientos. (239)
>
> a poetic reflection about the meaning of the man who undertakes the task of unraveling the world by way of an artistic work. The work is a process of

> construction; it does not imply the construction of an object (painting, poem, or symphony) but rather, the construction of a *world* and, in this case, we are to recognize that the word *world* entails an (inner) order for events.

This tendency to avoid the social text of the poem, in the end, ultimately frustrates the "close" readings that are purported to take place. In the remainder of this chapter, to the contrary, I will address the social text and the aesthetic text of Saenz's poetic Bruckner, with the aim of highlighting intertextualities and unpacking several multilayered comparisons. So, let me begin by advancing this claim: Saenz's selection of Anton Bruckner as poetic material is an attack on explanation itself. With this, I am suggesting that the poem reflects an awareness of some of the ways in which, from the 1890s to the 1940s, editors and propagandists infamously manipulated the Austrian's music and hermeneutically retooled the historical representation of his persona. In other words, Saenz's poetic Bruckner is an attack on the practice of criticism.

Cultural musicologist Paul Hawkshaw (1997) has shown that in the later years of his life, because Bruckner had been excluded from the editorial process of his own symphonies (by individuals confident they could *explain* his intent), he used his last will to ensure that future publications would be based on his autograph manuscripts. This suggests that Bruckner was aware of such unscrupulous manipulation. We know, for example, that Bruckner participated in the finalization of the Third and Fourth Symphonies; however, "during the 1890s, the students began to circumvent the composer's correction process and make adjustments of their own" (Hawkshaw 101). The brothers Franz and Josef Schalk added their own interpolations to the Fifth

Symphony, hatching a proper ruse to ensure that their "contributions" would be performed and published unbeknown to the publisher and the composer. This problem of authorship produced a need for critical examination.

As a result of the interpolations of the Schalk brothers, a text-critical tradition arose after World War Two, as musicologists labored to compare monographs of Bruckner's symphonies to autographs that the composer donated to the Imperial Library of Austria, trying to determine the authenticity of the works. This debate tends to be called "the Bruckner problem."[41] As we will see, Saenz's poetic Bruckner seems to argue against the aim of determining the "work" as a material object; proposing, instead, a conception of artistic creation a process of self-realization. In other words, Saenz *accepts* the indeterminacy of Bruckner. He has no need to *explain* what Bruckner's work is, since his interest lies in how Bruckner's music was created. This position against explanation is often expressed as an aversion or indifference to the academic institution.

For example, in the prose poem "En la abadía de San Florián," we are reminded of the low esteem his narrator has for the academy when he describes ironically how Bruckner was made *doctor honoris causa* at "no sé qué universidad" [whatchamacallit university], which had conferred upon him awards so respected that no one remembers

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[41] For more on the Bruckner problem in the text critical tradition, see Paul Hawkshaw, "The Bruckner Problem Revisited," *19th-Century Music*, vol. 21, no. 1, (1997) pp. 96–107; and "A Bequest and a Legacy: Editing Anton Bruckner's Music in 'Later Times," *Nineteenth-Century Music Review*, vol. 15, no. 3 (2018) pp. 405–19; see also Margaret Notley, "Bruckner Problems, in Perpetuity," *19th Century Music*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2006, pp. 81–93.

their name (136).[42] So, in one sense, Bruckner was the logical choice for Saenz because this composer came with a text-critical tradition of academic scholars whose research could be discredited on account of its descriptive, explicative method. This, in turn, advanced nonrepresentational expression (such as a symphony or oracular poetry) as a more legitimate cause. In this sense, Saenz avails himself of Bruckner inversely to how Paz avails himself of Fourier in *Los hijos del limo*, since Fourier came with a poetic (not critical) tradition led by André Breton, inviting a continuity between the Romantic, the Surrealist, and Octavio Paz, whereas Bruckner's critical tradition was met with Saenz's antipathy, inviting him to highlight his fraternity with the Romantic composer and distinguishes himself from the composer's critics and from criticism more broadly.

In addition to the so-called "Bruckner problem" caused by the interventions of the Schalk brothers, the Austrian's self-imposed standards were extraordinarily high, and for decades he obsessively revised his work. Such revision entailed a rigorous, unrelenting process that multiplied pages into a cache of partial drafts and numerous versions. In addition to the problems posed by "foreign interventions," other difficulties resulted from Bruckner's ambiguity in the textual annotations to the compositions, further complicating the work of text-critical musicologists. The Eighth Symphony, to

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[42] See Jaime Saenz, "En la abadía," pp. 133–8.

which he dedicated forty years of his life, was precisely the work that most interested Saenz, and it is the central theme of the "En la abadía de San Florían."[43]

Saenz's selection of Bruckner, however, also is a provocation. As it turns out, the ideological appropriation of Anton Bruckner was never as pervasive as in Germany during the Third Reich. Benjamin Korstvedt and Bryan Gilliam, respectively, have shown how National Socialist ideology subtends the cultural promotion of Anton Bruckner's music and historical persona in the years leading up to and during the Second World War.[44] In his early life, Adolf Hitler was famously rejected by the Viennese bourgeoise as he struggled with the mediocrity of his painting. He doubtlessly saw something of himself in the persona of Bruckner, who four decades earlier also had faced hostility from the cultured elite of Vienna.

4.3.2 The Enshrinement of Bruckner in the Third Reich

The aesthetic text of Saenz's poetic Bruckner is woven into the social text of two key events that occurred in 1937 Germany. This is not a mere structural affinity, since the social impact of these events would have been resonating the following year, when Jaime Saenz toured Germany as a military cadet: the infamous march against degenerate

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[43] Regarding the iterative process of the Eighth Symphony, see Benjamin Korstvedt, *Anton Bruckner, Symphony No. 8*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000) pp. 20–26.
[44] See Bryan Gilliam, "The Annexation of Anton Bruckner: Nazi Revisionism and the Politics of Appropriation," *The Musical Quarterly*, vol. 78, no. 3 (1994) pp. 584–604 and "Perspectives on Bruckner," *Current Musicology*, no. 57, (1995) pp. 95–100; see also Benjamin Korstvedt, "Anton Bruckner in the Third Reich and After: An Essay on Ideology and Bruckner Reception," *The Musical Quarterly*, no. 80 (1996) pp. 132–60 and "Language and Ideology in the German Reception of Bruckner's Symphonies in the 1930s," *The German Quarterly*, vol. 91, no. 4 (2018) pp. 460–72.

art on the *Tag de deutschen Kunst* which kicked off with a fanfare of Bruckner's Third Symphony and the enshrinement of a bust of Bruckner in a solemn ceremony at the Valhalla temple.[45] As Korstvedt suggests, for as much critical debate as there has been about the hermeneutic remodeling of the music of Richard Wagner, the appropriation of Bruckner proves to be as, if not more, comprehensive an action. He continues:

> Bruckner was exploited by the Nazi cultural program. Both the image of Bruckner and his music were imagined to exemplify the essence of Aryan art and were thus enlisted in the campaign to legitimate Nazism. The outlines of this dark chapter in the history of Bruckner reception are well documented. Buckner's music was featured in overtly political events; each of Hitler's cultural speeches at the Nuremberg rallies, for example, was preceded by the performance of a movement from a Bruckner symphony. Radio broadcasts were announced with the trumpet theme that opens Bruckner's Third Symphony. The Nazi government sponsored numerous Bruckner festivals. ("Anton Bruckner in the Third Reich," 132)

Research on authoritarianism shows that legitimacy tends to be upheld by a combination of extra-judicial coercion, such as State terror, and individual compliance, usually achieved by a agile propaganda campaign. In the case of Germany, the secularization of spiritual life advocated by National Socialism did not do away with religion even if it claimed to officially; instead, State rituals were held to promote a new form of religious fanaticism, which in the parlance of Saenz would be called "júbilo." This process, often called *the aestheticization of politics*, is a form of politics performed as solemnity. The Bruckner of the Third Reich shows the residue of this tendency to

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[45] Bruckner's music was so central to the National Socialists that on the day that news of Hitler's death was broadcast, it was followed by the adagio of Bruckner's Seventh Symphony. See Bryan Gilliam, "The Annexation of Anton Bruckner: Nazi Revisionism and the Politics of Appropriation," *The Musical Quarterly*, vol. 78, no. 3 (1994) pp. 284–604, esp. 588.

mythologize an Aryan hero or to represent the genius of his music as a mythical lost spirituality. (Korstvedt 1996, 135). This myth appears in the 1936 biography of Bruckner that had been started by August Göllerich, whom Bruckner himself had hired, but who died before he could finish the manuscript, whereupon Max Auer, using Göllerich's notes, completed the biography and published it in 1936.[46] For Auer, Bruckner represented an opportunity to diagnose the ills of "modern" society and to appeal for spiritual renewal in an age of decadence. Auer writes:

> For four years destruction was visited upon Europe [i.e. the First World War]. . . . Out of deepest need the people called out for guidance. False leaders brought nations and peoples to the edge of the precipice in the following decades. . . . Without spiritual renewal, recuperation was not possible. A yearning for elevation out of the misery caused by the crass materialism of the preceding century grew ever greater. Artistic bolshevism was carried to extremes. Against all this there was but one remedy: a return to the pure sources! What art was purer than that born of the deep religiosity of Bach, Beethoven and Bruckner! Especially Bruckner's God-consecrated art now found a fertile soil, at last it was rightly understood. For many thousands it was the guide to the beautiful, spiritual world that thereby the foundations were laid for a healthy and strong Bruckner movement, which is only now, after the World War, succeeding with elemental power. (*apud* Korstvedt, "Anton Bruckner in the Third Reich," 136)

That Bruckner's music was rightly understood "at last" alludes to the hostility his performances had met in 1890s Vienna. In the Third Reich, Korstvedt explains, commentators "exploited the political resonance of portraying Bruckner as an innocent soul persecuted by nefarious (often ostensibly 'Jewish') modern critics, representing Bruckner's music as spiritual, pure, free from the contamination of modernity, and

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[46] See Max Auer and August Göllerich. *Anton Bruckner: Ein Lebens- und Schaffensbild* (Regensburg: Bosse, 1936).

sacralizing it as an embodiment of the German Volksgeist" (ibidem, 137). While on one hand, this narrative racialized the discourse of national essentialism through deprecations of the euphemistic "modern" or "cosmopolitan" critic; on the other hand, it offered the metaphor of unitary greatness that would be used to promote compliance as the State *set the stage*, as it were, for the annexation of Austria. The problem was that Nazi ideology struggled to find concrete examples of the ideals it claimed to decontaminate and renew.

Bruckner is an example of this theoretical frustration of fascism, since this individual who was proclaimed to embody the German essence was an Austrian. This disconcerted Ernst Schwanzara so deeply that he purported to demonstrate Bruckner's blood purity by tracing his lineage to the fourteenth century.[47] Bruckner was rhetorically useful to fascist theorists, in part, because he was dead and, therefore, was not a liability. His Austrian origins, in turn, facilitated the metaphorical union between Austria and Germany, which was performed solemnly at the Regensburg festival of 1937 and executed politically in the Anschluss less than a year later. Joseph Goebbels's address at the Regensburg festival offers a striking example of the centrality of an interpretive edifice in Nazism, which combined ritualized performance with critical extrapolations of the music's significance.[48] As Korstvedt has observed, the Regensburg festival expresses

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[47] See Ernst Schwanzara, *Anton Bruckners Stamm und Urheimat* (Regensburg: Gustav Bosse, 1937).
[48] For more on the rhetorical strategies of Nazi propaganda campaigns, see Ernest K. Bramsted, *Goebbels and National Socialist Propaganda, 1925–1945* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1965); Jay W. Baird,

the need of National Socialist propaganda for the critical explanations of nonrepresentational art:

> Due to the nonrepresentational (and thus radically polysemous) character of music, this ideological appropriation had to circumscribe the potential meaning of German music. Thus the project of musical propaganda in the Third Reich needs to be seen, in large measure, as a systematic remodeling of musical hermeneutics in terms of the hegemonic narrative of Nazism. (ibidem, 139)

The Regensburg festival combined all the elements of a State celebration, a solemn ceremony, and a spiritual revival. Held at the Valhalla, the National Socialists celebrated the induction of the Austrian composer into the pantheon of Germanic heroes, adding a bust of Anton Bruckner. The ceremony was attended by the Führer who placed a wreath at the foot of the sculpture. In his speech, Joseph Goebbels suggested that the hostility toward Bruckner in the liberal press of the 1890s indicated that Bruckner's time had yet to come, implying an immanent compensation. Embracing "the völkische tradition of portraying Bruckner as parochial and oddly anachronistic," Goebbels emphasized "Bruckner's piety, naiveté, simplicity, provinciality (as opposed to urbanity), and essential Germanness" (Korstvedt 1996, 139).

Goebbels went on to argue that, since critics initially were so wrong about Bruckner's music and since Bruckner himself even lamented his poor public reception,

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The Mythical World of Nazi War Propaganda (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1974); and Michael Meyer, "The Nazi Musicologist as Myth Maker in the Third Reich," *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 10, no. 4 (1975) pp. 649–65.

the National Socialists were justified in restricting art commentary to official channels. Vindicating Bruckner's poor reception in 1890s Vienna offered Goebbels a way to justify the National Socialists' actions toward *Entartete Kunst* [degenerate art].[49] On the other hand, it allowed him to dissociate Bruckner's Catholic faith from the nostalgia for mythical spirituality embodied by his music. If Bruckner's symphonies seemed to put listeners in a state of jubilation, this state was not to be confused with Christian grace; rather, it was the "victorious intoxication of form-giving," during which "a boundless feeling of freedom roars through his soul," commanded by "the warrior-like will to act." Goebbels explains:

> Here his creative genius frees itself of all ties to the church, and now awakens in him like the spring-like force of the great creative act. He is filled with the victorious intoxication of form-giving, and a boundless feeling of freedom roars through his soul. In the works of this mature period the warrior-like will to act, without which we can imagine absolutely no true symphony, sweeps us along with it. [. . .] For Anton Bruckner, like every great genius, cannot be forced into the constraints of a dogmatically created stencil. And we – who (far though we are from any scholarly examination of his music) let his works affect us so simply and immediately as artistic revelations – we all sense and know that his deep religious faith has long since burst free of all confessional confines, and that it has its roots in the same heroic feeling for the world from which all truly great and eternal creations of German art blossom. (608)[50]

The "greatness" of Bruckner provided Nazi ideology a rationale for the German annexation of Austria. The metaphorical unity embodied by the hermeneutically

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[49] For intellectual history of this Nazi campaign against degenerate art, see Olaf Peters and Steven Lindberg, "Fear and Propaganda: National Socialism and the Concept of 'Degenerate Art,'" *Social Research*, vol. 83, no. 1 (2016) pp. 39–66. For collections of degenerate art see Olaf Peters (ed.), *Degenerate Art: The Attack on Modern Art in Nazi Germany, 1937* (Munich: Prestel, 2014).

[50] See John Michael Cooper (trans.), "Joseph Goebbels' Bruckner Address in Regensburg" (June 6, 1937)," *The Musical Quarterly*, vol. 78. no. 3, 1994, pp. 605–9.

remodeled persona of Anton Bruckner made German culture "greater" in the way that the Anschluss would expand the Third Reich's geographical borders. The decision to hold the State ceremony at the Valhalla was quite deliberate. Bruckner needed to be circumscribed within a racial origin narrative to make annexation equate with the vindication of an aggrieved political community, returning what has been fragmented by modern life to its former unity. Goebbels went on:

> Permit me, my Führer, also to state in this solemn hour that Anton Bruckner, as a son of Austrian soil, is especially called upon to make sense of the intractable intellectual and spiritual common fate that envelopes our entire German people even today. It is, therefore, a symbolic event of more than just artistic significance for us that you, my Führer, have decided to have a bust of Anton Bruckner included in this sacred national place, once established by a great Bavarian king, as the *first* monument of our empire. (idem)

Pronounced amid great pomp and circumstance, these words likely were echoing among intellectuals of the radical Right when Jaime Saenz reached Berlin in 1938. His poetic Bruckner derives from the hermeneutic remodeling of Max Auer and Joseph Goebbels during the Third Reich, but unlike Auer and Goebbels, for whom the myth of Bruckner urgently required an *explanation*, Saenz approached the same myth with deeply committed *acceptance*. This distinction between explanation and acceptance, in relation to myth, discussed in detail by Furio Jesi, may be applied with great benefit to Saenz's sheer lack of punctuation in the prose poem "En la abadía de San Florián" [In Saint Florian Monastery].[51] Omitting all punctuation except for a final stop at the end of

[51] See Furio Jesi, *Mito* (Barcelona: Editorial Labor, 1976) pp. 71–3.

each paragraph is a provocation. The reader who cannot help but recognize how certain syntactic elements might be demarcated by punctuation has taken the bait set by the author, since this path of explanation is set over against the path of creation. Defined by this "non-punctuation," the text asks the reader for an explanation like the Bruckner problem demands clarity from the text-critical musicologist, while at the same time aligning the perspective of the author with that of the paradigmatic creator, Anton Bruckner. If Saenz does not explain Bruckner but accept him, how does he characterize this mythical creator worthy of his acceptance?

4.3.3 From Pious Fool to Tormented Mystic

Saenz's writings on Bruckner bring to light the appropriation by Nazi ideologists of the composer's project and Saenz's own efforts at re-energizing modern poetry with a distinctly post-liberal oracular legitimacy, but this transmission of ideas was not unadulterated. It therefore warrants a careful assessment, if we are fairly and in good faith to evaluate his critique of bourgeois liberal values and call for spiritual renewal. In the prose poem "En la abadía de San Florián," Saenz reverses Goebbels's secularization of Bruckner and instead portrays the composer as a religious fanatic who enlists the help of Lucifer to praise the glory of God. Saenz also corrects the Nazi-era depiction of Bruckner as the pious fool and recasts him as an abject creator, but like the Nazis, he implies that Bruckner's music represents a mythical lost spirituality.

In Bruckner Saenz saw a paradigm of poetic creation, since the Austrian's symphonies perfectly evoked what the Bolivian called "el júbilo aniquilador" [destructive jubilee], the condition on which poetic revelation is predicated, the feeling that the world is about to end. On the condition of such an apocalyptic sublime, Saenz set forth a theory of poetics which held that artistic creation demanded self-realization. This idea of poetry as self-realization was shared by Octavio Paz in *Los hijos del limo*, but whereas the Mexican poet of simultaneity deftly selected his precursors to avoid affiliations with authoritarian regimes (choosing Fourier over Marx), Saenz opted for the path of provocation, daring his readers to reinterpret historical figures previously appropriated by fascism. In this regard, Saenz's Bruckner more closely resembles Zambrano's Seneca than it does Paz's Fourier.

The religious fanaticism of Saenz's Bruckner stands in contrast to Goebbels's secularized *volkische* schoolteacher who had been mistreated by the urban elite of Vienna. Now, Bruckner had become a fervent Catholic whose life's work was to compose music that would glorify God, even if the driving force of creation was essentially demonic. Bruckner represented the possibility of a cosmos, on the condition that such an organic totality be discovered through acceptance in the form of a vow. Yet, Saenz invests visionary literature with such formidable powers that some of his more radical proposals border on self-parody. Consider the beginning of "En la abadía de San Florián," where he describes Bruckner's religiosity in a surprisingly postmodernist way

that resonates with the concepts of the open work and endless intertextuality as well as such Borgesian tropes as the book with infinite pages written by everyone at the same time and the search for an Aleph-like cosmic perspective capable of reconciling the totality with its fragments:

> La obra era para él una cosa que no termina nunca por lo mismo que la vida y la muerte eran una obra y por idéntica razón el contenido de ella sólo podría buscarse en la obra misma ya que este contenido no consistía, sino en el hacer la obra por otra parte las incontables vidas que nacían y morían y que se renovaban perpetuamente a un determinado ritmo señalado por la respiración planetaria representaban de hecho la totalidad de la obra siempre comenzada y jamás terminada por cada uno de los seres humanos en este mundo pues cada cual era ya de por sí un fragmento de la obra y si esto era así lo que él se proponía era suscitar una totalidad a partir del fragmento que precisamente él representaba lo que según su sentir equivalía a tantear una fisura en las regiones de la revelación no revelada y tal a su entender el verdadero sentido de la obra pues quienquiera que estuviese poseído por el ansía de vislumbrar lo cósmico tendría necesariamente que buscar ciertos caminos y por más ocultos que estuvieran o por vedados que fueran tendría que seguirlos aun a riesgo de provocar la cólera de Dios (134–5)
>
> For him the work was something that never ends which is why life and death were a work and also why the content of the work couldn't be sought in the work itself since this content consisted solely in making the work on the other hand the countless lives that were born and died and that were perpetually renewed to a marked rhythm signaled by the planetary breath they represented the totality of the work that is always already begun and never finished by each and every human being in this world given that each in itself was a fragment of the work and if this was true then what he proposed was to give rise to a totality from a fragment of the work that he represented which seemed to him like the same thing as reaching into a fissure in the regions of unrevealed revelation and thus in his mind was the meaning of the work for whosoever were possessed by the anxiety of glimpsing the cosmos would need to follow certain paths and no matter how occult they are or how prohibited they may be one would need to follow them even at the risk of rousing the wrath of God

Whereas for Goebbels, Bruckner's greatest creations had been released of all ecclesial restraints, for Saenz the organist of Saint Florian was a zealous mystic who, as a

Catholic, lived tormented by conflict. Since he knew that his thirst for revelation was Satanic and only could lead to self-destruction, he ever more reverently begged for God's assistance in the creation of the work, recognizing at once that his supplication was a form of sacrilege. Saenz's Bruckner was a delirious, frenzied composer, tormented by a feverish desire to produce a work of art that would glorify God. So acute was this desire and so frustrated his art that "se veía en trance de convocar a quien realmente no debía" [found himself at risk of convoking he whom he really should not] (135). Saenz's Bruckner was a religious fanatic who begged Lucifer to help him compose a work *ad majorem Dei gloriam.* The light of Lucifer frightened and saddened this Bruckner, but it also inspired him to compose unrelentingly for the remainder of his life. The greatness of his music is precisely what the bourgeois critics of Vienna could not appreciate. As in Goebbels's speech, in Saenz's prose poem the cosmopolitan (Jewish) critics who had been hostile to Bruckner are condemned, but not because they advocated degenerate art which threatened the health of German culture; instead, the misreading of the Viennese critics, in Saenz's poetics, was a further example of the problematic of *explaining*, rather than *accepting* this creation myth. Viennese music circles spoke maliciously about Bruckner's "timidez y extravagancia y ingenuidad" [timidness, eccentricity, and simplemindedness] (136) because they were critics and critics alone, not true creators who would inherently understand these qualities.

For Goebbels, Bruckner's humble background had been an opportunity to exalt the *Volk*, to praise a national essence, and to offer a metaphor that could legitimate an annexation, since his music embodied such a German essence despite the fact that he was Austrian. For Saenz, on the other hand, the received representation of Bruckner the "timid, eccentric, and simpleminded" genius transformed into the frenzied mystic tormented by his own desire for revelation when not by the hostility of his critics, a frustrated religious artist whose drive to glorify God led him to seek Satan's assistance. It seems very plausible that Saenz carried out this performance cognizant of how central Bruckner had been to Nazi-era ideology. In the late 1970s, the Bolivian poet was not a politically active fascist as he had been in his youth, but he seems to have known that his poetic Bruckner would make him look like a Nazi, and he seems to have found the promise of this provocation irresistible insofar as it guaranteed his audience's revulsion.

As we have seen, the mythical lost spirituality of Bruckner's music derives from musicologists and propagandists of the Third Reich, such as Auer and Goebbels. Saenz carries over these qualities, but with them does not secularize Bruckner's greatness into a nationalist hero narrative as his Nazi predecessors did; instead, he inculcates Bruckner with religious fanaticism, a spiritual devotion that intensifies to the brink of the demonic. The lost spirituality of Bruckner's music for Saenz was not just the promise of an exalted state of spiritual sentiment in his audience; instead, it represented a paradigm of artistic creation itself. Bruckner's Eighth Symphony was the exemplar that Saenz

referenced in Talleres Krupp and in "En la abadía de San Florián." It was a work that the Austrian composer finished in 1890 only after thirty-four years of obsessive labor, as Saenz indicated in a lengthy passage devoid of orthographic punctuation in the manner of the stream-of-consciousness technique:

> Al cabo de treinta y cuatro años de intenso y concentrado y silencioso trabajo es decir en mil ochocientos noventa dio por terminada la sin par obra esto es la Octava sinfonía en do menor que sería por todos los tiempos venideros inagotable fuente de energía y sabiduría y cardinal camino de iniciación en lo mágico en lo hermético en lo aterrador suscitando asombro y pavura y sembrando secretas y jamás soñadas enseñanzas en las almas de los hombres quienes escucharían con siempre renovado júbilo y por milésima vez cual si fuera la primera e inconmensurable discurso de misterio humano y cósmico que hablaba el místico ("En la abadía," 137)

> After thirty-four years of intense and concentrated and silent work that is to say in eighteen hundred ninety he decided he had finished the incomparable work that is the Eighth symphony in C minor which for all coming ages would be an inexhaustible source of energy and wisdom and cardinal path of initiation in the magical in the hermetic in the terror eliciting astonishment and fear and sowing secrets and unimaginable lessons in the souls of men who would listen with ever renewed jubilation for the thousandth time as though it were the first to the mystic's incommensurable discourse on the human and cosmic mystery

Saenz's poetic remodelling of Anton Bruckner is carried over from "En la abadía de San Florián" to the poem *Bruckner*, in which the composer, seeking the support of Satan to write a symphony for the greater glory of God, remains striving steadfast "con el ángel a la diestra y con Satanás a la siniestra" [with the angel on the right and Satan on the left], since he knows that the secret concealed in any tormented artist is that his life, plagued as it is by suffering, cannot resist the attraction to an apocalyptic sublime (*Bruckner*, 18). To an extent, the sublime may be approached as the stylized, aesthetically (and politically) correct counterpart to abject neurosis in the artist's psychic experience.

In the poetry of Saenz, this Romantic inheritance evolves into "júbilo," expressing the sudden organicity of transcendent experience with its promise of renewal. Horrifying because it is at once apocalyptic and impending, "júbilo" is the state of frenzy in which the reflective self is possessed by the orgiastic eroticism of form-giving – the demonic drive to create by destroying. "Júbilo" permits the subject to speak of revelation without *explaining* anything, giving him free rein of nonrepresentational art that combines the most differentiated of forms, since it plunges the subject into states of ever greater contamination and impurity.

5. Conclusion: The Literary Oracular and Transatlantic Modernism

As we have learned, the poetics of revelation emerged out of the moral domain of transatlantic modernism as an inquiry into and complaint against adversity in a fragmented life of crisis. During the second half of the 20th century, poets launching a professional literary career could not survive the vernacularizing of mass culture by writing only highbrow culturalist poetry. The visionary practitioners who came under scrutiny in this study had deeply engaged in political militancy during the 1930s, but a revolutionary fatigue afflicted them by the 1940s. The national energy which once had seemed like a unitary force that could transform society into a collectivity of interdependence founded on solidarity and emulation, revealed its volatility in either the accelerated loss of prestige experienced by parliamentary democracy or the horrors of total war from 1936 to 1945. In the eyes of Hispanic visionaries, every assembly of bodies that appeared in public after 1945 represented the risk of devolution into a mob. The mechanization of modern warfare made this possibility especially ominous for those who had fled authoritarian regimes of terror.

The double distrust in a people's party and the image of the people projected by charismatic leaders, which grew in writers like María Zambrano, Octavio Paz, and Jaime Saenz, did not prohibit them from constructing a community by searching for it rhetorically, no longer in the social substratum but rather in the underground

subcultures of the western intellectual tradition. This construction (framed as a search) helped them to distinguish themselves as independent intellectuals in a public sphere rife with demands of ideological purity, which recently had transformed, as a newly literate class emerged out of the liberal education reforms of the early 20th century, irreversibly modifying the literary field by ushering in a *vernacularizing* period of literary production through the proliferation of periodical print journalism.

I approached the problem of visionary poetry from three different angles and consistently found a degree of contempt for the secularization of the *officium* of the poet, along with nostalgia for an organicity of transcendent experience, and desire for ethical clarity in an age of moral ambiguity. At slightly varying times and under different circumstances in their lives, Zambrano, Paz, and Saenz all felt a dawning nostalgia for an imagined experience of unity. Their newly acquired distrust of revolutionary politics and their perception of the writer's desacralization converged in a single complaint that led them into the role of the oracular sage.

We learned that visionary poets of Cold War Latin America understood pre-reflective immediacy to be the way through which multitudes connect to competing versions of a national culture and that these versions were nowhere as evident as in mass media. Although they surmised that popular traditions and the poetry of oral transmission remained the most authentic manifestations of national energy, oracular poets questioned whether the projection of the nation's future as well as the

interpretation of its past could be entrusted to the unreflective subject projected in mass culture's print and visual texts. The status of banishment that they willingly inherited as poets – Zambrano was a political exile, Paz an intellectual exile, and Saenz a voluntary outcast – provided a self-legitimating rationale for their oracular mediation between elite audiences of highbrow revues and the mass readerships of more inclusive magazines and daily newspapers.

The inclusion of Zambrano, Paz, and Saenz in this study has had several advantages. First, it allowed us to look beyond any regional exclusivity in the phenomenon of poetic revelation without losing sight of the regional specificity of its varied manifestations. Poetic revelation is not a regionalism, even if oracular poets in Latin America were sometimes as preoccupied with the social substratum as their indigenist contemporaries were. Looking beyond national borders without ignoring the relevance of the discourse of national culture, we were able to address visionary poetry within the field of cultural production, which had to account for evolving cultural paradigms that were profoundly inflected by an increasingly globalized economy.

Second, the selection of this corpus added important differentiation vis-à-vis the political ideology of each protagonist during their youth, when Zambrano gravitated closest to socialism, Paz to communism, and Saenz to fascism. This differentiation, taken alongside the writers' unilateral retreat from radical politics, has allowed us to infer that no single political ideology was prone to an apolitical conversion, but rather that a

youthful radicalization itself was a prerequisite for the revolutionary fatigue that made revelation viable. In other words, poets who were politically centrist in their youth were unlikely to become visionaries; whereas those who had radicalized (in either direction) could grow disenchanted enough during the Cold War to see in delirium or jubilation the promise of unity that could be grasped and enjoyed irrationally but not by any other means.

Tellingly, each of the three authors chose as their literary avatar and imagined precursor an earlier artist or intellectual whose work lent itself to appropriations by both progressives and reactionaries, as if this ambiguity and ideological undecidability could endlessly fuel the fire of their poetic thought. Zambrano chose Seneca because the Stoic philosopher, whether he was truly a "Spaniard" or not, resisted the Roman state's claims to imperial absolutism while at the same refusing to disentangle reason from desire. Paz chose the Fourier-Breton duo because together, the two French authors embodied a progressive utopianism that remained inassimilable to the Marxist-Leninist tradition from which he sought to distance himself from the mid-1940s onward. For his part, Saenz chose Bruckner because he was fascinated by a composer-theorist who wrote too many pieces that were too long, combining great technical skill with repetitive popular rhythms and motifs, not unlike what Saenz himself set out to do as a literary author. As a result of his eccentric habits of composition, Bruckner was maligned by his many detractors in Vienna during his lifetime, yet his resolve to capture the *Volksgeist* of the

German-speaking peoples made him the favorite composer of fellow Austrian Adolf Hitler.

Third, the inclusion of Zambrano, Paz, and Saenz allowed us to examine significantly differentiated relations between the oracular poet and the public sphere, especially when this was considered over a period of time, i.e. over the course of intellectual maturation. As we saw, Octavio Paz proved to have been the savviest oracular practitioner in the marketplace of ideas – a poet who managed to build an enduring publishing empire and to shape public discourse in the Hispanic world for decades. Zambrano, in turn, did not become a publishing sensation during her lifetime but instead survived precariously by publishing one-off articles in a wide variety of revues and journals, often repurposing these disjecta membra as "chapters" in later books. Her talent as a captivating conversationalist, indeed a modern-day snake charmer, is often highlighted in personal letters and interviews with intellectuals who knew her well, such as José Lezama Lima, Nilita Vientós Gastón, and Elena Croce. Jaime Saenz, for his part, attained public notoriety, paradoxically, by retreating from civic life, retiring from the diplomatic service, and renouncing social conventions of the modernizing city, casting himself out of public life as if someone had banished him. As we saw, over the long-term, this renunciation resulted in Saenz's enshrinement in the pantheon of Bolivian literati as the nation's official outsider and most original voice.

All three authors looked at the tradition of world literature for avatars of their own pathways, but while Paz and Zambrano (because of the constant exchanges in which they engaged) are transatlantic authors *stricto sensu*, Saenz proves to be a more transnational author who tried to reconcile his ultranationalist position with an appreciation for the need to mobilize and activate authors and traditions from world literature to strengthen the national project of Bolivian letters. Be that as it may, in all three cases, I found an intellectual who had radicalized politically as a youth and then abruptly retreated from militancy in party politics, without ever freeing him or herself from the belief in an unfragmented being-in-common or from the anxiety over the multitude's indomitable energy.

The "literary oracular" – conceived as a transhistorical colloquium – invited us to experience the conflict of poetic revelation as *unity of voice* through a critique of instrumental reason leveled by cultural mediators who refused to accept the disintegration of tradition, which they thought had to pass through them if it was to survive. The oracular logic of mediation organized a field of cultural production which responded to the fragmentation of life after the Second World War and to the vernacularizing effect of a mass readership on the linguistic domain of culturalist poetry. One of the forms this logic took, which we did not examine but perhaps warrants our attention, is the analogizing of poetry to "thaumaturgy," a phenomenon

which traverses the three cases studied here. Let us take this opportunity for a closer look.

Zambrano's 1934 article "Por qué se escribe" [Why One Writes], for example, is an invitation to complicate, if only slightly, the idea of community as a transhistorical colloquium, as this text very cogently showcases her proposal of writing as a practice of linguistic alchemy. In this short composition, written with the same jovial enthusiasm as "Hacia un saber sobre el alma," the philosophy student suggests that one writes only in a state that is *withdrawn* and *communicable*, because discovery is possible only at a distance, anticipating her retreat from politics five years later. Withdrawn from the chatter of mass culture in the public sphere, the solitary poet writes as a defense against solitude. Implicitly countering the Socratic critique of writing in Plato's *Phaedrus*, Zambrano argues against phonocentrism that speech is an instrument of false transcendence, because, although we speak to free ourselves from the morasses of life's situations, no sooner do we overcome obstacles with words than these words rebel against us, carrying us away in defeat. As a defense – not against the momentary but against a temporal totality– writing aims to recover and retain what was lost in defeat.

Zambrano thought that words must be recovered through the practice of writing because they were at risk of being contaminated by the vernacularizing effect of mass culture and manipulated by the machinations of charismatic leaders. Since she feared that the effects of popular speech and populist caudillos would make language vacuous

and no longer capable of concealing anything at all (thereby nullifying the possibility of culturalist poetry), she argued for the moral value of saving words from their transitory state by discovering in them a secret that can be communicated. The channel that would facilitate this transmission was nothing other than the literary oracular. One writes to tell a secret, she argued, but this secret is revealed by the instrument of the written word only during the act of writing, when one leaves a place of solitude to communicate. A writer does not allow this instrument's formal beauty to undermine writing's primary function of producing an effect of disruption, and since one can never know exactly what that effect will be, *writing is an act of faith*.

The metaphor of writing as a sojourn from solitude to communicate a secret evinces the famous trope of the "salida" from the Spanish mystical tradition. Zambrano argued that the truth of linguistic alchemy, which requires silence and emptiness, likens the "casa sosegada" that Saint John of the Cross had entered on his spiritual adventure and that Miguel de Molinos described as *recogimiento* [inner withdrawal]: not an *extraction* of oneself as it was for the Romantics, but an *introduction* into oneself. A writer does not reveal a secret because *he wants* to communicate it, but because *he must* – because secrets place demands on him and, accordingly, constitute callings. For Zambrano, the "comunidad espiritual del escritor con su público" [spiritual community of the writer and his readership] is formed during the creation, not the reception, of the

writing, structuring the discipline of the literary oracular with a magical relation between the author and the text:

> Comunidad de escritor y público que, en contra de lo que primeramente se cree, no se forma después de que el público ha leído la obra publicada, sino antes, en el acto mismo de escribir el escritor su obra. Es entonces, al hacerse patente el secreto, cuando se crea esta comunidad del escritor con su público.
>
> The community of the writer and his readership, contrary to what one believes at first, is not formed after the readers have read the published work, but rather before, in the act of the writing his work. It is then, as the secret is made patent, that the community of the writer and his readership is created. (327)

Communities of the literary oracular arose in the 1940s and lasted until the late 1970s, when notions of charismatic authorship became untenable under the critical gaze of post-structural theory. The profound impact that Zambrano, Paz, and Saenz have made in their respective literary traditions can be measured in several ways and indeed raise important lines of inquiry. Although these avenues for further study cannot be addressed in this dissertation, they are nonetheless worth outlining in the interest of future research. First, it is worth noting that, although Zambrano was relatively unknown in Spanish culture until her return to Spain in 1981, she was made into something of a folk hero during the Spanish Transition to Democracy, when she was coaxed with benefits to return to Spain, where she would be branded *the last exile*, in the government's attempt to refocus public attention away from an historical analysis of the 1939 exile. Since then, her writing has spoken to a new generation of commentators whose admiration for the philosopher often eliminates their critical distance from her ideas and even invites them to leave unexamined her idiosyncratic writing style, with its

characteristic reliance on the imitation of oral (often oracular) delivery and its frequent lack of argumentative transitions.

Beyond these commentators, some of the most indelible, organic, and potent suggestions of Zambrano's oracular influence appear in the essays of Cuban writer and nucleus of the Orígenes group, José Lezama Lima, and in the poetry of the younger Spanish exile, José Ángel Valente, who worked closely with and edited volumes of both Lezama and Zambrano. The Zambrano-Lezama-Valente triad has been explored by literary historians who describe Zambrano's quiet yet intense participation in the highly influential highbrow magazine *Orígenes*. They discuss Valente's apprenticeship with both Lezama and Zambrano, citing the cache of letters between these three larger-than-life personalities. These complex and overlapping trajectories, however, also invite us to ask how the problem of poetic revelation may be assessed tropologically in the writing of Lezama and Valente, vis-à-vis their relation to Zambrano. How are we to interpret their interventions in communities of the literary oracular, and how can this interpretation help refine our understanding of the poetics of revelation more broadly?

The influence of Octavio Paz on Mexican culture is famously controversial, especially among intellectuals of younger generations who did not come of age under his spell but rather grew up watching him on television play a role that today we might call an "influencer." For them, Paz was primarily a successful entertainer in an authoritarian society still ruled by a single party whose televised oracle was repeatedly

interrupted by the commercial advertisements sponsoring the broadcast. In addition to the numerous lecturing positions he received, from the late 1970s onward, Paz was lavished with prestigious international awards in ceremonies attended by world leaders. Over the next 30 years, he would build the *Vuelta* publishing empire and eventually end up on television programs of Televisa, where he continued to deftly manage his public persona, literary production, and critical interventions in the public sphere, leveraging his prominence as a poet to certify his critical perspectives.

Regarding the impact of Paz's desire to dominate the field of literature and connect Mexico to the world literary system in a cosmopolitan way, the trajectory of José Emilio Pacheco warrants closer examination from this sociohistorical perspective to the extent that such channeling/managing activities remain central to the new poetic discipline. Inversely, the influence of Paz's oracular logic of mediation is felt in the writing of Roger Bartra (*La jaula de la melancolía*) who, despite being a communist to the end of his days and polemically opposing Paz for decades, finally granted that the Nobel laureate had earned the distinction of having created modern Mexican literature.

Nonetheless, as I alluded to above, perhaps the place where Paz's influence is most palpable today is in the antipathy that younger generations of intellectuals feel toward this literary giant who in his final years dared to become a television personality while at the same time continuing to write in the culturalist mode about being an "intellectual exile." Such uncomfortable binomials have made him the favorite punching

bag of politically Left critics and writers. Roberto Bolaño's travesty of Paz in *Los detectives salvajes* brings this criticism to bear on literature. Unlike Zambrano, who is beloved in Spain, Paz elicits an immediate eyeroll when not unconcealed condemnation from younger critics today, who see self-legitimating indulgence in such works as Paz's late biography of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, whom he championed as a truly independent intellectual that could be interpreted best by an intellectual of equal stature and independence.

As for the legacy of Jaime Saenz, the first wave of Bolivian writers who grew up under the influence of his countercultural critique of the official literary establishment ultimately guaranteed his placement in that establishment by elevating his status as a literary outsider, whose uncompromising views on the practice of poetry were inherited as a discipline by his students and young aspiring writers. Despite the lack of objectivism in their early explorations of Saenz's poetry and homages to their mentor, those commentators helped bring Jaime Saenz to the light of international debate and research, especially in Spain, where Saenz (and Zambrano) would be republished by the Ave del Paraíso imprint, and the United States, where Hispanists have taken interest in a veritable critical assessment of his poetry and of the relation between his literary persona and the discourse of national culture. Saenz's sheer lack of utopianism, which he shares with such writers as Louis-Ferdinand Céline and Comte de Lautréamont,

lends his writing to postmodern theories that have proven themselves well-equipped to address the cult of negativity in transatlantic modernism.

It appears that Saenz's critical moment is steadily gathering momentum. While US-based Hispanists have begun to assess the discourse of national culture in Saenz's semiautobiographical prose fiction (especially as it relates to Franz Tamayo), English language translators have focused on his poetic works, prompting the proliferation of "inspired," award-winning translations (Gander and Johnson). These translations have introduced to a new readership the acclaimed Germanophile bard of the Bolivian sierra, even though the translators choose not to frame Saenz's poetry in its sociohistorical context but rather in the context of their own autobiographies which include unsubstantiated, albeit entertaining, literary anecdotes. There is clearly a need to translate the works of Jaime Saenz, as a concerted effort to update the international debate over what the Bolivian may teach us about transatlantic modernism. Regarding works in urgent need of critical assessment, I would point to *Vidas y muertes*, which consists of poetic obituaries of real and imagined people in the style of Edgar Lee Masters, and *Los papeles de Narciso Lima-Achá*, which, among other things, narrates the homoerotic adventures of a young Bolivian tourist named Narciso, his lover Elbruz Ulme (a Nazi military cadet), and Konrad Kluge, a reactionary *Lebensphilosoph* who laments the disappearance of absolute values in the Third Reich. These works, among

several others, by Latin America's great provocateur of reactionary poetics, are in need of critical assessment.

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