

This will be the last paper issue of the Latin American Literary Review. The editorial board has decided to take our well-recognized and venerable journal online, in collaboration with the Latin American Studies Association, which has also taken its flagship journal, the Latin American Research Review, into a fully open-access and online format.

The Latin American Literary Review is looking forward to a new chapter in its history, where open-access will make our authors more widely available to a greater readership throughout the world, and the possibilities of a net-based journal open opportunities for richer content that we are only beginning to explore. Of course, we will remain a fully peer-reviewed journal, with a long history of excellence to support our venture into this new and exciting development.

# LATIN AMERICAN LITERARY REVIEW



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The Latin American Literary Review is a peer-reviewed scholarly journal devoted to the literature of Latin America (including the United States) and Brazil. It is published semiannually in English, Spanish and Portuguese. Founded by Yvette Miller in the Fall of 1972, the magazine has been very well received, and has aroused national and international interest. It is now directed by Professor Debra A. Castillo at Cornell University.

Bringing to its readers the most recent writing of some of the leading scholars and critics in the fields of Hispanic and Portuguese literature, the Latin American Literary Review is of interest to all libraries and institutions of higher learning, and especially to all departments of English, Modern Languages, Latin American Studies, and Comparative Literature.

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EL TEATRO DE ROBERTO ARLT:  
DRAMA DE LA LITERATURA, LITERATURA DE LA VIDA.

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*MICHIGAN TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY*

Un autor anónimo profetiza [en *Cuasimodo*, octubre 1921]  
“Un arte nuevo para la Rusia soviética”, donde serán  
borrados “los límites entre el artista y el público, entre la  
escena y el espectador...”

Horacio Tarcus 755

Eran apenas pasadas las seis de la tarde. El tumulto de la puerta había desaparecido y sólo quedaban los restos de la multitud: papeles y papelitos, vendedores apurando la reposición de mercadería, y el viento acusaba sus soledades. Circo Podestá-Scotti —rezaba en la cartelera a la entrada del circo popular— “Presenta ‘Juan Moreira’ de Eduardo Gutiérrez, adaptación de José J. Podestá”. Era el 10 de abril de 1885, se estrenaba en Chivilcoy, Provincia de Buenos Aires, “Juan Moreira”.

Puertas adentro transcurre la escena en que el valiente Moreira se enfrenta, facón en mano, a la partida de gendarmes comandados por el canalla, deshonesto, jefe de la localidad, cuando inesperadamente salta a la arena un gaucho del público empuñando una daga dispuesto a defender al gallardo Moreira (Mayer, en Gutiérrez 15). A grandes rasgos, esta obra ilustra el conflicto entre el gaucho que vive de la ley de la tierra, costumbres del campo, y la ciudad que visualiza la ley del hombre moderno. En el prólogo a la novela de Gutiérrez (ediciones Longseller, 2007) Marcos Mayer cuenta que frecuentes irrupciones, como

las narradas más arriba, dejaban entrever la estrecha relación entre ficción y realidad (entre literatura y política, o teatro y vida, o farsa y tragedia). Mayer advierte que estas irrupciones al plano de la fantasía fueron interpretadas como ignorancia del público apostado en el circo. Un público inculto y salvaje que no podía discernir entre ficción y realidad, pero queda bien claro que sí sabía distinguir los diferentes ejercicios de la justicia en la comunidad.

La anécdota del público inculto se ajusta a aquel “el señor Roberto Arlt persiste aferrado a un realismo de pésimo gusto” (Arlt 310) del que el mismo Arlt solía hacer burla. El crítico moderno de su época diría que en Arlt convergen una realidad de pésimo gusto con una ficción de pésimo gusto con su consecuente público inculto, y de mal gusto, que no entiende el orden de la emergente estética liberal y su valor cultural. De ahí que su escritura, la de Arlt, se encuentre reprimida (Piglia, *Respiración*) y su impostura sea un agravio a la “razón” de la alta cultura.<sup>1</sup> Más allá de la impostura frente al “buen estilo” literario que lo definiría como el único “escritor verdaderamente moderno” (Piglia 132), lo que interesa señalar en estas líneas es el carácter efectista de su narrativa como estrategia para acceder a la “verdad”.<sup>2</sup> Si bien Arlt se “gana la vida” con su trabajo literario, su proyecto literario y teatral transgrede los límites entre ficción-realidad y deja al espectador enfrentado a la pregunta por su propia existencia. Lejos de entenderse una falla, un error, o una falta de cultura (como ilustra el episodio del gaucho espectador del circo en el siglo XIX), la transgresión del límite entre la realidad y la ficción abre un espacio por donde una sensibilidad otra se hace presente reclamando una interpretación distinta a la proclamada por la “alta cultura”. Para Arlt la literatura no es solo la necesidad de una entrega demandada por el consumidor que le brinda (como señaló Piglia en “Roberto Arlt: una crítica de la economía literaria”) su sustento económico, sino que también cumple una función social en la que el teatro imprime en el ánimo del lector-espectador la reflexión sobre su lugar en el mundo. De ahí que esa transgresión a los límites formales de la realidad-ficción no solo se opone al proyecto liberal de la burguesía local (donde expondría su fragilidad) sino que es también una vía de acceso a la “verdad” que guía la existencia individual y comunitaria. En suma, el teatro de Arlt opera desde dos dimensiones: por un lado hace ejercicio de tal transgresión formal de sus personajes y escenarios (como en el teatro experimental), mientras que por el otro se ofrece como ejemplo de transgresión ya que ese mismo teatro es parte del horizonte perceptivo de la cotidianidad del espectador (teatro pobre).

Con el objetivo de hacer visible esta dinámica entre el espectador-lector

y la obra teatral-narrativa, este artículo está dividido en tres secciones: las dos primeras señalan la borrosa distancia entre ficción y realidad a través del análisis de la primera obra propiamente escrita por Roberto Arlt para el teatro (*Trescientos Millones*), y la narración de Osvaldo Bayer sobre los anarquistas expropiadores; mientras que la última sección reflexiona en torno a las consecuencias que acarrearía la tesis de un universo sin claros parámetros entre la realidad y la ficción a través del análisis de las obras *Saverio el cruel* y *Prueba de amor*. En esta última parte se propone una noción de “verdad” que difiere de la certeza basada en la experiencia empírica y concreta de la realidad y sus procesos racionales modernos.<sup>3</sup>

Mirta Arlt, la hija de Roberto, narra una anécdota que brinda algunas pistas sobre la relación tan particular que tienen la realidad y la ficción en Arlt. Cuenta que leer *Los siete locos* (1929) fue difícil; lo fue porque se decía que Silvio Astier, el personaje de *El juguete rabioso* (1926), era un autorretrato de Roberto adolescente; por lo que había que entender que Erdosain, protagonista sumamente abyecto de *Los siete locos*, era también un autorretrato. Frente a la duda, la adolescente decidió preguntarle a su padre sobre la base de inspiración de los personajes; es decir, le preguntó a su padre si era él el de las novelas, a lo que Arlt respondió,

-¿Cómo podés hacerme preguntas estúpidas? (Sacudía la cabeza con desconsuelo.) Las palabras de un escritor buscan la piedra filosofal de los alquimistas medievales.

-¿?

-Un novelista, yo, invento una historia para ubicar a mis personajes, tal cual como esa bazofia de historia sagrada que te hacen memorizar las monjas te cuenta cómo Dios creó el mundo para ubicar, o para sacarse de encima a Adán y Eva, sus personajes. Entonces, ¿vos le preguntarías a Dios si él era Adán y Eva? (“La locura” 18)<sup>4</sup>

Pero también le recomendó un libro de Oscar Wilde diciéndole: “Leete *La decadencia de la mentira*, ya es hora de que sepas que la vida se parece más al arte que el arte a la vida” (18).

En la escritura de Arlt hay un clamor urgente por la verdad, pero ese que llama *cross* a la mandíbula en el prólogo a *Los Lanzallamas* (1931) es traicionero; juega sucio mezclando la realidad con la ficción haciendo temblar

los pilares de las certezas de los discursos modernos.<sup>5</sup> La escritura novelesca, sin embargo, es un *cross* tardío sobre el lector. El teatro, por otro lado, ofrece la rapidez de una escritura que, ni bien se concluye, tiene acceso al público.<sup>6</sup> Luis Ordaz sentencia: “Roberto Arlt, por antonomasia, fue el autor del movimiento independiente” (*El teatro en el Río* 187) y el movimiento independiente tuvo su aparición con el Teatro del Pueblo. Fundado por Leónidas Barletta en 1930, este teatro convocó a los artistas ávidos de alternativas al teatro comercial. A su vez, se sumaba el hecho de que Barletta fuera parte del grupo de Boedo, por lo que su teatro tenía el mismo perfil de compromiso social con su consecuente estética. Durante la disputa estilística de aquella época, Arlt mantenía amistades en ambas márgenes literarias (Boedo y Florida), una de ellas era el nombrado Barletta.<sup>7</sup>

La adaptación de un capítulo de *Los siete locos*, “Los humillados”, a pedido y solicitud de su amigo Leónidas, abrirá la dramaturgia de Arlt. Pero su primera obra escrita para el teatro fue *Trescientos Millones* (1932) que, debido a su contenido y relación con la fantasía, recuerda al teatro de Bertolt Brecht.

### Un escape de la fantasía: Trescientos Millones.

En los comentarios preliminares a la obra *Trescientos millones* Arlt dice que se inspiró en el suicidio de una joven inmigrante porque, como periodista, había tenido la oportunidad de conocer todos los detalles del desgraciado evento. “La suma de estos detalles simples [le] produjo una impresión profunda” (*Teatro* T1 51), y agrega más tarde: “de esa obsesión, que llegó a tener caracteres dolorosos, nació esta obra” (52).

Según advierte Ordaz, “el teatro de Roberto Arlt podría calificarse como el teatro de los sueños desatados. Sueños que se escapaban de los personajes y adquirirían tanta fuerza y tal carácter, que llegaban a ser personajes ellos mismos” (189). Este es el caso de *Trescientos Millones*. Esta es una obra que podría pertenecer al movimiento surrealista europeo de los años veinte. En ella sorprende su nivel de abstracción, pero no obstante, como el mismo Arlt señala, es de gran éxito y simpatía entre la gente: “El estreno, las representaciones (alcanzan a treinta), lo cual es un fenómeno en un teatro de arte como el de Barletta, me han convencido de que si técnicamente no he construido una obra perfecta, la dosis de humanidad y piedad que hay en ella llega al público y lo conmueve por la pureza de su intención” (52).

El público se conmueve porque la joven inmigrante es una soñadora (como

muchos apostados en el teatro) que se suicida ante la desgracia de ser pobre y abusada por sus dueños. Pero a su vez, la obra es un éxito porque el público encuentra su propia humanidad al identificarse con la pobre protagonista. Arlt revive el ideal solidario, no en el escenario sino en la gente misma. La distancia entre representación y realidad es violada al extenderse el escenario del teatro a la realidad de las butacas, o a la inversa, llevando la vida al escenario. De ahí que el dramaturgo no teoriza una moral, o razón, sino que directamente interviene sobre los espectadores poniendo en práctica la moral o la razón. Esto no quiere decir que no haya teoría en su trabajo, sino que la misma intervención ya lo es al desarticular la dicotomía ficción-realidad que abre en el espectador la reflexión sobre su propia condición social.

La obra está estructurada en tres actos. Pero a modo de “Prólogo”, en una escena única, el espectador-lector se enfrenta con un gran desconcierto: los personajes son figuras abstractas, absurdas y ridículas que pululan en una suerte de hiperespacio. Tienen que transcurrir algunos minutos hasta que llega la primera escena del primer acto, para que el lector-espectador comprenda lo que está sucediendo. A modo de un futuro que explica lo pasado, el lector-espectador comprende que los personajes vistos en el “Prólogo” son fantasías, sueños diurnos, que se estaban quejando de su creador-soñador. Estas se independizaron en su consciencia y, como trabajadores que no tienen derecho a su propia voluntad, se quejan de la autoritaria lógica en la que están obligadas a participar.

La primera escena, sumamente esclarecedora, presenta a una empleada doméstica quejándose de su infortunio de vivir en pobreza. Rápidamente se pasa a la segunda escena donde la Muerte reclama su derecho a llevarla con ella si la Sirvienta no quiere vivir; pero la joven no quiere morir. Con el cínico pensamiento que se le podría adjudicar a la Muerte, se retira mientras le dice que sus males eran consecuencia de no haber querido comer “jamón del diablo”. Enigmática afirmación que más tarde se podrá interpretar como que ella no había querido ceder a la moral repudiada por la burguesía (¿tal vez una moral revolucionaria?, aunque queda claro que Sirvienta quiere ceder a una moral burguesa). La narradora de la fantasía de la obra dentro de la obra cuenta con el servicio de Rocamble, el Hombre Cúbico, la Reina Bizantina, el Galán, el Capitán, el Demonio y más tarde con el de dos catalanas (Griselda y Azucena). Otros personajes-sueños se agregarán en los siguientes actos.

Su primera fantasía, de una vida “digna”, es viabilizada por Rocamble, famoso personaje de Ponson du Terrail, un truhán que logra su fortuna a través

del engaño con fantasías inverosímiles. Este es un héroe que hace alarde de haber sido objeto de la escritura de cuarenta tomos.<sup>8</sup> De todas maneras, como un trabajador sin voz ni voto en las decisiones, él es el Robin Hood que le trae una herencia de trescientos millones a Sirvienta. El dinero había sido robado, o estafado, al mismo tiempo que ella quedaba huérfana. Rocambole es el justiciero que le devuelve la riqueza perdida antes de su nacimiento. Este héroe del siglo XIX francés se presentaba como un criminal “regenerado” que ahora vivía como Duque. Dirá de sí mismo: “En algunas partes me llaman el expresidiario. En otras, el exjefe del Club de Sotas. (*Hace un gesto fantoche sentimental y libertario, llevándose un pañuelo a los ojos.*) Un ángel, la duquesa de Chamery, me redimió...” (67). A lo largo de toda la obra Rocambole será el Arcángel que velará por sus sueños diurnos. Sirvienta, al igual que el personaje Silvio Astier de la novela *El juguete rabioso*, era una ávida lectora de las aventuras de Rocambole, de ahí que su presencia significaba la justicia de recibir el dinero que le correspondía. La herencia era la salida fantaseada de todos sus males reales en la vida. A diferencia de Fabio Cáceres, el joven personaje de la novela *Don Segundo Sombra* (1926) de Ricardo Güiraldes, que recibe una herencia que lo convierte en la representación del nuevo sujeto moderno argentino, en Sirvienta la herencia es netamente una farsa, ya que ella no tiene ningún lazo sanguíneo que le permita “progresar” al nuevo mundo de la nación argentina. Pues todo lo contrario, como se verá más adelante, ella no puede traicionar la parte de sí misma que se “regenera” en un sujeto nuevo, por lo que toda ella muere al matar su pasado de ilusiones: la muerte de las ilusiones conlleva una muerte absoluta.

En el Segundo Cuadro del primer acto, Sirvienta viaja en un crucero por el Mediterráneo. Las imágenes del crucero son las que aparecían en las revistas de actualidad de la alta sociedad argentina, disponibles en la casa en que trabaja y en alguna otra que había trabajado. El Capitán del crucero le hace notar las particularidades de ser millonaria, por ejemplo los placeres y servicios que puede obtener del barco en el que está. Como si ella fuese la duquesa de Chamery, un Galán se le acerca y procura conquistarla con palabras dulces y cursis a las que ella rápidamente impugna. Estas no tienen el tono delictivo de su agrado, por lo que corrige a su personaje (y este muestra su enfado) diciéndole cómo ha de conquistarle su corazón. “Bueno, haga de cuenta que yo soy el hombre y usted la mujer —le dice ella y se lanza en su *performance*— Niña... me gustaría estar como un gatito en tu regazo. [...] Quisiera que me convirtieras en tu esclavo. Quisiera encanallarme por vos...” (77). El Galán se siente ofendido en su pudor,

ante lo que ella arremete con dinero y quiere comprarlo. Como si las revistas de la alta cultura argentina siguieran soplándole al oído, ella entiende que si se tiene el dinero y se quiere algo se lo compra, porque todo tiene su precio, incluido el Galán. Paradojalmente las fantasías-personajes se ven atacadas en sus buenos modales al ser objetos de una imaginación perversa, que primero propone “servidumbres voluntarias” y luego la compra indecorosa.

Curiosamente, la fantasía-Galán resulta ser un cínico y Sirvienta se lo lanza en la cara. Este confiesa que le molestan las mujeres porque lo usan en sus comedias como una simple idea, o sueño-objeto. Develaba así que sus sentimientos y deseos de cortejar a una dama no eran reales sino simples deberes de su condición de personaje en una fantasía. No obstante la fantasía-Galán se defenderá: “Es el único elogio que me encanta. Sí, soy un cínico y desvergonzado y, además, me gusta serlo” (80); asume así que su interés era la buena vida y que ser una fantasía-Galán se la brindaba. La honestidad y desfachatez de su interés por los objetos materiales, como también por las mujeres investidas de ellos, reafirma el interés de Sirvienta por comprarlo. Al fin y al cabo ella era millonaria. Ambos en acuerdo, aclarados en sus intereses y deseos, anuncian impudicamente su casamiento al Capitán.

Las fantasías-personajes están fastidiadas por la falta de coherencia en el sueño de Sirvienta. Como si estuvieran en el Teatro Coliseo de Buenos Aires envalentonadas por Leopoldo Lugones, reclaman que “debería prohibírseles soñar a los pobres” porque estos imaginan los “disparates más truculentos” (83).<sup>9</sup> Una de esas siniestras y disparatadas fantasías es la de tener una hija con el Galán, que de hecho tiene, pero que más tarde será robada. Nuevamente el héroe Rocambole, el criminal regenerado, encuentra a su hija, lo que confirma su lugar de héroe en la fantasía. Mientras la Muerte espera, recordando que todo esto sucedía porque Sirvienta no había comido “jamón de diablo”, por lo tanto ella todavía no sabía cómo ser inmoral.

El segundo acto de la obra parece una narración histórica contada en clave de la Argentina. Los personajes de humo (Cenicienta, Compadre Vulcano, Rufián Honrado y el infaltable Rocambole) representan eventos, figuras públicas “reales”, y también ideologías. La fantasía se lleva a cabo en una carbonería donde el dueño, Vulcano (tío y abusador), tiene cautiva a Cenicienta, la hija de Sirvienta. Más allá del hecho de tener secuestrada a Cenicienta, Vulcano busca su aprobación diciéndole que lo hace por su bien, por su futuro. De ahí que Cenicienta trabaje en su “establecimiento” como una forma de agradecimiento por haberla recogido, protegido y alimentado desde tiempo atrás, cuando una

Gitana cualquiera la había robado de los brazos de su madre. El comerciante “era un hombre gigantesco, con el rostro manchado de carbón, gorra de visera de hule y blusa proletaria” (90) de apariencia a aquella imagen que los trabajadores habían hecho del presidente argentino Yrigoyen (el “peludo”): un hombre enorme que chaqueteaba de proletario manteniendo como rehenes las ilusiones de los trabajadores.

La escena cambia de rumbo cuando Vulcano, al presentir la presencia de Rocambole, el violento truhán protector de Sirvienta, se inquieta y llama al Viejo (“un viejo gordo, grasiento y granujiento, con traje de color canela, bastón-garrote y una chisterita jovial” 92—también conocido como el Rufián Honrado) con la intención de venderle a Cenicienta. Pero el “chanchito burgués”, como podría haberlo llamado, al evaluar la mercancía a comprar la considera muy flaca y poco educada, buena para nada, por lo que regatea su precio. Rocambole y Sirvienta salen a escena, revólver en mano, dispuestos a luchar por la libertad de la cautiva.<sup>10</sup> Vulcano acusa al héroe: “Usted está violando las leyes... Me amenaza a mano armada...” (94). El Viejo, al reconocer que estaba tratando con el expresidiario Rocambole, decide escaparse de la escena diciendo que “[podían] despellejarlo [a Vulcano] tranquilamente, que [él] no dir[á] palabra!” (95). Finalmente madre e hija se reencuentran y Vulcano recibe el castigo de Rocambole que lo deja ciego. En la escena irrumpe la Patrona de Sirvienta solicitando sus servicios.

El tercer acto comienza con un sentimiento: el de juventud de Sirvienta. Este sentir contrasta con su entorno que insiste en informarle que está vieja, como ellos. No recuerda con claridad que Rocambole rescató a su hija de la carbonería de Vulcano. Una suerte de amnesia la invade, pero le permite percibir, mientras conversa con su hija, que en el campo hay flores y no solo vacas y caballos como ella pensaba. El campo ya no es simplemente una fuente de materia prima sino que también refleja belleza y armonía. La hija le contesta, “mamita, no tenés imaginación. A vos no te gusta soñar. Estoy segura de que vos nunca has soñado que volabas” (104). Cenicienta, sin memoria y sin pasado, se transforma en una tirana que exige, sin haber visto lo que su madre ya le había dado: toda la existencia de los personajes-fantasías, las ilusiones de un cambio.

Un cambio que no se hace esperar. Cenicienta le cuenta a su madre que está enamorada de un joven “alto, rubio, buen mozo” (104). Está emocionada por su futuro, pero la madre muestra distancia. Cenicienta la interpreta como envidia, ante lo que Sirvienta se defiende diciendo que “a veces los autores les tienen envidia a sus personajes. Quisieran destruirlos” (105). Aunque al

final, sabiendo que todo progenitor busca la felicidad de sus hijos, Sirvienta acepta el destino que ha de seguir la suya. Cuando se dispone a bendecirlos la realidad imaginada por Arlt se le anticipa irrumpiendo violentamente a través del hijo de la patrona que golpeaba la ventana y gritaba: “Abrí, Sofía. [...] no te hagás la estrecha” (107). Buscaba arrebatarse más dignidad y poseer su cuerpo. Cansada del atropello Sirvienta se suicida con un disparo en la cabeza, mientras el hijo de la patrona, borracho, seguía gritando: “Abrí Sofía. Abrí... no hagas chistes” (108). El suicidio de la realidad imaginada es un escape a la fantasía que los pobres insisten en perseguir: enamorarse de un joven “alto, rubio, buen mozo ...”, el ideal occidental. Liberadas al fin las fantasías de su creadora, el leal Rocambole reza: “Señor, el empedernido criminal te pide piedad para esta pobrecita criatura, que tanto ha padecido sobre la tierra” (108).

Roberto Arlt trastoca el orden estipulado sobre el bien y el mal. El criminal, que se supone que es el mal, es quien se apiada de la joven inmigrante; mientras que las otras fantasías, las más nobles bajo el criterio cultural liberal de la burguesía, son llevadas al absurdo. Sin embargo queda la duda, ¿es que Arlt visualiza la sensibilidad humana a través de la criminalidad? Tal vez, aquel *cross* a la mandíbula que invitaba a crear una nueva literatura tiene el mismo carácter expropiador de los anarquistas en las primeras planas de los periódicos. Lo cierto es que Arlt hace una crítica sistematizada a los valores burgueses, pero la ética que devendrá una vez desenmascarada la hipocresía, todavía no queda clara. Ese es el tema central de su segunda obra teatral, *Prueba de amor*. Pero antes de ingresar en ella, el otro lado de la ficción, lo que normalmente se llama realidad, también es desmantelado por la narración histórica y sus límites mostrando que, como le señaló Roberto a su hija, “la vida se parece más al arte que el arte a la vida”.

### Un delirio coherente.

Por razones lógicas del método de lucha, el anarquismo expropiador tenía mayor impacto en la prensa burguesa que el sindical. Claro, en la sección policial, pero tuvo un punto de contacto al fin con la escritura de la burguesía. De ahí que es sumamente probable que Roberto Arlt estuviera al tanto de la crónica policial y del anarquismo en las columnas periodísticas, y que la llamada ficción, tal vez, haga referencia a este tipo de lucha obrera: individualista, no sindicalizada.<sup>11</sup> Como se observará en estas páginas, en Arlt la obra disloca la realidad, o la ficción, diluyendo los límites entre ambas, haciendo que lo

novelesco (mentira-ficción) devenga histórico (verdad-realidad) y lo histórico devenga novelesco. Pero antes será necesario identificar la “realidad” para argumentar que en Arlt no es tan clara dicha división.

Como si Roberto Arlt le dictara al oído, Osvaldo Bayer, con su admirable estilo narrativo, cuenta a modo de monólogo unipersonal sus hallazgos históricos. Según dice, el anarquismo expropiador fue de gran auge en el Río de la Plata, incluso más importante que en España. Desde fines de la segunda década del siglo XX hasta entrados los años 30, los expropiadores estremecían los pilares de la moral burguesa a fuerza de bombas y balas que se adueñaban del capital acumulado. Aproximadamente quince años estuvieron en las columnas de las noticias policiales hasta que, una vez ya muy entrada la dictadura, los considerados delincuentes expropiadores no pudieron contra la estigmatización, la tortura y el fusilamiento.

La leyenda de Robin Hood, el que robaba a los ricos para distribuir la riqueza entre los pobres, era conocida; y más que la narración de un héroe que exhorta a la lucha contra la injusticia, la leyenda enseñaba que los bienes no pueden ser redistribuidos. Como malos estudiantes de esta norma, los expropiadores vivían por fuera de la ley del Estado y de su razón. El primer delito de esta naturaleza fue cometido en 1919.<sup>12</sup> El botín tenía como finalidad financiar un periódico en ruso, para trabajadores rusos, que informaría sobre los acontecimientos en la madre patria (Bayer 11). Sus autores, claro está, eran rusos disidentes de la Revolución de Octubre.

Luego de estudiar el objetivo de asalto, tres hombres arremeten contra un comerciante y su esposa dueños de una casa de cambios. Ya habían cerrado el negocio y llevaban en una maleta la recaudación del día. Los asaltantes los siguen sigilosamente en la corta caminata y luego en el tranvía; apenas bajan, uno de ellos intenta sacarle la maleta con el dinero pero el hombre se resiste, grita y llama la atención de dos policías que pasaban por ahí. El asaltante se ve en la necesidad de actuar: dispara su arma y corre; los otros dos secuaces huyen en el coche que los esperaba. Acorralado y sin salida, herido de un balazo en el brazo, da muerte a uno de los policías. Lo atraparon inmediatamente y pasó al interrogatorio en el que proporcionó el paradero de los otros dos criminales.

Bayer enumera los eventos que llevaron a los rusos a perpetrar el delito. El cabecilla de mente perversa detrás del accionar era Boris Wladimirovich, el autor intelectual del crimen, que había llegado a la Argentina en 1909. Era un aristócrata ruso que había sido médico, biólogo y catedrático en la Universidad de Zurich por un corto período; participó del Congreso Socialista de 1904

representando a su país, tuvo diferencias con Lenin por lo que se alejó de él y, como detalle, puso toda su fortuna al servicio de los ideales revolucionarios. Decidió viajar al lejano país patagónico para descansar de una vida que le traía pesares: su esposa acababa de fallecer en Suiza. Después de algunos años en la Provincia de Santa Fe, decidió recorrer el país por el norte, pero al mismo tiempo estalló la Revolución Rusa. Rápidamente se puso en contacto con coterráneos en Buenos Aires y se instaló en la capital argentina. Vivía del dinero que le dejaba la pintura de sus cuadros y de las clases particulares de los diferentes idiomas que hablaba. Pocos años más tarde, los eventos de la Semana Trágica de 1919 lo alertaban sobre el porvenir de sus compatriotas. La Liga Patriótica Argentina amenazaba con organizar una “degollina de rusos” (Bayer 20).<sup>13</sup> Para Boris era importante informar acerca de los eventos en la lejana Rusia y del poder que tenían los obreros allá. De ahí que editar un periódico en su lengua materna era una necesidad de primer orden. Se pretendía llevar a cabo la revolución, o como él mismo dice: “llevar a la realidad una gran teoría” (en Bayer 20), por lo que había que acceder al dinero necesario para iniciarla. Declararía en una nota enviada a los medios de comunicación después de su captura:

Lo explicaré el porvenir más que el proceso judicial... Necesitaba dinero con urgencia para defender la vida de los rusos en Argentina contra el cometido de la Liga Patriótica. ¡Aquí todos los medios son buenos! Sin vacilar participé personalmente pues algún otro tal vez no supiera explicar su acto ante la humanidad... Y tengo mi consciencia limpia. (Bayer, *Anarquistas* 26)

Como si Bayer estuviera contando la vida del Astrólogo (personaje arltiano clave en las novelas *Los siete locos* y *Los Lanzallamas*) antes de los eventos en la quinta de Témperley (localidad de la Provincia de Buenos Aires, donde Arlt sitúa la sede revolucionaria de sus novelas), la policía encuentra el rastro de Boris a través de su fascinación por la astronomía. Había dejado sus maletas en un observatorio del que era *habitué*. En ellas había pistas que daban a entender que Boris estaba en Misiones, provincia del norte argentino.

La figura de Wladimirovich fue tan interesante que una vez apresado en Posadas, capital misionera, el gobernador de la provincia viajó con él de regreso a Buenos Aires; el Ministro del Interior de la Nación lo visitó en la cárcel donde charló con él por horas; los periódicos de la ciudad no dejaron de

hablar de él durante varios días. Por ejemplo, el diario *Crítica*, donde trabajará Roberto Arlt por algunos años, dirá que la historia es de “bandoleros tipo Bonnot, recordando a la banda de anarquistas franceses que asaltaban bancos en Francia y Bélgica” (Bayer 23).<sup>14</sup>

Más allá del interés casi farandulesco que generó la figura de Wladimirovich entre la clase dirigente y burguesa, el dictamen del poder judicial nuevamente muestra su condición de farsa y atropello. En el juicio llevado contra los tres participantes en el robo, en el que se dio muerte a un policía, el fiscal a cargo solicita la pena de quince años para Wladimirovich por ser el autor intelectual del crimen, pena de muerte para el que mató al policía, y un año para el conductor del coche que los transportaba.<sup>15</sup> Sin embargo, el juez en servicio dictaminó que, incluso cuando Wladimirovich no había sido parte del asesinato, debía pagar una pena similar a la del asesino por haber ideado el plan de robo, por lo que fue sentenciado a pena de presidio perpetuo en Ushuaia, la Siberia argentina (Bayer 23-25).

Pero la novela no termina con esta sentencia. Dos años más tarde llega a la Siberia argentina Kurt Wilckens, el héroe anarquista que había vengado la muerte de mil quinientos obreros patagones al asesinar al Teniente Coronel Varela.<sup>16</sup> Al poco tiempo de su arribo, Wilckens es asesinado a manos de Pérez Millán, un nacionalista amigo de Carlés, presidente de la Liga Patriótica. Para sortear su condena Pérez Millán se hace pasar por loco para que lo trasladen al manicomio de Vieytes. Habiéndole generado suficiente indignación, Wladimirovich también se hace pasar por loco (irónicamente después de hacer mucho barullo para que lo tomen seriamente; es decir para lograr una locura creíble) y es trasladado al mismo hospital psiquiátrico, pero a otro pabellón sin privilegios como los de Pérez Millán.<sup>17</sup> Wladimirovich se la ingenia para conseguir un arma fuera del psiquiátrico y pasarla a uno de sus seguidores que tenía acceso a todos los pabellones. Este último le da muerte al nacionalista, ajusticiando así el asesinato de Wilckens.

Al descubrirse que Wladimirovich era quien estaba por detrás del atentado, fue devuelto a la Siberia argentina, donde al poco tiempo muere, pero no antes de que lo torturaran y lo dejaran paralítico de sus miembros inferiores. Como advierte Bayer, Boris se arrastraba por la celda decadente, oscura y fría, convirtiéndose en un personaje dostoiévskiano. Por lo que cabe preguntarse ¿podría haber sido Wladimirovich un personaje arltiano? Intuitivamente Bayer desplaza la narrativa histórica al campo novelístico del que Arlt, en la región, será el máximo exponente. Bayer intuye, se adelanta y advierte: “como todo

acto que cometían los anarquistas [esto] tenía algo de novelesco, de inverosímil, de burlona ironía, de romántica aventura” (68). Como un laberinto borgiano de referencias históricas que hacen perder al lector su norte real, los anarquistas hacían perder su sur de ficción. De ahí que las crónicas policiales perfectamente podrían haber sido el corazón de una novela o de una obra de teatro de Roberto Arlt.

### **Saverio el cruel: tragedia de la farsa, farsa de la tragedia.**

Estrenada en el Teatro del Pueblo el 4 de septiembre de 1936, *Saverio el cruel* transgrede el límite entre la realidad y la ficción al disputar los procesos lógicos de la verdad.<sup>18</sup> En ella se narra la interrelación entre la farsa y la tragedia desmantelándose la repetición de la Historia para ilustrar la verdad de la farsa y la mentira de la tragedia. Como consecuencia, el límite que diferenciaría a la farsa (ficción) de la tragedia (realidad) se abre al cuestionamiento sobre el origen de la “verdad”. De ahí que la verdad no pertenecería solamente a las condiciones reales sustentadas en los procesos lógico-modernos (de mayor valoración a la experiencia empírica de la realidad), sino que también a la dimensión ficcional de la narrativa histórica. Lúcidamente Horacio González dirá que “el tema que subyace a *Saverio el cruel* es, como acaso lo es el de todo el teatro, qué movimientos son adecuados para descubrir en estos casos una verdad que sería consubstancial a la condición humana” (“Simulación” 28). Arlt problematiza la verdad al introducirle las múltiples facetas del lenguaje. La obra, en tres actos, devela los mecanismos de “encubrimiento” y su absurda pretensión de verdad ideológica, por lo tanto es una crítica al Estado argentino pero también a los comunistas que veían en la Revolución Rusa un ejemplo a seguir.

El primer acto introduce a los personajes, sus características, y el objetivo del drama. Por un lado, se encuentra un grupo de amigos acomodados en el edificio social, y por el otro Saverio, un vendedor de manteca que busca colocar su producto en sanatorios (hospitales privados) de la ciudad a través de la influencia de Pedro, el médico del grupo burgués. Los aburridos burgueses, menos una de las hermanas que no desea participar, Julia, deciden divertirse realizando una farsa de locura en la que Saverio tendría el rol principal al representar a un coronel a quién le cortarían la cabeza. Con este acto le restituirían la cordura a Susana, supuesta doncella loca. Se supone que lo irrisorio sería ver a un mantequero creyéndose alguien importante, como podría ser un coronel. Tal vez también podría ser gracioso el temor que podría producirle saber que el destino de su

personaje es el de que le corten la cabeza... la ignorancia de un mantequero que no puede distinguir entre la realidad y la ficción en una farsa como lo hacían aquellos gauchos espectadores del circo Podestá-Scotti. La supuesta locura real de Susana sostiene la razón por la que Saverio participa de la farsa. El resto de los jóvenes complotarían para que Saverio aceptara participar en la cura de la desafortunada joven. Esta es una obra dentro de la obra en la que Saverio es el único que ignora los intereses de aquellos que disponen del libreto.

El segundo acto se inicia en la pensión de Saverio. Tras haber aceptado la farsa, este ensaya su acto: un personaje megalómano que ansía poder, decisión sobre la vida y la muerte de la gente. Pero poco a poco, la ficción de la farsa va apoderándose de su vida, va descuidando los clientes de su negocio a quienes tan difícil había sido conquistar. La dueña de la pensión, al igual que la criada, se dan cuenta de cómo la imaginación se impone sobre la realidad de Saverio, por lo que le aconsejan retomar sus actividades laborales. Pero este ni siquiera lo considera, ya está inmerso en el rol de coronel.

La enajenación va calando en la realidad al punto que Saverio asume que deberá casarse con la desequilibrada Susana para hacer la comedia más creíble (Luisa, hermana de Susana, no simpatiza con la propuesta porque la considera una falta de respeto). Pero, a su vez, también vislumbra la necesidad de construir una guillotina como las usadas en la Revolución Francesa, ya que en todo gobierno se hace necesario “cortar cabezas”. El arribo de la guillotina genera estupor y rechazo. La respuesta de Saverio es sumamente lógica y racional, dice: “Qué gentecilla miserable. Cómo han descubierto la envidia pequeño-burguesa. No hay nada que hacer, les falta el sentido aristocrático de la carnicería. Pero no importa mis queridos señores. Organizaremos el terror. Vaya si lo organizaremos” (71). La locura de Saverio hace resonancia con otros personajes de Arlt, como el Astrólogo de *Los siete locos* y *Los Lanzallamas*. Este buscaba la revolución de la sociedad a través de la destrucción masiva, muerte y terror de la población argentina. Pero más absurda aún era la forma de solventarla: las células revolucionarias se sustentarían con las ganancias de prostíbulos.

El tercer y último acto resuelve la farsa y Saverio deviene “el cruel”. Los jóvenes esperan la llegada de Saverio para iniciar la obra. Pero él se hace desear. Julio sospecha y predice la desgracia: “en el aire flota algo indefinible. Olor a sangre. (*Riéndose*) Preveo una carnicería” (78). Finalmente Saverio arriba al lugar del acto, pero está escéptico. Susana se lanza en su papel haciendo monólogos que él acusa de “literatura”. Frente a la frialdad de Saverio ella

pregunta “—¿Qué nodriza te amamantó con leche de perversidad?” —a lo que él responde: — “Hay razones de Estado” (81). La incoherencia de su respuesta llevan finalmente a la criminalidad de Saverio: revelar la “verdad” de la farsa; dice “le voy a dar la clave de mi silencio. El otro día vino a verme su hermana Julia. Me informó de la burla que usted había organizado con sus amigas. Comprenderá entonces que no puedo tomar en serio las estupideces que está usted diciendo” (81). Irónicamente, en caso de que Susana estuviera “realmente” loca, Saverio tampoco hubiese podido tomar en serio las “locuras” de Susana. Por lo que de una forma u otra, tomarla en serio es siempre una farsa. De ahí que esté sin salida a la lógica de la farsa burguesa. ¿Cómo salir de ella? ¿Cuál es su costo? Devenir “cruel” al decir la verdad de la farsa. La escena planteada por los jóvenes se vuelve en contra de Susana y de ellos mismos. El que parecía ser burlado se transforma en el tirano y malvado coronel que decide cuándo participar. Ella declara: “Es terrible la jugada que me ha hecho, Saverio, pero está bien. [...] Luces, tapices. Y yo aquí sentada a tus pies como una pobre vagabunda. [...] Se está bien en el trono, ¿eh, Coronel? Es agradable tener la tierra girando bajo los pies” (82). Saverio pasa de víctima a victimario.

Sin embargo Susana sigue queriendo incorporar a Saverio a la escena insistiéndole que hable con ella. Él la acusa de hacerlo ahora infeliz; no lo era antes, cuando era un simple mantequero y vivía de su trabajo; pero cuando los jóvenes lo invitaron “a participar de la farsa, como [su] naturaleza estaba virgen de sueños espléndidos, la farsa se transformó en [su] sensibilidad en una realidad violenta, que hora por hora modificaba la arquitectura de [su] vida— Se detiene unos segundos y ante la invitación de Susana de continuar, exclama— ¿Qué triste es analizar un sueño muerto!” (83). Él había sido engañado. Aunque, la desazón de Saverio no fue por haber sido burlado, sino por haber desenmascarado el sueño de ser un gran militar “semejante a Hitler, a un Mussolini” (84). Bajo ese sueño se le revela la infinita nada, y la presencia de la joven burguesa Susana tampoco es suficiente para llenar ese vacío. Esta más aún muestra su crueldad y hace tesis: “[Usted] no ha soñado. Ha ridiculizado... Es algo muy distinto eso, creo” (84). Saverio establece una diferencia entre el sueño del proletariado (el autoritarismo socialista ¿tal vez?) y el sueño de la burguesía que por ser tal, solo es ridículo porque no tiene verdaderos sentimientos de transformación. Le dice Saverio a Susana: “Usted no interesa ... es una sombra cargada de palabras. Uno enciende la luz y la sombra desaparece” (83). Al igual que un planeta que necesita de la luz de una estrella para brillar, la burguesía depende de los sueños del proletariado para hacerlos suyos. La “manteca”, la materia

transformada por el trabajo del hombre, brinda la fuerza (“Y esa fuerza nació de la manteca”) para los sueños revolucionarios. De ahí que la tragedia de la farsa sea el no tener sueños propios: la farsa como pura farsa. Sin embargo, para devenir repetición histórica, la tragedia tiene que hacer su escena.

El giro inesperado que eleva al infinito la relación dialéctica (sin fin) es el momento en el que Susana se da cuenta de que, finalmente, Saverio no participará más en la farsa. Sin dejar de llamarlo Coronel, y tras ofrecerle casamiento, Saverio insiste en afirmar el carácter de farsa de la conversación; pero Susana pierde pie en la farsa y le da muerte con dos disparos. Declara luego mientras el resto mira en ronda a Saverio muerto: “Ha sido inútil, Coronel, que te disfrazaras de vendedor de manteca” (87). La tragedia que le depara al vendedor de manteca es reincorporada en el discurso de la joven burguesa siendo ahora una farsa con origen trágico. Arlt demuestra que el proletariado está destinado a jugar la farsa que le estipula el capital y su clase reguladora, la burguesía; ya que de todas formas, esa misma farsa le dará muerte. Al igual que Saverio, Wladimirovich participó de la farsa argentina donde los sueños proletarios le dieron cuerpo con su tragedia.

### De la “prueba” a la “verdad” del ser: un fin de medios inciertos.

Para mí, el teatro -dice Pedro-, es un medio de plantearle problemas personales a la humanidad... en este caso mis problemas. Necesito urgentemente subir a un escenario y decirle a un público cuya cara sea invisible en la oscuridad: me pasa esto, aquello, lo otro. ¿Cómo resuelvo los enigmas que bailan en mi conciencia? Ya ve, los otros quieren llegar al escenario para darle satisfacción a un problema, a su vanidad... Yo no... es un problema personal... auténticamente personal.

*El fabricante de fantasmas.* Roberto Arlt.

A diferencia de otras preocupaciones sociales propias del teatro de Barletta, su segunda obra teatral, *Prueba de Amor* (estrenada en 1931), resalta la ética de la burguesía como un absurdo. Esta obra se lleva a cabo en tan solo un acto y con el diálogo de dos personajes: Guinter y Frida. Él le solicita a Frida (su comprometida) que vaya a su apartamento sola. Situación esta de por sí incómoda

para ella, con el objetivo de pedirle “una prueba de amor”. Su solicitud está revestida de una doble tensión: por un lado la “prueba de amor” refiere a la relación sexual prematrimonial; pero por el otro, y la supuesta verdadera razón por la que ella está ahí, es para demostrarle que su dinero es la causa por la que ella quiere casarse con él.

En un diálogo cubierto de ironía y sarcasmo, Guinter arriba a la conclusión de que su prometida es, como todas las mujeres, una hipócrita. Afirmaba su hipótesis en el que ella estuviera ahí, a solas con él, cuando eso significaría tener relaciones sexuales. Pero él, motivado por una ética que lo distinguiría de ella, quiere de todas maneras hacerle la “prueba de amor”. Esta consiste en quemar todo su dinero y ver si, a pesar de su pobreza, ella sigue amándolo. Pero Arlt ofrece una nueva tensión. Una vez quemado el dinero, Frida lo abraza y besa agradeciendo semejante prueba de amor. Sin embargo, Guinter le da un cheque con la suma de su capital, mientras confiesa que el dinero quemado era falso. La situación es rápidamente invertida: Guinter, quien pensaba ser el que tenía el control, es quien es puesto a prueba. Totalmente desilusionada, Frida lo abandona devolviéndole su anillo de compromiso.

“Boceto teatral irrepresentable ante personas honestas”, advierte Arlt en la tapa del libreto; de lo que se deduce, por el hecho de que la obra sí fue representada, que su público era deshonesto. ¿Cuáles son las personas deshonestas? ¿La clase media baja del Teatro del Pueblo o el de la pequeña burguesía que veía los valores burgueses como modelos a seguir? Arlt dice de sí mismo: “Personas que me conocen poco dicen que soy un cínico; en verdad, soy un hombre tímido y tranquilo que en vez de atenerse a las apariencias, busca la verdad, porque la verdad puede ser la única guía del vivir honrado” (*Regreso* 27). Arlt, por lo tanto, es honesto al no atenerse a las apariencias y buscar la “verdad” ya que sobre ella se proyecta la honradez. Sin embargo, la “verdad” no cuenta con las coordenadas de la realidad pues está contaminada de ficción (dinero falso, por ejemplo). ¿Qué tipo de verdad sostiene la vida honrada?

Frente a la necesidad de Guinter de la “prueba” que, en tanto evidencia, diera lugar al “razonar” lógico que desvela la “hipocresía”, Frida responde con su “verdad”:

Frida. – Razonás muy bien... y de todo lo que decís se desprende que es imposible darle una prueba de amor a un hombre como vos.

Guinter. – ¿No encontrás una sola prueba?

Frida. – No encuentro, Guinter.

Guinter. – ¿Por qué no la encontrás?

Frida. – Primero, porque matás la fe en mis propios actos; después, porque esa prueba no existe, Guinter. Habría que inventarla expresamente para vos. (385)

La evidencia de su amor no tiene asidero en la realidad dado que la fe en sus actos ya está perdida. En el anverso de esta afirmación se entiende que la “fe”, el creer sin evidencias, sostendría la realidad de los actos concretos que darían cuenta de esa evidencia. Por lo tanto la ficción alimenta la realidad y la realidad sustenta la ficción. Es de ahí que hay que inventar la “prueba” a la medida del que la necesita. La “verdad”, consecuentemente, no es universal sino singular y contingente; necesita de la creatividad para sostenerse en una prueba. Es por eso que frente a esa ausencia de universalidad de la prueba de amor, Guinter afirma: “Pues yo la he inventado” (quemar su dinero).

La farsa, hasta ese momento tragedia, reaviva en Frida la fe en sus actos y se entrega a los brazos de Guinter. En dirección contraria, Guinter revela la farsa del dinero quemado, al mostrar el cheque con el dinero real y asume la tragedia de su propia verdad: él no puede dar una prueba de amor. La realidad y ficción no son por sí mismas, sino que están en proyección hacia la verdad. La presentación de la prueba en tanto que formalidad que sustenta su coherencia es un medio al servicio de un fin: el vivir honrado.

### “Telón”.

El teatro de Roberto Arlt trast(r)oca la legitimidad de la norma burguesa al exponer al espectador a la experiencia moral de su propia verdad. Lejos de buscar una nueva norma estética, sus obras privilegian la sensibilidad del espectador interpelado por el contrasentido de lo racional. Al igual que Guinter, tal vez que la búsqueda de la verdad lleve al espectador-lector a inventar una prueba que, en su incertidumbre formal, le debe una razón más profunda de su existir.

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Este artículo no busca ingresar en las discusiones en torno a la “mala escritura” de Arlt y su traspaso al teatro como, por ejemplo, lo desarrolla Julio Prieto en “Los

dos *Saverios*: delirio, poder y espectáculo en Roberto Arlt”. De mismo modo, las pertinentes conexiones al grotesco criollo de Armando Discépolo tampoco serán analizadas en esta oportunidad. Este artículo parte de la observación de Piglia de una “mala escritura” (en el sentido “moral”), y de los efectos de un proyecto cultural liberal fallido (dada la “mezcolanza” de la inmigración) como propone David Viñas, para señalar la interpelación al espectador sobre su verdad existencial. Lo que ocupa a este artículo es la dinámica de cómo esa interpelación es llevada a cabo a través de la desarticulación de la realidad y la ficción.

<sup>2</sup> Julio Prieto señala una cercanía sumamente interesante entre el teatro de Arlt y el “teatro pobre”. Dice este: “El proyecto teatral y novelístico de Arlt es notablemente concordante por esta vertiente [de una suerte de antropología tragicómica] con el ‘teatro pobre’ de Grotowski y su concepción del teatro como ‘lugar de provocación’ que se propone como objetivo ‘desenmascarar el disfraz vital’” (“Los dos Saverios” 53). En el presente artículo no se explorará la relación entre el “teatro pobre” y Arlt ya que el objetivo es visualizar la ficción y realidad como estrategia política que interpela al espectador en su verdad.

<sup>3</sup> Para mayor información sobre el contexto del teatro de Roberto Arlt se pueden visitar, entre otros trabajos, al de Osvaldo Pellettieri, *Cien años de teatro argentino. Del Moreira a Teatro Abierto*. También editado por el mismo autor, *Roberto Arlt: dramaturgia y teatro independiente* (en este volumen, el artículo de Sylvia Saítta, “Desde la butaca: Roberto Arlt, crítico teatral”, es sumamente iluminador de la relación de Arlt con el teatro argentino). El volumen editado por José Morales Saravia y Barbara Schuchard, *Roberto Arlt. Una modernidad argentina*, ofrece capítulos críticos sobre las obras de Arlt. Luis Ordaz, por su lado, permite abordar un panorama general del teatro en la región (*El teatro en el Río de la Plata*). De igual modo está *La teatralización de la obra dramática: de Florencio Sánchez a Roberto Arlt* de Enrique Giordano.

<sup>4</sup> Roberto se olvidó que Dios creó al hombre a “imagen y semejanza”, tal vez, como él hizo con sus personajes.

<sup>5</sup> Dice en el “Prólogo”: “Crearemos nuestra literatura, no conservando continuamente la literatura, sino escribiendo en orgullosa soledad libros que encierran la violencia de un ‘cross’ a la mandíbula. Sí, un libro tras otro, y que los ‘eunucos bufen’” (310).

<sup>6</sup> El debate de igual orden que tuvieron Georg Lukács y Bertolt Brecht sobre el realismo es sumamente interesante ya que muestra la tensión entre arte y política a través de sus efectos. Reflexionará el dramaturgo: “The term *popular* as applied to literature thus acquires a curious connotation. The writer in this case is supposed to write for a people among whom he does not live. Yet if one considers the matter more closely, the gap between the writer and the people is not as great as one might think. Today it is not quite as great as it seems, and formerly it was not as small as it seemed. The prevailing aesthetic, the price of books and the police have always ensured that there is a considerable distance between writer and people” (79). Por su lado Fredric Jameson aportará a la discusión: “The reproach sprang from Brecht’s experience as a man of theater, in which he constructed an aesthetic of performance and a view of

the work of art in a situation that was in diametric contrast to the solitary reading and individualized bourgeois public of Lukács's privileged object of study, the novel" (200).

<sup>7</sup>Los nombres de los grupos hacen referencia a dos barrios de la Capital Federal Argentina. A grandes rasgos, en ellos se representan las dos tradiciones literarias que tenían, a principios de los años veinte, por un lado al realismo social (Boedo) y por el otro a los vanguardistas (Florida). Hay una vasta literatura en torno a estos dos grupos. Arlt, en 1929, considera que pertenece al grupo Boedo. Dirá éste "En el grupo llamado Boedo encontramos a Castelnuovo, Mariani, Eandi, yo y Barletta" (en Safta "Desde la butaca" 112). Sin embargo, esta disputa por la literatura argentina fue desmentida hasta por el mismo Jorge Luis Borges: "no hubo tal polémica ni tales grupos ni nada. [...] La prueba está, por ejemplo, en que un escritor como Arlt perteneció a los dos grupos, un escritor como Olivari, también. Nosotros nunca tomamos en serio eso" (en Carbone 67). Como han señalado varios críticos literarios, Arlt es de los escritores que no se ajusta a estas categorías genealógicas (sobre este tema ver los trabajos de Beatriz Sarlo y Rocco Carbone entre otros).

<sup>8</sup>Pero a su vez, a través del personaje, Arlt desliza su creencia sobre el lugar de la escritura ya que para Rocambole el dinero es vulgar, la verdadera riqueza consiste en los cuarenta tomos escritos sobre él. De ahí el desprecio de Rocambole por la Sirvienta que desea dinero y no la gloria de la escritura. En este punto las observaciones de Ricardo Piglia sobre la "economía literaria" ("Roberto Arlt: una crítica") en Arlt son relevantes al explicar el paralelismo entre valor de la literatura y valor de la literatura en tanto que mercancía.

<sup>9</sup>Leopoldo Lugones dicta una conferencia en el Teatro Coliseo en 1923 frente a miembros de las Fuerzas Armadas donde alertará de "una masa extranjera disconforme y hostil, que sirve en gran parte de elemento al electoralismo desenfrenado" (296) de la Unión Cívica Radical; por ende, el llamado a un gobierno autoritario que ponga orden.

<sup>10</sup>A modo de tragedia en el Olimpo, Cenicienta es el fruto de la unión entre el trabajador (Sirvienta) y la fantasía que señala el deseo de la pequeña burguesía (Galán).

<sup>11</sup>Pablo Ansolabehere y Glen Close rastrean elementos anarquistas en la escritura de Roberto Arlt permitiendo hacer más estrecha esta conjetura entre anarquismo y Arlt.

<sup>12</sup>Antes de este evento, ya habían existido actos de violencia sumamente recordados y "aclamados". Tal es el caso del ruso Simón Radowitzky que, a un año de llegado a Buenos Aires en 1908, ajustició al jefe de policía Ramón L. Falcón quién había reprimido la manifestación por el Primero de Mayo de 1909 desatando la "Semana Roja". Radowitzky fue sentenciado a encarcelamiento perpetuo en Ushuaia, hasta que el perdón presidencial de 1930 (Yrigoyen) lo dejó en el exilio de Argentina. Este vivió en Montevideo hasta su partida a España para luchar en las filas anarquistas (Columna Durruti) en la Guerra Civil.

<sup>13</sup>Dentro de los que se encontraban los judíos (en Argentina, por estos tiempos, se llamaba ruso a todo judío). A inicios del siglo xx (1919) la Liga Patriótica Argentina era una organización de personas acaudaladas respaldadas por las clases dirigentes que actuaban en brigadas al estilo paramilitar hostigando a los grupos anarquistas, obreros y extranjeros en general.

<sup>14</sup>El director y fundador de *Crítica* era Natalio Botana, cuya esposa, la poeta y dramaturga Salvadora Medina Onrubia, simpatizaba con el ideario anarquista con el que contribuyó con prólogos, artículos y dinero.

<sup>15</sup>Según Osvaldo Bayer el evento del robo fue un total fiasco. La muerte del policía sería un accidente consecuente de la inexperiencia y los nervios de sus actores.

<sup>16</sup>En enero de 1923 Wilckens da muerte al Teniente Coronel Héctor Varela.

<sup>17</sup>Como se verá al analizar la obra de teatro *Saverio el cruel* la "locura creíble" es un tema recurrente en Arlt.

<sup>18</sup>Similares en su forma se encuentran *El fabricante de fantasmas*, *La isla desierta* y *África* también escritas y estrenadas en el teatro de Barletta.

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NERUDA THE GUERRILLA: EROTICISM AND INSURGENCY  
IN PABLO NERUDA'S *LOS VERSOS DEL CAPITÁN*

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In *The Decline and Fall of the Lettered City*, Jean Franco poses critical questions regarding Pablo Neruda's return to erotic sensuality in the 1950s. With *Los versos del capitán* (1952) Neruda returned to writing personalized love poetry, which he had not done since his personal and political conscientization during the Spanish Civil War<sup>1</sup>. Referring to the 1959 text *Cien sonetos de amor*, Franco asks:

In these private poems, the tropes of "Las Alturas de Macchu Picchu" recur in a new context, and once again they reiterate the narrative of a sterile existence that is redeemed not by community but by his love affair.... Doesn't "everything belonged to others and to no-one" betray a certain lack that the party had not filled? Why does "love" in these poems have the same redemptive function as the "party" in Canto General? (79)

Neruda's return to erotic poetry was motivated by his relationship with Matilde Urrutia, which began as an extramarital affair in the late 1940s, settling into domesticity and marriage by 1966. Franco's analysis also highlights ambiguities in the relationship between Latin American leftist artists of the mid twentieth century and international Communism. Communism provided "a secular narrative that gave meaning and purpose to individual lives" (60). Its

adoption by artists and intellectuals was founded more in their opposition to US imperialism than an exclusive commitment Marxist materialism. Many were members of the very social class they contended against, and their writings explore the subjectivist preoccupations of an educated elite while attempting to graft critical consciousness on to them.

This ambiguity between subjective preoccupation and social commitment explains some of the tensions in Neruda's 1952 work *Los versos del capitán*. The poems of *Los versos* are often read by critics as forming a voluntarist dialectic in which the singular focus of erotic love is sacrificed for a collective sentiment, a "philadelphos" in Bruce Dean Willis' term<sup>2</sup>. Nelson Osorio, for example, refers to the text's progression as one in which "El amor [...] trasciende la simple individualidad hombre-mujer para convertirse en sentimiento que se liga a todos los que marchan con la misma esperanza" (233). Antonio González Montes, similarly, describes the text as a "dialectic of love" moving from an ámbito natural y cósmico maravilloso pero desconectado de la realidad" to one of "comprensión y compromiso con los demás" (25). The text does follow a dialectical pattern contiguous with Neruda's middle period texts,—indeed I intend to make the case that 1947's *Tercera Residencia* provides a model for some of Neruda's editorial choices in *Los versos*. The poems written between the Spanish Civil War when Neruda became involved in the Republican cause and the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party when his politics became nuanced by public revelations of Stalin's human rights abuses, feature narrations of Franco's "sterile existence redeemed", first by the war in *Tercera residencia* (1947) and the party in *Canto general* (1950)<sup>3</sup>. As Franco observes, this narrative is problematized and eventually supplanted by his love affair, a process that, I will argue, begins in *Los versos del capitán*. What critics fail to notice about the text is that *eros* is a wild element inserted into the insurgent consciousness of the militant Neruda, one whose presence in the poems is a source of irreconcilable tension. Through a close reading of the poems, I argue that rather than being sacrificed on the altar of the Revolutionary cause, *eros* in *Los versos* fundamentally disrupts and transforms Neruda's critical consciousness, prefiguring his abandonment of militancy in the aftermath of the revelations of the Twentieth Congress

### Conscientization and the Dialectic of Conversion In the Middle Period Texts

Neruda's personal transformation following the Spanish Civil War of 1936 and the effect of this transformation on the poet's literary production is a contentious issue among scholars. On the one side, critics such as Amado Alonso and Enrico Mario Santi read Neruda's postwar work through what might be called—borrowing from Catholic debates around Vatican II, a "hermeneutic of rupture". This hermeneutic situates Neruda's involvement in the Civil War as the site of a "conversion" both in his poetry and his life. Alonso goes so far as to call it a "True conversion" in the "technical-psychological sense" which saw "Todas sus fuerzas espirituales las ejercitadas y las dormidas, reunidas de pronto y organizadas con una imantación nueva, enardecidas por un entusiasmo nuevo, justificadas ahora y satisfechas por los nuevos fines" (359). Santi similarly perceives a dialectical pattern in Neruda's middle texts comparable to those of religious conversion narratives. Conversion narratives, he argues "[rest] on a retrospective structure issuing from a self who, having reached self-understanding and ontological coherence, proceeds to give an account of his spiritual progress" (89). The narrations "[assume] a rhetorical difference between the self he has become and the self he used to be (89). Other critics such as Hernán Loyola and Greg Dawes disagree with the "conversion" idea proposing rather a "hermeneutic of continuity". Loyola argues the committed poems of *Canto General* as "un desarrollo y no una ruptura respecto a *Residencia en la tierra* (1935)" ("Neruda postmoderno" 1). For Loyola the rupture occurs much later, after 1956. Greg Dawes, similarly argues that Neruda's poetry constitutes "[a]n uneven yet steady line" traceable from "the young Neruda affected by anarchist politics in Southern Chile, to the poet who defended the Spanish Republic during the civil war, to the Communist who ran for the senate and later the presidency" (*Verses* 16).

Part of the debate stems from the thorny issue of religious language applied to the development of a political perspective. Dawes, critiquing Santi, suggests that the analogy between the two undermines Neruda's political commitments, reducing his Marxism to moral philosophy: "If there is no epistemological or ontological foundation to Neruda's Marxism, then it can be depicted as a system of thought that is ideological, in Marx's sense of the term, that is a moral philosophy and nothing more, with no more purchase on

reality than, say phenomenology” (*Verses* 39). Santi, however, conscientiously limits his focus to rhetorical exchanges between social discourses found in Neruda’s poetry, specifically prophecy as a “rhetoric in which religion and politics merge” (14) and makes no statements on the political or discursive implications of this exchange. The borrowing of religious rhetoric is also a common praxis of some streams of Latin American Marxism, though the more established forms of this “borrowing” emerge much later than the Neruda text in question. Ernesto Che Guevara’s guerrilla rhetoric from the early sixties, the writings of Liberation Theology of the 1970s by Helder Camâra and Gustavo Gutiérrez and finally the political theory of Paulo Freire, are steeped in a highly religious language of conversion and self-abnegation. Freire for example, argues: “Conversion to the people requires a profound rebirth. Those who undergo it must take on a new form of existence; they can no longer remain as they were” (*Pedagogy* 61).

Freire, and through him the insurgency discourses that developed in the 1970s, opens up the possibility of a compromise in this debate while at the same time providing fresh perspectives with which to approach Neruda’s middle texts. Maria Josefina Saldaña Portillo, speaks of a “meliorist model of subjectivity” found in both developmentalist discourses of the United States’ culture of autonomy and the revolutionary discourses of Che Guevara and the Latin American insurgency movements of the sixties and seventies. This meliorism stems from an Enlightenment colonial legacy that “worlds the world” into an actualized self and a raced and gendered other. Guerrilla narratives in particular, she argues, “repeatedly figure the moment of achieving revolutionary consciousness as a transcendental moment of choice with its attendant discursive binary modes of being” (66). This “transcendent choice” appears in the narratives as a moment of awakening. Freire himself, in a later elaboration on conscientization theorizes it as a development of a subjectivity both abstracted from the world and engaged with it:

Since the basic condition for conscientization is that its agent must be a subject (that is a conscious being), conscientization, like education is specifically and exclusively a human process. It is as conscious beings that men are not only in the world but *with* the world, together with other men. Only men, as “open” beings are able to achieve the complex operation of simultaneously transforming the world by their

actions and grasping and expressing the world’s reality in their creative language. (39)

Only human beings are capable of being conscientized, of “severing” their adherence to the world in order to “transcend mere being” and thus “add to the life they have the existence that they make” (41). Conscientization thus rests on dialectic of subject-object or “men-world” relations through which the conscientious individual acts. Both Saldaña-Portillo and Ileana Rodríguez read this dialectic as a gendered one. For the former, the “subject” position in both guerrilla and developmentalist discourses is intrinsically masculine. Guerrilla stories feature as central elements a “transcendent choice” or conversion from pre-conscientized to conscientized that allows the insurgent subject to be freed from painful histories of complicity with both the bourgeoisie and a compromised third-world masculinity. The Revolutionary subject becomes, in Saldaña’s words, the “risk-taking, resolute, frugal, non-ornamental, productive, fully masculine fellow”. While the people become “unruly, feminized, not quite human, not quite non-human, objects of perpetual instruction” (65). Indeed, the feminist response to *Los versos* has singled out this gendered element. John Felstiner, for example, states, “Neruda has a way of addressing his woman as if she were chiefly a projection, a landscape of his own visionary quest” (96). While most feminist responses to *Los versos* focus on the text’s problematic erotic elements: the voicelessness of the poet’s beloved and Romantic tropes of Woman as Nature/Cosmos, this gender divide also emerges in the poet’s insurgent consciousness and narratives of personal transformation.

Ileana Rodríguez, upon whose work Saldaña bases her analysis, explains the narrative of revolution as “the narrative of the construction of the self, first as guerrillero, then as vanguard, leader, party and government” (xvi). Rodríguez notes that while the narrative constitutes a different identity, a break from “bourgeois masculinity” and a “moving toward” identification with the people (“masses-people-troops-base”) it also reveals the lacuna between them:

For Che the warrior/guerrilla is a “guiding angel, who has fallen into the zone, helping the poor”; he is a standard-bearer in the cause of the people” In “fallen” and in “the cause of the people” whose standard the warrior-guerrilla bears there is a differentiated, distinct and separate subjectivity. In the

process of trying to define the warrior/guerrilla as “the people” the warrior/guerrilla paradoxically becomes “the other.” (42)

Che’s “masculine alterity” genders the binary relationship between the revolutionary subject and the “people-masses-bases” and becomes problematic in Guerrilla narratives where the masculine subject encounters woman whose alterity is both erotic and revolutionary. Rodríguez speaks of guerrilla fictions’ “attempt to pry affect from the personal and fuse it with politics” and to “narrate the imagined processes of constituting the revolutionary collective subject by departing the man-woman copula and from the effort to instruct the woman in the debits and assets of revolutionary insurgency” (95). *Los versos del capitán* features an insurgent figure, though one preceding the guerrilla movement by several decades. This figure emerges in a letter that precedes the initial anonymous publication of the text and written by Matilde Urrutia under the pseudonym “Rosario de la Cerda”<sup>4</sup>. According to Adam Feinstein, “the lovers had concocted the basic cover story together, but [Neruda] had asked her to write the letter” since Matilde would “get the tone right” (274). Feinstein identifies the letter’s invented story as a subterfuge for the lovers’ amorous discretion. In it, through Matilde’s words, the poet imagines himself as an insurgent:

Él venía de la guerra de España. No venía vencido. Era del partido de Pasionaria, estaba lleno de ilusiones y de esperanzas para su pequeño y lejano país, en Centro América. Siento no poder dar su nombre. Nunca he sabido cuál era el verdadero, si Martínez, Ramírez o Sánchez. Yo lo llamo simplemente mi Capitán y éste es el nombre que quiero conservar en este libro.

Sus versos son como él mismo: tiernos, amorosos, apasionados, y terribles en su cólera. Era fuerte y su fuerza la sentían todos los que a él se acercaban. Era un hombre privilegiado de los que nacen para grandes destinos. Yo sentía su fuerza y mi placer más grande era sentirme pequeña a su lado. (844)

Here in Matilde/Rosario’s description we see both elements of the same “differentiated masculinity” and the lacuna between the insurgent subject and

“people/masses/bases” identified by Rodríguez and Saldaña. Rosario identifies him as a “strong man” capable of arousing the fidelity of all those who surround him, and who “was born for a great destiny” and “did not emerge defeated”, from the Spanish War (which the Republican side lost). The guerrilla is not merely a soldier in the cause, but is the “Captain”, incarnating Rodríguez’s three post-conscientization identities: “guerrillero,” “vanguard”, and “leader”.

*El capitán* is Saldaña’s “risk taking, resolute, frugal, non-ornamental and fully masculine” subject, while Rosario, is the “unruly, feminized... object of personal instruction” (65). There is no question here of what Luce Irigaray terms “intersubjectivity”, or the “space” between two subjectivities “that must not be overcome in words or representations” (Irigaray 118). Through their erotic encounter, Rosario’s life itself is forced into a meliorist conversion: “Me hizo sentir que todo cambiaba en mi vida, esa pequeña vida mía de artista, de comodidad, de blandura, se transformó, como todo que tocaba” (844). She becomes part of his army, as well as his lover. Eros is the agent of her own conscientization. The Venusian and Martian elements, of her relationship are so fused that she addresses her beloved by his military title as though she were a soldier in his army. At the same time, his political objectives are framed entirely as acts of love motivated by personal sentiment: “Tenía la misma pasión que él ponía en sus combates, en sus luchas contra las injusticias. Le dolía el sufrimiento y la miseria, no sólo de su pueblo, sino de todos los pueblos” (844). Curiously, though the text was written fifteen years after the Spanish War, Neruda chooses this conflict to situate his love-affair and Matilde’s conscientization. This suggests that, in spite of the subterfuge, which the letter performs and which the text’s anonymous publication was intended to protect. Neruda also establishes a link with *Canto general* and *Tercera residencia* both of which situate the war as Neruda’s site of transformation. Even in these erotic and personal poems, the conscientization of Neruda present. Indeed, one might even suggest that the “artist with a small-scale life” described by Matilde is not only her, who worked as a singer before her relationship with the poet, but himself. Thus, the concept of “meliorist subjectivity” presented by Saldaña-Portillo thus can be used to frame the dialectical pattern of Neruda’s middle period poetry and its rhetoric of self-transformation without necessarily shoehorning in a religious perspective that Neruda didn’t have, nor conflating religion and Marxism as conservative discourses do. At the same time, it recognizes, as the poet himself does in multiple self-reflective writings the transformative influence the war had on his poetry.

### “El firme amor” The Dialectic of Eros in the Middle Period Poems

The meliorist pattern is found in the syntax of Neruda's middle period poetry books. Neruda's poetic praxis tends towards syntactical composition, the reason why Emir Rodríguez Monegal refers to him as a “poeta de libros.” According to Monegal, Neruda is a poet of “total lucidez creadora” who conceives the majority of his texts with an “interior unity”: “una concepción o impulso interior que asume ya (dentro de sí) la forma del libro” (181). Indeed, in both *Tercera residencia* and *Los versos del capitán* significant attention is given to the reading order of the works. Thus it is useful to look at how the meliorist pattern establishes itself in *Tercera residencia* especially with regard to *eros*, and how it carries over into the texts that follow including *Canto general* and *Los versos del capitán*. Neruda began writing *Tercera residencia* in 1935 as a third installment to *Residencia en la tierra*, whose two previous volumes had been published in Madrid that same year. According to Adam Feinstein's 2004 biography, Neruda had been given a post as Chilean consul in Barcelona and traveled to Spain in 1934 as the Second Spanish Republic came into power. Later, after switching consulships with Gabriela Mistral, he re-located to Madrid where he remained until 1939. During this time he developed many close friendships with leftist intellectuals both in Spain and France who would influence the political direction he would take as the war broke out in 1936. Feinstein credits, in particular, the assassination of his friend and fellow poet Federico García Lorca as a decisive factor in Neruda's support of the Republican cause (Feinstein 118).

The text's arrangement is thus almost directly chronological. *Tercera residencia* opens with the seven pre-war poems, introduces the poet's conscientization through the epigraph to a long erotic poem entitled “Las furias y las penas,” and follows with the poems of engagement, “España en el corazón” and a series of poems celebrating Stalin's WWII victories and the heroes of the Latin American left. The first seven poems reflect on the isolation created by what Enrico Mario Santi refers to as the poet's “visionary alienation”<sup>5</sup> and erotic impulses. The war intervenes in the form of an epigraph to the long erotic poem “Las furias y las penas”.

En 1934 fue escrito este poema. ¡Cuántas cosas han  
sobrevenido desde entonces! España, donde lo escribí, es  
una cintura de ruinas. ¡Ay! si con sólo una gota de poesía

o de amor pudiéramos aplacar la ira del mundo, pero eso  
sólo lo pueden la lucha y el corazón resuelto. El mundo ha  
cambiado y mi poesía ha cambiado. Una gota de sangre  
caída en estas líneas quedará viviendo sobre ellas, indeleble  
como el amor. (357)

Written five years after the poem's composition, this epigraph negates a posteriori the erotic, alienated voice of both the seven previous poems as well as the other *Residencias*. As Santi explains “The self that is (‘marzo de 1939’) writes about a self that was (‘1934’) who died in a holocaust for which the poem itself [...] appears to be partly responsible” (100). In its place, “a link between history and writing is proposed and even dramatized” (100). The relationship between the poem and epigraph becomes a manifestation of a temporal paradox. The poem “Las furias y las penas” preserves the erotic alienated voice, while the epigraph displaces it in time such that it becomes an emanation of an anterior negative self that the conscientization process alters. Its role becomes the antithesis in the dialectic, the “before” image that confirms the new self through a renunciation. This renunciation is restated in “Reunión bajo nuevas banderas” and “Explico Algunas Cosas”

Preguntaréis: Y dónde están las lilas?  
Y la metafísica cubierta de amapolas?  
Y la lluvia que a menudo golpeaba  
sus palabras llenándolas  
de agujeros y pájaros?

Os voy a contar todo lo que me pasa.

Yo vivía en un barrio  
de Madrid, con campanas,  
con relojes, con árboles.

Desde allí se veía  
el rostro seco de Castilla  
como un océano de cuero.  
Mi casa era llamada  
la casa de las flores, porque por todas partes

estallaban geranios:  
(369-70)

“Explico Algunas Cosas” fits Czeslaw Miloz’s description of a poem “in passionate pursuit of the real” (25). “Poppies,” “metaphysics” and “rain” give way to first the real (“yo vivía en un barrio de Madrid”) then to the horrible: “las hogueras salían de la tierra devorando seres.” The first stanza’s “lilacs,” “poppies” and “rain” metaphorically relate not only to traditional poetic themes of beauty and death, but also to the sexual longing and alienation of Neruda’s previous mode which “read” image objects as metaphoric symbols, externalized expressions of his subjective being. In the “Madrid” stanza, metaphor changes to metonymy as rarefied, symbolically loaded “poppies” and “lilies” become “geraniums,” a hardy and abundant flower ubiquitous in urban environments. Rather than evoking visionary or erotic themes through metaphor, flowers now become a metonymic indicator of the urban scape and marketplace where Neruda experiences communion with the “brotherhood of man” through his friendships with artists like Lorca, Rafael Alberti and Raúl González Tuñón and his daily interactions with *madrileños* of all social classes.

The renunciation of isolating erotic lyricism to collective engagement is evident in poem’s own internal shift from the interrogative opening lines to the expository third stanza, a shift that Greg Dawes notes: “The poem,” he explains, “shifts its attention, formally and thematically, from the autobiographical specificity of Neruda’s individual case to the collective nature of the poet’s life” (*Verses* 198). Dawes stresses this collectivity as a primarily emotional one, founded on an alternative, collectivized love: “he associates the unity between them with the profound heartbeat and the pulsating bread. Their hearts are metaphors for shared emotions and thoughts” (*Verses* 199). As the war breaks out, “burning metal” replaces “flowers.” The “resolute heart” must therefore step into the place of the loving heart. Love, taken up in the collective sentiment of “España en el corazón,” becomes inseparable from the struggle for justice. Instead of personal friendships and relationships, the poet experiences union with other people through their common political goals, through the “brotherhood of man” and solidarity. The poet thus no longer conceives of himself as a solitary artist writing from a visionary impulse or a solitary lover seeking an exit from his alienation through sexual union.

The dialectical pattern reemerges in *Canto general* in several places. Most notably it provides the structural unity to “Alturas de Macchu Picchu”, in which

the lyrical speaker travels from a state of alienation “Del aire al aire, como una red vacía/ iba yo entre las calles y la atmósfera, llegando y despidiendo” (440) to becoming aware of oppression as the historic condition of humankind “Macchu Picchu, pusiste/ piedra en la piedra, y en la base, harapos?/ Carbón sobre carbón, y en el fondo la lágrima?” (446) and finally resolving his youthful alienation through solidarity and communal love “Sube a nacer conmigo, hermano/ Dame la mano desde la profunda / zona de tu dolor diseminado” (448). Erotic love is vaguely referred to in the opening canto as one of the futile pursuits of his alienated youthful self “Alguien que me esperó entre los violins/ encontró un mundo como una torre enterrada” (440). Eroticism is a dead end, a “gastada primavera humana”. Love, in the form of this communal solidarity, however, is permanent.

Thus prior to the war, love is experienced in its subjective erotic dimension, circumscribed by anomie and failure. Following the war, the poet’s erotic subjectivity is submerged into his conscientization experience. Personalized *eros* becomes expansive, humanistic *philadelphos*. Another place where this occurs in *Canto general* occurs in the autobiographical section “Yo Soy”. In this section Neruda re-narrates his personal transformation, placing *eros* as an emotional element of his pre-conversion self in dialectical relation to his post-conversion *philadelphos*. Perhaps the clearest example of this is found in the poem “El amor (1936)”, the third in a triad of poems dealing with Neruda’s erotic life:

El firme amor, España, me diste con tus dones.  
Vino a mí la ternura que esperaba  
y me acompaña la que lleva el beso  
más profundo a mi boca.  
No pudieron  
apartarla de mí las tempestades  
ni las distancias agregaron tierra  
al espacio de amor que conquistamos. (817-18)

“El amor,” one of the few poems dedicated to the poet’s second wife Delia del Carril, describes a lyrical subject that is not, as in Neruda’s earlier erotic poetry, contained within an isolating dyad with an unattainable other that exacerbates his alienation, but rather integrated into a network of communal passions and actions. This is reflected in the poem’s diffusion of dyadic speech into a col-

lective framework. “España”—a spatial and collective signifier and the site of Neruda’s awakening—not Delia, is the poem’s “thou” in the opening stanza. Delia is addressed in the third person. When Delia is finally addressed in the second stanza, the poet’s dyadic language is further modified by its integration into a rhetorical question “¿Quién no te vio, amorosa, dulce mía / En la lucha, a mi lado como una / aparición, con todas las señales / de la estrella?” (817). The poet and his beloved are bound to each other by their philadelphic integration into the multitude, not by their erotic passion for each other. Indeed, Neruda here almost excludes *eros* entirely:

No sé mi amor,  
si tendré tiempo y sitio de  
escribir otra vez tu sombra fina  
extendida en mis paginas, esposa;  
son duros estos días y radiantes. (817)

The ideals of collective love have galvanized all the poet’s mental and emotional energies. He simply “doesn’t have time or place” to spend on the partial love of his wife, which is in any case unnecessary since the energy of collective love is what binds the two together. Indeed, the philadelphic “love” that Spain gives, penetrates more “deeply” and “firmly” into the poet’s subjective being than *eros* ever did, resolving his erotic romantic alienation and giving him a beloved who “brings a deeper kiss” to his mouth. Neruda’s meliorist transformation thus coincides with an abandonment of subjective *eros* as an element of the romantic isolation he experienced as part of his previous self, in the name of a *philadelphos* that touches him on both the intimate and public levels. The erotic relationship at the heart of *Los versos* is put through a similar dialectical process in which the insurgent subject attempts to conscientize the beloved and transform *eros* from a singular to a collectively oriented passion. The result, however, is a complete failure.

### The Captain’s Texts

Neruda began writing *Los versos del capitán* on August 28, 1951, on a journey with Matilde Urrutia, his wife Delia del Carril and Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén to the Romanian capital of Bucharest shortly before Neruda would visit the Soviet Union for the first time. Urrutia recounts the Bucharest trip

in her own 1982 memoir as fraught with emotional strain. Living in the same house as her paramour and his wife left caused her to become ill: “Mi vida se había convertido en disimulo [...]. Todo eso me hacía daño” (50). Urrutia refers to at least five poems from *Los versos* that he gave her during this trip: “Siempre” “Tus pies” “El alfarero” “La reina” y “La pródiga.” He presented the last two of these to her in an envelope as the couple was about to separate: she left Bucharest for Paris while Neruda continued on to Prague, The Soviet Union and China.

According to Robert Pring-Mill, whose careful work has traced the chronology of the text, the trip from Romania to China lasted approximately a month. During this time Neruda, separated from Matilde and travelling with Delia surreptitiously wrote twelve poems over the course of a day during the long stretch of travel across Russia and Mongolia. Two months later Neruda reunited with Urrutia in Switzerland and decided to remain together during his time in Europe, beginning with a week-long stay in the town of Nyon on the shore of Lake Lemman. During the Nyon trip Neruda would write “La carta en el camino” and “Si tú me olvidas.”<sup>67</sup> Afterwards, the couple moved on to Rome and finally Capri, where they were able to spend several months together in the house of Italian historian Edwin Cerio. On Capri, Neruda finished the remainder of the poems that make up *Los versos del capitán* and reorganized the book into the form in which it would be published. The first edition was published anonymously by Neruda’s friend Paolo Ricci in Naples in 1952 containing a letter which established fictitious circumstances of the poems.

Presenting a diagram depicting the chronology and geography of the successive versions of the poems and the resulting book, Pring-Mill extrapolates two coinciding textual orders, a “composition” order and a “book order” which differs drastically:

En esta figura esquemática el orden de composición de los poemas—a la izquierda—queda contrapuesto al orden del libro y todos los desplazamientos de los poemas, en su transición del ciclo composicional al libro definitivo, cobran forma visible en líneas de desplazamiento cuyos entrecruces constituyen el complejo tejido de la columna central. Ahora bien: cada una de estas tres columnas representa una red de relaciones intertextuales. La de la columna derecha es obvia y hartamente conocida: [...] es la red sistemática con que se ha

ido familiarizando todo lector del poemario que siguiera el orden de lectura que nos fue propuesto por el poeta. La de la izquierda es una red cronológica en que cada poema está relacionado por su contigüidad en el tiempo con el texto que le precedió, pasando a constituir—a su vez—el predecesor inmediato del próximo poema en escribirse. (184-5)

Pring-Mill's "lines of displacement" show drastic transpositions: poems written during the "last phase" of the writing, when Neruda and Urrutia were living their idyll on Capri, are included in the euphoric opening section "El Amor". Seven of the twelve poems included in the section "Las furias", in which the poet vents his jealousy and angst of the relationship were written during the couple's month long separation and near breakup between October and November 1951. The difficult circumstances preceding their separation, Matilde's determination to return to Mexico and the extensive separation explain some of these poems darker tones. Finally the section "Las vidas" and the long poems which follow were written at various points throughout the period as the poet is at odds to harmonize this newly found erotic passion within his social commitments. The poems read in their chronological order thus mirror the relationship's euphorias and complications. Pring Mill's order of composition is where the poetry reflects biography. As Pring Mill notes the poet did not publish the book in the order it was written, but rather imposed a separate *a posteriori* "reading order". Neruda's editorial decisions create a narrative structure of the poetic arrangement, a structure that, frontloaded by Matilde's letter, situates the poems as a conscientization drama with Spanish Civil War as a backdrop.

Of the text's sections, "El amor" is the longest, containing sixteen poems written mostly in the first and last phases of the writing when the couple was enjoying their tranquil, lengthy cohabitation on Capri. The "island" locale is more than contextual, however. The couple both lives on an island and creates one through their secretive communicative union, a space of intimacy in the gregariousness of *El capitán's* public life. This brings a new dimension of reading to Neruda's trademark "woman/earth" fusion, described by Selena Millares as "un proceso de ósmosis entre amada y naturaleza que hace que sus atributos se confundan en una comunión simbólica y mística." (223). This osmosis is experienced as a paradox: as the simultaneous expansion and communion of the lyrical speaker with the universe, as well as the isolation of his

*eros* into a type of dyadic enclosure, a *monde à deux* of lover and beloved. While *El capitán* experiences a communion with the cosmos via the mediation of Rosario, her body also occupies the very center of his perception, excluding other preoccupations.

Pequeña  
rosa,  
rosa pequeña,  
a veces,  
diminuta y desnuda,  
parece  
que en una mano mía  
cabe,  
que así voy a cerrarte  
y llevarte a mi boca,

pero  
de pronto  
mis pies tocan tus pies y mi boca tus labios,  
has crecido. (845)

The section begins with a clear poetic description of the beloved as "expanding" through three stages: smallness, embodied similitude and cosmic expansion. Antonio González Montes breaks down "En ti la tierra" into 21 lines to demonstrate Neruda's "hyperbolic expansion of the beloved," a rhetorical strategy echoed structurally as the verses "expand" in length as the poem progresses (26). González's analysis, however, only focuses on one of what are actually three emotional sub-territories in "En ti la tierra," each associated with one of Rosario's "stages": diminutive tenderness, human-embodied sexual desire and expansive ex-stasis. In the first section she is compared to a "small rose" who would fit into the poet's hands. This littleness is both wondrous and endearing to the poet who uses a broken chiasmus to bring its attention to the reader, packing on the affective charge through an almost musical compaction of rhythms and pauses "pequeña / rosa / rosa pequeña."

Physical contact—bringing the small beloved up to his mouth—changes not only her affective size but also the emotional field from which *El capitán* speaks. The source of sense-contemplation shifts from the gaze, which reduces,

to touch which triggers desire for sexual union with an embodied counterpart. Her size becomes human and on par with his own: “mis pies tocan tus pies y mi boca tus labios.” Neruda emphasizes not only the visual, but also the tactile. Rosario and the poet meet as two bodies in sexual union with each other, a union which begins a process by which Rosario becomes “unbound,” expanding beyond her human size to take up all the space in the loving subject’s universe. He no longer merely kisses Rosario, but through her the entirety of the earth. An enclosure is thus created by the continuous expansion of the beloved and of the poet’s affects in response. The beloved becomes simultaneously woman and Earth, she who in “Las furias y las penas” “surrounds” the poet through her sexual receptivity: not like a “hole” but more like nature itself, an island, or enclosed garden, a *hortus conclusus* in the classical sense which the poet enters and finds succor and spiritual communion.

The woman-as-terrain is actually only one half of the spiritual communion in question. As well as a “terrain,” Rosario is also a “counterpart,” the only other person in the universe whom the poet “sees” and who “sees” him. Lover and beloved inhabit a planet made for themselves alone, not only because of Matilde’s integration with natural forces, but also because they are bound to each other in an exclusive union. This is expressed further in the second poem of “El amor”: “La Reina,”: “Yo te nombro la Reina / Hay más altas que tú, más altas. Hay más puras que tú, más puras. / Hay más bellas que tú, hay más bellas. / Pero tú eres la reina” (846). This title invokes both a dyadic union through the traditional association of queen with consort, as well as an association with territory, with a circumscribed Earth. Rosario is distinguished not because of her physical beauty relative to other women, but because she is the “only other.” The erotic enclosure excludes all other human beings, isolating the lyrical subject and the beloved from expressing himself or herself relative to anyone except each other. The final verse of this poem unites both “territory” and “consort” associations through the utterance of the Earth, an utterance which to which the visionary poet has privileged access, and which binds the couple in that union of intersubjective exclusion, emphasized by the repetition of “Sólo tú y yo” in the poem’s final two verses.

These two elements of erotic space—the woman/earth osmosis and the lovers’ exclusive intersubjectivity—are repeated throughout the “El amor” section. Thus in “8 de septiembre,” the couple’s bodies “become expansive” and “grow to the ends of the world” (847). In “La infinita,” Rosario’s body

becomes a territory which the poet’s hands can never fully encompass, while in “La tierra” she literally becomes fused into the elements of nature such that everything the poet sees reminds him of her:

Veo los monumentos  
de antigua piedra rota,  
pero si toco  
la cicatriz de piedra  
tu cuerpo me responde,  
mis dedos reconocen  
de pronto, estremecidos,  
tu caliente dulzura. (860-861)

“La tierra” is really the first poem in which this isolating erotic space becomes problematized. *El capitán* has a public role to which he must attend, yet the erotic space extends to wherever the lyrical speaker is, isolating him from whomever he happens to be with. The “heroes” and “the people” have been crowded out of the Earth by the face and body of the beloved, leaving him tormented with desire by every contact made with it. *Eros* is prodigious, overriding the Earth itself such that, in the final verse of the poem, it is nature that pursues the poet for the sole purpose of tormenting him with its analogies to the beloved, piercing him with “knife-shaped leaves” in order to create wounds in the shape of her mouth.

Thus in “El amor,” those poems written in the final phase of the text’s creation, become the introduction of the narrative reconstruction. As in *Tercera residencia*, the eroticism of the opening section is intrinsically linked to isolation and alienation from collective reality. Compare for example the alienation of “Alianza Sonata” whose very title uses a substantive of nuptial, religious and even political expressions of union—the word in Spanish means “covenant,” “alliance” and even “wedding ring”—in a poem where lover and beloved are unable to breach their solitudes. Sexual encounter with the beloved, which holds out the hope of his transcending that isolation and finding redemption and communion, only exacerbates the problem. Her kisses “exile” him. Between their lips are “cities of great ashes and humid chimeras” (350). In *Los versos*, the poet and beloved attain a kind of communion with one another, but it is a communion threatened by the very solitude that it creates.

“El amor’s” ending launches the poet into a closer examination of his

desire in the second section, “El deseo” proposing three potential trajectories his eroticism can take in the form of three “animal” poems: “El tigre,” “El cóndor” and “El insecto.” Neruda may have intended the three poems as a kind of play on the nature of desire, and for this reason chose to put these three poems together, beginning with the poem in which he plays a “powerful, savage role” (Duncan 439), and ending with the one in which he is nothing more than a tiny insect wandering the body of the beloved. Indeed, despite Cynthia Duncan’s assertion that the section manifests merely the brute need of the male speaker to “penetrate her body with force, to reassert his control over her, and to ward off the threat her sexuality poses for him” (439), the power dynamic in this section is more subtle. Pring Mill’s chronology notes that the three poems of “El deseo” were written one right after the other, but that “El insecto” was written first, followed by “El condor” and “El tigre” (Pring-Mill 178). The *order of reading* here differs little from the *order of composition* other than the significant transposition of “El tigre” and “El insecto.” By transposing these two poems, the section now emulates the small-immense pattern of “En ti la tierra,” this time within the erotic theme of consumption. As “the tiger” his desire is to consume the beloved in a violent manifestation of desire—Cynthia Duncan uses the loaded term “rape” to describe it (439). In turn, in “El insecto” the same longing manifests as a desire to be consumed or absorbed by her, returning to the idea of woman as a “cosmos”, which absorbs and isolates the public poet.

“El cóndor,” the middle poem, balances these two impulses by imagining the beloved as becoming the poet’s equal through a transcendental metamorphosis. Rather than consuming or being consumed, the poet’s erotic impulse “raptures” her and transforms her into a likeness of himself, prefiguring the beloved’s meliorist transition by drawing the readers’ focus to the symbol of the condor itself which has immense significance in Neruda’s politicized poetry. In “Las Alturas de Macchu Picchu” the condor symbolizes both monumental temporality and the Americas themselves while at the same time, driving the poet toward’s conscientization:

Cuando como una herradura de élitros rojos, el cóndor  
Furibundo  
Me golpea las sienes en el orden del vuelo....  
No veo la bestia veloz  
No veo el ciego ciclo de sus garras,

Veo el antiguo ser, servidor, el dormido  
En los campos. (446)

In “El cóndor” the poet enacts a similar conversion on Rosario, using the erotic energy that draws him to her to “lift” her up to his nest, cover her with feathers and transform her into a “hembra cóndor” who will fly with him over the world, and with whom he will pounce upon a “palpitating life”:

Yo soy el cóndor, vuelo  
Sobre ti que caminas  
Y de pronto en un ruedo  
De viento, pluma, garras  
Te asalto y te levanto  
En un ciclón sibilante  
De huracanado frío

Y a mi torre de nieve  
Te llevo y sola vives,  
Y te llenas de plumas  
Y vuelas sobre el mundo  
Inmóvil en la altura. (863)

In this first stanza the description of the condor’s flight and the woman’s rapture immediately echoes the imagery of “Alturas.” The condor is associated with violence, speed and spiritual ascension. Paradoxically in spite of the violent phrase “te asalto” and unlike the beloved of “el tigre,” Rosario is not the condor’s “prey.” His intention is not to attack her, but to make her into one like himself by isolating her in his “tower” and covering her with feathers so that she will be capable of both flying and “seeing”: developing a broader perspective that encompasses collective history. Once the transformation is complete, the two will then plunge to Earth together and “pounce upon this red prey / tear into this palpitating life,” by becoming re-immersed in the struggle. “El cóndor” thus anticipates the transformation that Rosario will undergo through her union with the poet, a transformation that begins by problematizing and breaking open the all-absorbing erotic isolation of “el amor”. This process is undertaken in the section “Las furias”.

Comprising twelve poems, seven of which were written during the couple’s

month-long separation and near breakup between October and November 1951, “Las furias” is the second-longest section of the text. That separation explains some of these poems’ darker tones. “Las furias” is characterized by obsession and possessiveness on the part of *El capitán*, a constant childish demand for Rosario’s attention and a keening insecurity regarding her past. Rosario herself refers to the conflicts that precipitated this section as “Celos y furias incontenibles. Éstas eran como tempestades furiosas que azotaban su alma y la mía” (844). Rosario describes the poet’s anger coming in “storms and furies,” a pluralization that echoes the poet’s own shift in title. According to Robert Pring-Mill, the section title in the original 1952 anonymous publication of *Los versos* was simply “Furia.” In the 1963 Losada edition in which Neruda acknowledges his authority of the text, it became “Furias.” The plurality of “furias” is not merely a reference to the emotional variedness of the section, nor to the multiple arguments the couple may have had. It also calls to mind Neruda’s earlier poem “Las furias y las penas” which acts as a template for the section, not only in terms of its affective and rhetorical similarities, but also in terms of its role in his meliorist narrative.

“Las furias” enacts the same drama as its predecessor, and by doing so also sets itself up as the antithesis of the section “El amor” in which eroticism isolates and absorbs the poet. In “Las furias,” as in “Las furias y las penas,” the erotic enclosure now isolates him from the flow of time and history and also progressively imposes a difference between lover and beloved making the latter inassimilable. Finally, as in “Las furias y las penas,” the temporal difference between the poet, anchored to an intemporal present, and the beloved, moving in the flow of time, makes him keenly aware of her past and potentially future relationships. The evocation of “Las furias y las penas” is intentional. It purposefully troubles the jouissance of the erotic subject in “El amor,” by invoking the anguish of erotic isolation so as to incite the transformation process.

For this reason many of the poems in “Las furias” are arranged as affective inversions of the poems of “El amor,” a textual order recalling William Blake’s *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, which organizes poems into pre- and postlapsarian dualities. There are many examples of this dual structure linking “El amor” and “Las furias,” from the title of the opening poem of “Las furias” (also called “El amor”) to the diminishment of Rosario’s body as a kind of counterpart to “En ti la tierra”:

Qué tienes? Yo te miro  
y no hallo nada en ti sino dos ojos  
como todos los ojos, una boca  
perdida entre mil bocas que besé, más hermosas,  
un cuerpo igual a los que resbalaron  
bajo mi cuerpo sin dejar memoria. (863)

In “En ti la tierra,” Rosario’s body was a cosmic expanse; now it is diminished to “one more among many,” which nevertheless is inscribed with the erotic paradox of “Las furias.” Inasmuch as the poet attempts to “reduce” Rosario to just another lover, he is unable to do so. This is intimated in the final poem of the section “El amor,” “La tierra,” but it is not until the poem “El amor” of the section “Las furias” that it becomes explicit:

Ay nuestro amor es una cuerda dura  
que nos amarra, hiriéndonos  
y si queremos  
salir de nuestra herida,  
separarnos  
nos hace un nuevo nudo y nos condena  
a desangrarnos y quemarnos juntos.(863)

Like Blake’s *Songs of Experience*, “Las furias” portrays how the love of “El amor” becomes corrupted. For Blake the source of corruption is the passage of time and the influence of the world, but for Neruda it is the opposite. *Eros* becomes corrupt due to the couple’s lack of engagement with either the flow of time or the wider world. The dyadic enclosure, which was a refuge for the lovers in “El amor,” now isolates the couple not only from others, but also from each other. The longer his energies are locked in to a contemplation of the beloved, the more he becomes conscious of her difference, drifting back into the visionary disjunct of his *Residencia* self.

As in *Tercera residencia*, the only possible resolution requires Rosario to undergo a meliorist transformation of her own subjectivity, proposed in the final poem of “Las furias,” “Tú venías”:

Yo no sufrí buscándote,  
sabía que vendrías,

una nueva mujer con lo que adoro  
de la que no adoraba,  
con tus ojos, tus manos y tu boca  
pero con otro corazón  
que amaneció a mi lado  
como si siempre hubiera estado allí  
para seguir conmigo para siempre. (878)

“Tú venías” introduces the transformation intimated in the poem “El cóndor. Rosario’s requires a “change of heart” and “glance” so that she would become his ideal lover “para seguir conmigo para siempre.” From the poem itself there is the sense that Rosario has submitted entirely to *El capitán’s* subjectivity. Cynthia Duncan in particular makes this argument: “the message to female readers is clear: woman bears the responsibility of attracting and keeping man’s love alive” (437). Yet reading the poem in relation to the following section, “Las vidas” suggests that the conversion is not necessarily a “consumption” of her subjectivity by the poet’s own, but a shift from isolating eroticism to an integration of eroticism into collective passion. Introducing the subject of conversion in the very final poem of the section strengthens the link to “Las furias y las penas,” acting on the prior sections of *Los versos* in a manner analogous to that poem’s epigraph. Both the epigraph and the poem “Tú venías” work retrospectively in order to create a temporal displacement, the former of the erotic subject, the latter of erotic space. “Tú venías” displaces the erotic enclosure from the text’s central modality of love, to a dialectical expression resolved through conscientization, which should occur in “Las vidas” as Neruda’s did in “Explico Algunas Cosas” but doesn’t.

Bound together thematically and rhetorically through verbal cues and line breaks, the poems of “Las vidas”, are a typographical illustration of the collectivist, meliorist ideal the text proposes. The section’s individual poems are part of a single lecture through which the poet leads his beloved into a state of collectivist engagement analogous to the poet’s own in *Tercera Residencia*. Neruda philosophically anticipates Che Guevara’s famous “act of love” passage in *Man and Socialism in Cuba* “Our vanguard revolutionaries must idealize their love for the people, for the most hallowed causes and make it one and indivisible. *They cannot descend with small doses of daily affection, to the terrain where ordinary men put their love into practice.*” (352 emphasis mine). The couple’s relationship must cease to be bound by

their exchange of passions and to become bound instead by their common engagement in the struggle. The fundamental difference between *Los versos* and *Tercera residencia*, however, lies in the question of who is transformed. Neruda’s conscientization occurred as a result of his own choices and evolution in the former text. In the latter, his entire enterprise is hamstrung by the sexual and intersubjective difference of the beloved. Conscientization is an intransitive, not a transitive experience. It’s grounding in subjectivity means one can move through the terrain of an awakening but cannot be its direct object. The results of this attempted impossibility are nearly paradoxical. On the one hand, the poet experiences intersubjective “openings” in his relationship to the beloved, becoming progressively more comfortable with her difference and engaging in Freirean “dialogue” over direct imposition. On the other hand, she never really fully converts to a militant companion, but remains an erotic one:

En mi patria hay un monte.

En mi patria hay un río.

Ven conmigo.

La noche al monte sube.

El hambre baja al río.

Ven conmigo (879)

As with the transition of flowers from metaphoric to metonymic elements in “Explico algunas cosas,” “mountain” and “river” lose their poetic function as analogues of woman. Neruda now assigns them as geographical features of his nation, a space inhabited by the multitude and given dimension by their sufferings within it: “night climbs the mountain / hunger goes down to the river.” The dyadic enclosure has become externalized. No longer is Rosario the only other person who occupies the poet’s consciousness; others have entered the scope of *El capitán’s* amorous attention. Erotic love is now inscribed within a larger concern, within the context of the poet’s role as “voice of the people.” In the poem’s final stanza, however Neruda returns to his singular affection for Matilde

Oh tú, la que yo amo,  
 pequeña, grano rojo  
 de trigo,  
 será dura la lucha,  
 la vida será dura,  
 pero vendrás conmigo (880)

Beyond the mere term of endearment “mi amor/amor mío” used throughout the earlier sections, Rosario is now given a longer, more formalized title: “la que yo amo,” “she whom I love,” which emphasizes the uniqueness of her relationship to the poet. That partiality is immediately modulated by the metaphoric description of her as a “small grain of wheat,” emphasizing her membership in a collective. Finally the poem closes on a heavy foot by shifting the refrain “ven conmigo” from an amorous supplication to a military command. She is not merely his beloved, she is a soldier in the army of which he is the Captain.

In this heavy ending, the lyrical speaker attempts to resolve a paradoxical situation that hampers his entire enterprise. “Transitive critical consciousness” is impossible. Rosario’s sexual difference remains: *eros* cannot be “displaced” as easily as it was in *Tercera residencia*. Matilde/Rosario cannot be completely absorbed into what Saldaña-Portillo terms “the sameness of revolutionary universalism” (79). That same “isolating factor” of eroticism resists collectivism. Thus in the poems of “Las vidas”, “Las vidas” and “El amor del soldado,” the beloved is both integrated into the multitude and also, paradoxically, externalized from it in her erotic role. In the poem “Las vidas” *El capitán* identifies himself as the “frente,” the forehead or front, of the multitude, incarnating what Saldaña describes as the elusive yet much desired objective of the revolutionary leader: “to represent the masses” (80). The lyrical speaker becomes the concrete embodiment of the multitude, sublimating his subjectivity into the collective voice “que no soy / que no existo / que sólo soy la frente de los que van conmigo” (881). Rosario herself is not entirely absorbed into this multitude, however:

mi voz se oye en las orillas  
 de todas las tierras  
 porque es la voz de todos  
 los que no hablaron,  
 de los que no cantaron

y cantan hoy con esta boca  
 que a ti te besa. (881)

Rosario remains somewhat outside of it, relating to the poet through *eros* as woman kissing the mouth of a man. As much as the poet’s “ven conmigo” beckons her to join in the struggle, his *eros* also holds her apart, abstracting her from the multiplicitous body. This same tendency is seen in “El amor del soldado”:

Ya no puedes volver a bailar  
 con tu traje de seda en la sala.  
 Te vas a romper los zapatos,  
 pero vas a crecer en la marcha.

Bésame de nuevo, querida.

Limpia ese fusil, camarada. (883)

“El amor del soldado” describes Rosario’s metamorphosis from “compañera del baile” to “compañera,” a transformation which iterates what Ileana Rodríguez terms one of “revolutionary literature’s most important topoi: the masculinisation of women” (94). *El capitán* emphasizes that her old life of “poor silk” “false nails” and ballroom dances, is coming to an end. These are sartorial elements that emphasize sexual difference, a difference that can’t be assimilated by revolutionary collectivism and thus must be discarded. Yet for Neruda, something of *eros* always remains. Rosario may not go to the ballroom anymore, but she is still his lover. Her role as “camarada” is conjugated with that of “querida.” She occupies a third space, between *soldadera* and *guerrilla*, in the army but not of it, separated from the troop by her “special” relationship to their leader, a relationship which on its own proposes an alternative collectivism.

This failure to integrate the erotic beloved into revolutionary collectivism manifests itself particularly in the poet’s abandonment of the fiction in the long-poems, which complete the text. The narrative’s shape is not dialectical, but circular, returning to the personalist enclosure of *eros*. In “Oda y germinaciones,” Neruda reflects:

Años tuyos que yo debí sentir  
 crecer cerca de mí como racimos  
 hasta que hubieras visto cómo el sol y la tierra,  
 a mis manos de piedra te hubieran destinado  
 hasta que uva con uva hubieras hecho  
 cantar en mis venas el vino.  
 El viento o el caballo  
 desviándose pudieron  
 hacer que yo pasara por tu infancia,  
 el mismo cielo has visto cada día,  
 el mismo barro del invierno oscuro,  
 la enramada sin fin de los ciruelos  
 y su dulzura de color morado.  
 Sólo algunos kilómetros de noche,  
 las distancias mojadas  
 de la aurora campestre,  
 un puñado de tierra nos separó. (889)

In a reiteration of the Woman/Earth trope of “El amor,” Matilde’s body “dissolves” through physical contact into natural impressions: scents of honeysuckle and shucked corn, the warmth of roads, bread and the dusty color of the moon. Yet this return to eroticism isn’t entirely a repetition of the same tropes of the opening poems. A transformation has taken place, not in the beloved, but the poet, who evokes the beloved not with nature-sex metaphors, but, as was the case in “Explico Algunas Cosas” replacing them with national/geographical metonymies. Erotic space evokes the poet’s nation through the mediation of the body of Matilde who grew up in Chillán, Chile, 272 kilometers north of Neruda’s hometown of Temuco. In “Oda y germinaciones” couches this personalist identification in the flood of natural metonymic-metaphoric impressions. One gets the sense, particularly in the above-cited passage from the second canto, that it is Neftalí Reyes who is speaking, not “Pablo Neruda” the public persona, nor *El capitán*, the insurgent subject. The geographical elements mentioned in the poem are Chilean, instead of the Central American provenance of his insurgent persona. Nor are they the Nature-Woman tropes of “El amor” The woman-geography fusion of Nerudian erotic space becomes woman as nation, the nation lost through exile returned through erotic encounter. At the same time, *eros*’ intersubjectivity brings to him to a deeper encounter

with his own loss of nation and identity. Their childhoods are unified by their common territory, yet separated by “unos kilómetros de noche.” Similarly In “La carta en el camino,” the text’s final poem, it is *eros* that transforms the poet’s subjectivity, rather than militancy changing the beloved’s:

Saldrá el ladrón de su torre algún día.  
 Y el invasor será expulsado.  
 Todos los frutos de la vida  
 crecerán en mis manos  
 acostumbrados antes a la pólvora.  
 Y sabré acariciar las nuevas flores  
 porque tú me enseñaste la ternura. (904)

The poet’s subjectivity is now modulated by *eros* with the dual effect of “strengthening” the poet, inspiring him to go on fighting even in the darkest of circumstances, and also “softening” him, leading him away from the militancy of his earlier writings. His work becomes encapsulated within his erotic sensibilities, motivated and inspired by the beloved. Indeed, the poet is no Guevaran ascetic, sacrificing his partial affection for Matilde on the altar of the cause. Rather, he takes his love with him, first as part of the struggle but then later as the only reason to struggle at all.

In conclusion, *Los versos del capitán* straddles two important periods in Neruda’s poetic life. On the one hand, the text reiterates the meliorist pattern of his middle poetry, —the poetry influenced by his involvement in the Spanish Civil War which turned away from youthful eroticism and Romantic alienation, and sought to articulate the larger historical struggles taking place during the middle decades of the Twentieth Century. On the other, the text also anticipates the failure of militancy to ultimately redeem the poet’s “sterile existence”. Unlike in *Tercera Residencia* and *Canto General*, eroticism with its singularity and its intersubjectivity is never dissolved into militant collectivism. It remains, resiliently insisting on the beloved’s uniqueness in spite of the poet’s attempt to transform it, and it gently persuades the poet towards a different kind of collectivism, one described by Irigaray as “a more authentic version of collectivism” a “we” constituted by “subjects irreducible each one to the other, each one to the others and thus capable of communicating out of freedom and necessity” (104). This subjectivity emerges fully following the crisis of 1956, in which the poet abandons his Stalinism and identifies more

with the emergent, integrated socialism of the Latin American left of the sixties and in which his poetry approximates the more “communicative style” of writers such as Mario Benedetti and Ernesto Cardenal. Eros similarly, becomes something different after the 1960s, neither the alienated Romanticism of his youth, nor the sublimation of militancy, but a tempered eroticism described by Chilean feminist critic Marjorie Agosin as a “cognition and discovery of the other” (20).

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> I use the term “conscientization”, as a direct translation of Paulo Freire’s term *conscientização*. The term has also been translated as “critical consciousness”. Although the Anglicization is clumsier, it also preserves the dynamism of the original concept. For Freire, conscientization refers to an active process by which participants in an oppressive system become aware of their own internalization of its axioms and work to counter the system through praxis or action. “One of the gravest obstacles to the achievement of liberation is that oppressive reality absorbs those within it and thereby acts to submerge human beings consciousness. Functionally, oppression is domesticating. To no longer be prey to its force, one must emerge from it and turn upon it. This can be done only by means of the praxis: reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (51).

<sup>2</sup> Willis describes a similar process of sacrificing *eros* for collectivism, but with regard to the protagonist of Michael Radford film *Il postino* whose “connection to Neruda’s ideas about love widens from eros to philadelphos, and he sacrifices himself for the cause” (88)

<sup>3</sup> Both Hernan Loyola and Greg Dawes note the significance of 1956. At the twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party Nikita Khrushchev gave a “secret speech” officially denouncing both the cult of Stalin, as well as the human rights abuses of the Stalinist regime. According to Loyola, this was one of two “golpes” the poet experienced which profoundly affected his poetic production (the second being his divorce to Delia del Carril. The poet’s response was not to “rasg[ar] sus vestiduras” and renounce the party but rather to “cambi[ar] de escritura,” exchanging the “figuras de autorepresentación” for a more “modest” self examination (1-2). For Dawes, Neruda’s post 1956 work, particularly 1958’s *Estravagario*, represents an attempt to “absorb and understand” the crisis of both himself and socialism “Se trata de desahogarse y de exponer su propia conducta con respecto de la poesía, su pensamiento político, y su vida personal sin haber llegado a una resolución.” (“Neruda ante la crisis”). For Dawes, the poetry post 1956 would settle on an aesthetic of communicativeness, approximating it to other 1960’s poets like Ernesto Cardenal, Roque Dalton, Juan Gelman and Mario Benedetti. (“Neruda ante la crisis”).

<sup>4</sup> According to Adam Feinstein, “de la Cerda” is Urrutia’s second surname (Rosario was one of the nicknames Neruda had given her and appears in the “peace” litany in *Canto general*’s “Que despierte el leñador”). (274)

<sup>5</sup> Santi associates the alienation of the residential poet with what he calls “the subject-object dichotomy” of the “visionary mode.” “In visionary poetry,” he explains, “the revelation of an object’s truth stems from the perception of an alienated subject” (24). The poet’s prophetic voice is charged with articulating the absolute truth of a revelation, but that absolute creates a temporal and psychic disruption: “the power of the language that infuses him, in the thrust to establish a dialogue with absolute values, disrupts his temporal structure as a perceiving and expressing subject and replaces it with a whole new series of temporal relations” (16). “Visionary truth” thus corresponds with “the subject’s estrangement” and “his own internal discontinuity,” a discontinuity that also affects his perception of the object, “alienating” it such that it prompts the object’s “rearrangement in inordinate, perhaps superior ways” (26).

<sup>6</sup> Feinstein notes that Nyon had a strategic role during the Spanish Civil War as the site of a conference of anti-fascist nations in 1937 “aimed at preventing fascist attacks off the coast of Spain” (440 footnote 65). There may be some connection with Neruda’s editorial decision to create a Republican insurgent for his persona, though Matilde situates the encounter with El Capitan somewhere along the “Franco-Spanish border”.

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AN ETHICS OF PAIN: CARLOS CERDA'S  
*UNA CASA VACÍA*

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*THE NEW SCHOOL*

*There are many forms of writing; only in literature, however, can there be an attempt at restitution over and above the mere recital of facts, and over and above scholarship.*

W.G. Sebald, "An Attempt at Restitution"  
Speech at the opening of the Stuttgart House of Literature, 2001

**I. Restorative Justice and Testimony in Chile**

In a recent *New York Times* essay on Pablo Neruda, Ilan Stavans made the claim that poetry is the "best antidote to oppression." "On its surface, a poem seems incapable of stopping a bullet," he wrote. "Yet Chile's transition to democracy was facilitated by the poet's survival in people's minds, his lines repeated time and again, as a form of subversion. Life cannot be repressed, he whispered in everyone's ears. It was a message for which he may have died, but that lives on in his verse." Literature has played an important role in Chile in the culture of memory that has developed in the wake of the 17-year regime of General Augusto Pinochet. During the darkest years of the Pinochet regime, over 3,000 individuals were "disappeared" or executed and over 30,000 were imprisoned and tortured.<sup>1</sup> Countless others went into hiding or exile. When democracy was restored in 1990, the Pinochet regime stood beyond the reach of the law because of a general amnesty it had granted itself in

1978. For Desmond Tutu, head of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the Chilean blanket amnesty amounted to “national amnesia” and ensured that the past would return (29). “[T]he past, far from disappearing or lying down and being quiet, has an embarrassing and persistent way of returning and haunting us unless it has in fact been dealt with adequately,” Tutu wrote. “Unless we look the beast in the eye we find it has an uncanny habit of returning to hold us hostage” (28).

The past has been particularly present in Chile in the post-Pinochet era. In the wake of excessive political abuse and limited political accountability, a culture of testimonial has taken root.<sup>2</sup> Two truth commissions were established to investigate human rights violations: the National Commission for Truth and Reconciliation of 1990-91 (the “Rettig Commission”), which investigated politically motivated deaths, disappearances and kidnappings; and the National Commission on Political Imprisonment and Torture of 2003-2005 (the “Valech Commission”), which documented additional human rights abuses, such as torture, rape and unlawful detention.<sup>3</sup> Based on testimony from family members of the victims and corroborating evidence, the 1,400-page Rettig Report contains thousands of short narratives that document the fate of individual victims of the Pinochet regime, as well as lists of detention centers and torture sites. An extensive reparations program was established in 1992 to help the victims of the families included in the Rettig Report. The Chilean case is part of a larger international movement to confront state-sanctioned violence through restorative justice processes. Since the creation of the Commission of Inquiry into the Disappearance of People in Uganda in 1974, truth commissions have been established in over 21 countries, including Argentina, El Salvador, Sri Lanka, South Africa, and Guatemala.<sup>4</sup> Truth commissions seek to establish and record the “truth,” to give victims and survivors a voice, to recommend reparations measures and social and political reforms, to promote individual and communal healing, and to enable the reconciliation of divided societies. While truth may come at the expense of justice, as in the case of South Africa, where the full disclosure of politically motivated crimes could lead to amnesty, truth commissions may also compliment or contribute to criminal justice proceedings.<sup>5</sup>

On a local level, another form of truth telling sprung up in Chile in the form of testimonies.<sup>6</sup> Hundreds of survivors in Chile and abroad recorded their experiences of persecution in the form of first-person narratives designed to counter the “official story.” The genre of testimonial literature, or *testimonio*,

is defined primarily by its *witnessing* function: the narrator has lived the events and seeks to bear witness to them in a form that will endure and that

will reach an outside audience. As John Beverly writes, *testimonio* is “a novel or novella-length narrative in book or pamphlet . . . form, told in the first-person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts, and whose unit of narration is usually a ‘life’ or a significant life experience. . . . The word *testimonio* translates literally as testimony, as in the act of testifying or bearing witness in a legal or religious sense” (12-14). In the literature on trauma, witnessing is understood to be essential to the ability of survivors to come to terms with the past and to the eventual recovery of divided nations. That so many individuals in Chile managed to “speak the unspeakable” is, in itself, a testimony to the will of the survivors and the deep need to bring the past to account. In his essay on the testimonial genre in Chile, “Political Code and Literary Code,” Ariel Dorfman is critical of the tendency of the genre to produce heroic narratives that may appear like “exercises in propaganda” and appeal to the converted (159).<sup>7</sup> The critical reception of *testimonio* has undergone a significant shift. Initially hailed as a radical new body of work that gave voice to the dispossessed and provided an essential political counter-narrative, the genre fell out of favor when the truth-value of various accounts was contested.<sup>8</sup>

Along with *testimonio*, an important genre of politically engaged fiction has emerged in Chile. Called variously the “literature of social protest,” the “literature of atrocity,” or “post-authoritarian literature,” this body of work engages directly or indirectly with the Pinochet regime. Relevant authors in this domain include Isabel Allende, Roberto Bolaño, Carlos Cerda, Ariel Dorfman, Ana María del Río, José Donoso, and Diamela Eltit, amongst others. As critics have begun to note, many of the politically committed fictional works that engage with state-sponsored terror constitute a form of testimony, a kind of witnessing in their own right. Such a witnessing is paradoxical in that the problem of truth telling is no longer relevant; the veracity of the account is no longer at stake. What is at stake is a different kind of truth, what Paul Gready has called in relation to post-apartheid South African fiction “novel truths.” “‘Novel truths’ venture into areas that human rights and truth commission reports struggle to address due to resource constraints, methodological shortcomings or political sensitivities,” Gready writes. “By novel truths I mean the unique truth practices and repertoire available to the novel as a genre, asking questions rather than seeking answers, rooting out ambiguity,

as distinct from genres such as the human rights report, state inquiry or official history” (180). For Michael J. Lazzara, fiction, as well as other artistic modes, is particularly suited to the Chilean case because of its capacity to represent “limit experiences” and to confront historical absence and gaps: “[A]rt is crucial to the construction of post-dictatorial memory insofar as its unique ability to incorporate silence and the ‘unsayable’ permits a fuller, more direct engagement with absence than other representational modes” (103). In his autobiographical account, *Heading South, Looking North*, Dorfman, like many survivors, is haunted by the fact that he was spared the fate of many of his Chilean comrades. Seeking a meaning to his survival, he wonders if he was meant to serve a larger purpose, to serve as the “storyteller,” the witness (39). “If it is not true that this was why I was saved, I have tried to make it true,” Dorfman writes. “In every story I tell. Haunted by the certainty that I have been keeping a promise to the dead” (40).

This article contributes to the growing body of literature addressing the role of art in the transitional period in Chile.<sup>9</sup> I am concerned here particularly with the place of fiction in restorative justice processes in Chile. Politically committed fictional works, I believe, play an integral part in restorative justice processes for a number of reasons: 1) In their capacity to represent personal and collective trauma in a complex and unsparing mode, they may have a restitutive or healing effect for those who have lived through the events represented in the works; 2) They help to increase national and international awareness of massive human rights violations because of their capacity to reach a large audience, an awareness that may put pressure on transitional governments and international tribunals to prosecute perpetrators; and 3) they provide access to truths that stand outside the realm of testimonies, truth commissions and criminal tribunals.<sup>10</sup> In order to address the larger question of the role of fiction in the post-Pinochet era, I will focus here on Carlos Cerda’s *Una casa vacía* (1998) (“An Empty House”), a contemporary Chilean novel that centers on a “house of torture.” Like Ariel Dorfman’s *Death and the Maiden* (1990), Cerda’s novel depicts the experience of torture and terror under the Pinochet regime through the use of a fictionalized, testimonial account of a female survivor. In *Una casa vacía*, the central metaphor of the “house” is a multivalent literary figure that refers both to the Chilean nation and to individual survivors and exiles.

## II. The Metaphor of the House

### A) Torture and Terror

In Elaine Scarry’s *The Body in Pain*, the house stands at the center of the familiar, humane and made world. Scarry conceptualizes the civilized world as a series of three rings or concentric circles: the room/shelter, institutions, and the cultural embodiments of civilization. As Scarry points out, the room is the most basic unit of shelter, and the rooms within a home (such as the kitchen, bathroom, and bedroom) are designed to attend to the needs of the body. In situations of torture, the civilized world, which, for Scarry, is a room writ large, is condensed and contracted to the space of a room or rooms. The torture chamber serves as a place to destroy rather than shelter the body, and household items, such as “bathtubs,” “showers,” and “ovens,” are used to injure rather than care for the body (40). Because the products of civilization are used to *unmake* civilization, to destroy both its grounds (the ethical, rational grounds upon which civil societies are based) and its function (to enable human growth and flourishing), torture is, for Scarry, “world destroying.” In terms of state-sponsored oppression, Scarry’s notion of the “world destroying” properties of torture is an instructive one in that it captures the experiential dimensions of torture and terror. Torture provides the most perfect example of the ways in which oppressive regimes terrorize individuals and gain control of populations. While the experience of torture itself is unique, many of the features Scarry attributes to it, such as the inversion of legal and political morality and the infliction of orders of pain that are difficult to assimilate and difficult to convey, are common to oppressive regimes. Whether national laws are modified to deprive certain groups of their rights (as in the case of the Nuremberg laws in Nazi Germany) or disregarded at will (as in the case of the summary executions and disappearances that characterized the “dirty wars” in Latin America), legal and political processes are no longer familiar or transparent. In this regard, the metaphor of the house is a potent one. Because the house is the most fundamental place of shelter, it symbolizes that which is safe, secure, familiar and potentially sacred. It is, for Gaston Bachelard, the space of “original warmth,” a “material paradise,” “the environment in which the protective beings live” (7). The transformation of domestic space into a space and/or instrument of terror compounds the radical loss of a sense of safety from which violated individuals suffer and from which it is difficult,

if not impossible, to recover. This loss of one's bearings tends to affect entire families and communities and to cross generational lines, resulting in what Dominick LaCapra has called "transgenerational processes of 'possession' or haunting" (15).

On an immediate level, the physical violation of individuals translates into psychological torture for their loved ones. In the case of Chile, testimonies of survivors and family members of victims of human rights abuses attest to the ongoing sense of alienation, bewilderment, disorientation and despair caused by the political and moral violations of the Pinochet regime. The direct testimony included in one of the final sections of the Rettig Report, "Impact of the most serious human rights violations on families and social relations," illustrates the extent to which family members are haunted by the horror of the events and unable to find a place to rest. Their awareness of the senseless suffering endured by their loved ones or their lack of awareness of the fate of the disappeared or the whereabouts of the bodies of the deceased makes closure impossible. In a section on "Unresolved mourning," a family member testifies, "Luis' disappearance has meant the destruction of our home, of our common plans. It is hard to describe the torment and psychological torture involved in not knowing what happened" (vol. 2, 781). In a section on "Torture," one individual recounts, "They told me he smoked his last cigarette in handcuffs; he was trembling and couldn't inhale. That's the image that keeps me from dying in peace" (vol. 2, 782). Another attests, "If they had just killed him outright it wouldn't be so hard. But since you know they tortured him and don't know what they did to him, your imagination torments you more than death itself" (vol. 2, 782).

Public recognition of human rights violations is an essential starting point for the restoration of the grounds of reality to individuals whose worlds have been turned upside down. Restorative justice seeks to "right the world" by implementing measures designed to restore a sense of dignity and worth to individuals and communities and to reconcile divided nations. Such measures include 1) recognizing the grave violations of the past by providing a platform for individuals to speak and give testimony, creating a public record of human rights violations, and developing a culture of collective commemoration in the form of artworks, monuments and memorials, 2) righting wrongs in the present by providing reparations to survivors and family members of victims and contributing evidence where possible to criminal courts and international tribunals, and 3) ensuring a different and stable future by seeking the reconcili-

ation of opposing parties and enabling the development of new political and judiciary structures. While most critics of restorative justice are concerned with the "truth versus justice" quandary and the critical issue of legal and political accountability, Carlos Cerda's work addresses some of the weaknesses inherent in restorative justice itself.<sup>11</sup> In regards to the Chilean experience, Cerda's *Una casa vacía* is a cautionary tale, suggesting that efforts to restore the nation too quickly, too easily and too wholly will lead only to deeper trauma on an individual and national level. Drawing on the central metaphor of the house, Cerda depicts the nation of Chile as a haunted one, a "possessed" nation whose ghostly voices must be heard and whose pain must be shared. On a metatextual level, the work suggests that literature, that is, story telling in oral and written form, is crucial to the reconstruction of individual lives and communities as a whole.

### B) Carlos Cerda's *Una casa vacía* (1998)

Cerda's *Una casa vacía*, the second work in a trilogy of novels on the Pinochet period, is a kind of *roman à clef* in that it is based on real events and individuals and, more importantly, seeks to uncover or unlock certain truths about the recent past.<sup>12</sup> The narrative has a number of autobiographical elements. The story revolves around the childhood home of Andrés, a "returnee" who has just returned from twelve years in exile in East Berlin. Like Andrés, Cerda studied at the Instituto Pedagógica in Ñuñoa in Santiago, a "Marxist" institution that was later destroyed by Pinochet. Following the Pinochet coup, Cerda went into exile in East Berlin, where he received his doctorate in literature at Humboldt University. When he returned to Chile twelve years later, he studied under the Chilean novelist José Donoso and staged theatrical productions.<sup>13</sup> While *Una casa vacía* was awarded three of Chile's most important literary prizes, it has received relatively little attention in the English-speaking world. The gothic elements of the novel—the empty house shrouded in mystery and the supernatural forces that emanate from it—disrupt the largely realistic or modernist narrative and lend an air of horror and poetry to the tale.<sup>14</sup>

The novel is set in 1985, a turbulent period of national street protest and renewed government repression.<sup>15</sup> The atmosphere of Santiago is dense and suffocating, exploding with violence and thick with fear, tension, sickness and sadness. The novel ostensibly centers on the couple Manuel-Cecilia. In order to save their failing marriage, Cecilia's father has offered them a new

house in the residential neighborhood of Ñuñoa.<sup>16</sup> Surprised that such a lovely house is empty and has fallen into such disrepair, the couple renovates it and moves in. To celebrate their new life, they invite their closest friends to a house warming party. Like Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, the action takes place primarily at the party, with alternating flashbacks and foreshadowing. Amongst the partygoers is Julia, a lawyer at the Vicaría de la Solidaridad (Vicariate of Solidarity) whose husband was executed in the desert by the regime. Julia's job consists of taking testimony from women who have been tortured in order to find evidence of clandestine torture houses. At the party, Julia recognizes the house as one of the "moradas del horror" described by Graciela Muñoz Espinoza, a torture survivor known as "Chelita" (166). In a twist at the novel's end, we learn that Cecilia's father is a self-interested opportunist who buys up houses that have been "burned" ("quemada" (303)) and renovates them for sale. Upon discovering the truth of the house, Cecilia flees with her two little girls in a futile attempt to return to her own childhood home.

The empty house is a haunted house. The couple discovers uncanny traces of torture all over the property: "ugly stains" on the concrete steps and floors; huge, circular burn marks in the middle of the parquet on the second floor; and strange spots on the ceilings. Sounds of suffering—moans, cries, pleas, labored breathing—emanate from the walls and floors. In a recurrent dream, Cecilia hears the sound of a tree branch dragging against a windowpane that recalls a human voice, "algo que se arrastraba con mucho dolor y que parecía a punto de morirse, o desaparecer en el abandono más completo" (115). While the sounds of suffering are given a rational explanation in the narrative (the foliage of a tree scratching the windowpane, a rusty hinge squeaking, the water running in the pipes), a supernatural element remains. In a kind of ghostly portent of the truth of the house, Cecilia first dreamt of the thrashing foliage before she moved into the house. The dream-like experience repeated itself (and realized itself) while she was awake her second night in the new house. Like Lady Macbeth's spot, the burn marks cannot be fully removed. In their eagerness to restore the house and turn back time, the couple has inadvertently wiped out the personal and political history of the house: "El parquet vitrificado, reluciente, sin historia" (215).

The reiterated use of the word restoration situates the novel in relation to restorative justice processes. Part I is entitled "La restauración," and the lexicon of the restoration of the house ("restoration," "restoring," "restored") draws on the vocabulary of restorative justice ("la justicia restaurativa" or "la

justicia reparadora"). While the work is set in 1985, it was written in 1998, the year that Pinochet was arrested in London on charges of crimes against humanity. In the tenuous period of transition, attempts at achieving truth and justice were limited. At the outset of his term in 1990, President Patricio Aylwin vowed to meet an equivocal goal: "the whole truth, and justice to the extent possible."<sup>17</sup> The limited mandate of the Rettig Commission and the limited scope of the initial reparations program gave rise to serious criticism and public protest.<sup>18</sup> In 2003, President Ricardo Lagos established a second truth commission in order to take account of victims of torture and other human rights abuses, and the reparations program was broadened in 2009 to include victims of unlawful detention and torture. As for those who were in voluntary or involuntary exile, a relatively short-lived National Office of Return (*Oficina Nacional de Retorno*) was established in 1991.<sup>19</sup> Public discourse centered on national reconciliation, the establishment of the rule of law and peaceful coexistence ("convivencia").<sup>20</sup> In a speech at the National Stadium on March 12, 1990, President Aylwin maintained, "We have to be capable of rebuilding the unity of the Chilean family."<sup>21</sup> In *Una casa vacía*, rebuilding the house is an operative metaphor for rebuilding the nation. The couple's fate is linked to the fate of the nation. They were married three days before the coup and returned from their honeymoon to find "una ciudad sometida al silencio y a la muerte" (263). The restoration of the house is at the same time a restoration of their relationship. In language reminiscent of that of restorative justice, the text refers to "la precaria reconciliación de la pareja" (47) and "la relación restaurada" (220).

The house, which stands metaphorically for the nation, also stands metonymically for the individuals who suffered within it. This multivalent sign follows the schema proposed by Scarry in *The Body in Pain*. For Scarry, the room, the most basic form of shelter, is a magnification of the body, a container that shelters or houses the self, and a miniaturization of the civilized world. "[The room] is . . . an enlargement of the body:" Scarry writes, "it keeps warm and safe the individual it houses in the same way the body encloses and protects the individual within" (38). In a similar manner, the house in *Una casa vacía* is a figure both for the suffering, wounded nation and the suffering, wounded individual. Like a person, the house has intrinsic dignity and worth; it is imposing, sober, solemn, spacious, and elegant. Like the individuals who have suffered within its walls, the house has been violated (164–65).

The house reflects not only those who were tortured under the Pinochet

regime, but also those who were disappeared or forced into exile.<sup>22</sup> In a recurring nightmare, Andrés dreams that his childhood home has disappeared. A wall with an iron gate has replaced the wooden fence that led to a wooden door, and the windows have been boarded over. “Ha vuelto a su barrio, a su cuadra, a lo suyo. Pero no encuentra su casa. Desapareció.... Todo está igual. Sólo falta su casa.... Desapareció” (104). The dream follows a recurring logic of familiarity and strangeness. In a cinematic sequence that moves from a broad view to a narrow focus, Andrés wanders through a city he knows, the familiar sights and smells infusing him with a sense of kinship and happiness. He arrives at his street and walks by the corner grocery store, to his neighbors’ houses, to the space where his own house should be. The house is missing. The cycle of the dream repeats, from the comfort of the familiar streets and red-tiled houses to the shock of absence. The dream captures the bewildering, disorienting sense of dislocation that attends disappearance. The recurring shock marks the extent to which the idea of disappearance cannot be assimilated into the psyche. The disappearance of his house marks for Andrés a double loss: the loss of his childhood and the loss of his sense of national belonging. In a reference to Argentine writer Julio Cortázar’s fantastic tale, “Casa tomada” (1944), in which the house of a brother-sister couple is slowly taken over by unexplained forces, he experiences the loss of his house as a kind of real and metaphysical exile. Unlike the nostalgia that issues from the familiarity of the dream, Andrés experiences the Chile to which he returns as “el único territorio definitivamente extraño del planeta” (41). He realizes that he has become a foreigner in his own home, a permanent exile. The only thing that is familiar to him now is distance. “Sólo quedaba el lado de allá. La espera siguiente, otra partida, recaer en las distancias” (308).

It is Chelita’s voice, an echo of the voices of the other women who were held captive in the house with her, which haunts the house. Chelita, a political activist and teacher who “se había acumulado todo el dolor del mundo” (132), is one of the many women who give Julia testimony at the Vicaría. Chelita’s five-day testimony is given to the reader in a series of flashbacks. Although “era la más pobre de las denunciadas” (128), her testimony is remarkably detailed and straightforward. Following a violent arrest at her home, she was housed with other women at the headquarters of DINA (the Department of National Intelligence), known as “La Venda Sexy” (“The Sexy Blindfold”). There they were blindfolded and subject to a daily routine of professional torture. The primary forms of torture took place in the most

intimate spaces: the bedroom and the bathroom. In the bedroom, they were subject to abuse on “electric beds.” The women were tied naked to the metal bedsprings, and electrical currents were applied to the most sensitive parts of their bodies, a procedure that resulted in unbearable pain, convulsions, and loss of consciousness. In the bathroom, they were forced naked into the bath and subject to “the treatment” or “the submarine,” a procedure in which they were submerged underwater until they reached the point of asphyxiation. The “almost obscene conflation of private and public” that Scarry attributes to torture is borne out in Chelita’s account (53). While Chelita’s account is lucid and linear, there are limits to her narrative, and the weight of her silence, “esa extraña materialidad que había adquirido la total ausencia de palabras” (245), speaks louder than her words.

Chelita’s experience of torture reflects the reality of persecution during the early years of the Pinochet regime.<sup>23</sup> The Valech Report, which was based on testimony from over 35,000 victims of torture, delineates 1,132 official detention centers, as well as unofficial torture sites, such as police stations, hospitals, and schools (all of which are, ordinarily, places of protection and care).<sup>24</sup> Santiago itself was the locus of over eighty centers of torture.<sup>25</sup> According to the Valech report, 94% of political detainees were tortured, a statistic that underscores the extent to which torture was both institutionalized and systematic under the military junta.<sup>26</sup> “La Venda Sexy” was an actual house of torture in the Quilín district of Santiago that was known for the use of metal cots for electric shock treatments and sexual abuse.<sup>27</sup> Common techniques of torture under the Pinochet regime included the “submarine,” in which the individual was submerged in a bath or in repellent bodily fluids until he/she was forced to gulp for air, and the “barbecue” or “grill,” in which the victim was subject to electrical shocks on vulnerable parts of the body, such as the teeth, tongue, breasts and genitals.<sup>28</sup> Almost all of the women who gave testimony to the Valech Commission testified to sexual violence and abuse.<sup>29</sup> Like the empty house in Cerda’s novel, most of the “houses of torture” were renovated or destroyed.<sup>30</sup> After protest on the part of survivors, human rights groups, and others, Villa Grimaldi, the regime’s most infamous site of torture and terror, was transformed into a memorial park. In his discussion of sites of memory in *Chile in Transition*, Michael J. Lazzara compares post-dictatorship Santiago to “an immense crime scene” in which all traces of the human rights violations have been “[expunged] from the urban landscape” (129). As it is depicted in the novel, the Vicaría de la Solidaridad, which was founded in 1976 as part of

the Santiago Catholic Church, was a critical source for testimonies and reports on political detention, torture and disappearances.<sup>31</sup>

What is striking about the text is that it is Julia, and not Chelita, who bears the most marked signs of trauma.<sup>32</sup> In my reading, this displacement of trauma provides the key to the novel in that it reveals the author's position on individual and collective healing in restorative justice processes. Julia, who suffers from fear, anxiety, sleepless nights, repetitive images, and recurrent dreams, hides her anxiety beneath a veneer of cynicism. She lacks the kind of psychic shield that would permit her to take distance from the violent experiences of the women whose stories she hears. In the eyes of friends and colleagues, she is "crazy" ("loca, loca" (126)). In terms of trauma theory, Julia would seem to be attached to the traumatic experience of others. Like individuals who are "possessed" by the events that have traumatized them, Julia's mind is inhabited by the stories of mental and physical abuse she has heard. The voices of the women whose testimony she has taken follow her in a kind of relentless pursuit; they are described in the text as "voces que la seguían en la calle, en el café, en el auto, en el comedor de su casa" (127).

Julia's experience in the house is a cathartic one. As she climbs the eight steps of the basement during the tour of the house and lays her hand on the rough texture of the wall, she hears the voices of "her women" in her head and recognizes the truth of the house. Overcome by nausea, she runs to the second floor bathroom and vomits violently. As is common with experiences of involuntary memory, the source of the feeling is not immediately apparent to her: "¿Qué fue entonces ese presentimiento que tuvo en el instante mismo en que vio la casa...? ¿Qué fue lo que gatilló ese miedo?" (123). As she hides out in her bathroom retreat during the long dinner party, the memories in her head—memories that are not her own, but those of others—come to the surface, and the testimonies come back to her word for word. Memory is identified in the text as "una especie de materia viscosa que lo envolvía todo" (170), and the work of memory is represented as a sensory, tactile, lived experience. Julia can hear the testimonies as they were spoken; she can smell the odors of the house; she can hear the sound of the tree knocking against the windowpane. Nearly suffocating on her own bile, she identifies on a visceral level with the women who were violated in the house. In a graphic and drawn out passage that disturbs and provokes the reader's own imagination, she imagines what it would be like to be forcibly submerged in one's own vomit. In a moment that marks the culmination of this sensorial and identificatory memory work,

Julia has a hallucination. As she is looking at her wan image in the mirror in the bathroom, Chelita's face appears next to hers. Chelita's reflection is a ghostly one, enveloped in the steam and fog of the hot water issuing from the faucet. Startled, Julia tries to wipe the misty image away. But there she is, watching her quietly from the bathtub in which she is submerged. "Chelita?" Julia asks (140). A conversation in the "present" about a violent episode of tear gas in the plaza merges into a word-by-word replay of Chelita's testimony about the "bathroom business." In a final iteration of the house metaphor, Julia herself serves as a figure for the empty house, a house permanently "invadida, ocupada" and "tomada" by pain (198).

With her "job of hearing" ("la misión de oír" (127)), Julia is, first and foremost, a witness to the events. In his essay in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Dori Laub emphasizes the importance of witnessing for the continued survival of survivors. Concerning his work with Holocaust survivors and their children, he writes, "The survivors did not only need to survive so that they could tell their stories; they also needed to tell their stories in order to survive.... In my experience, repossessing one's life story through giving testimony is itself a form of action, of change, which one has to actually pass through, in order to continue and complete the process of survival after liberation" (63-70). Like many critics, Laub considers testimonial a paradoxical endeavor, the articulation of that which cannot be articulated. Julia's efforts to enable victim-survivors to tell their stories, to find the words to convey the weight and depth of the catastrophes they have lived through, is thus an attempt to enable survivors to take their first steps out of the past and into the present. The novel places great weight on Julia's steadfast efforts to bear witness. In a kind of epiphany, Andrés recognizes that the fate of the nation depends on the restoration of dignity to those who have suffered.

In the way in which she has assimilated the experience of the survivors, Julia serves as a participating witness or a "proxy survivor." In an interview with Cathy Caruth, Robert Jay Lifton emphasizes the importance of what he calls "being a survivor by proxy" (*Trauma*, 145). He recounts a conversation he had with Elie Wiesel concerning *The Nazi Doctors*, Lifton's important 1986 study of medical experimentation and killing in the concentration camps. In this conversation, Lifton articulated the psychological burden of his work on Nazi doctors, the ways in which the suffering of Holocaust victims had entered his psyche and the ways in which images of the camps had begun to intrude upon his dreams. For Wiesel, this state of mental and emotional

participation constituted the essential starting point for Lifton's work. "What he was saying is that you must in some significant psychological way experience what they experience," Lifton explains. "You can never do that quite. But it's being a survivor by proxy, and the proxy's important" (*Trauma*, 145). Caruth considers this a "double survivor situation," the situation of "a survivor and a proxy survivor" (*Trauma*, 145). In a similar vein, Dominick LaCapra emphasizes the importance in the listening situation of what he calls "empathetic unsettlement," "a kind of virtual experience through which one puts oneself in the other's position" (78). While cautioning against "surrogate victimage," a phenomenon in which a witness assumes a "victim's voice or subject position," LaCapra recognizes the likelihood, and indeed, potential desirability, of secondary trauma in those who work closely with survivors of historical trauma.<sup>33</sup> In her internalization of the (his)stories of others, Julia acts as a "proxy survivor" whose ability to identify and empathize has induced a "desirable" form of secondary trauma. This secondary trauma is desirable in that Julia's preoccupation with the accounts she has heard is a productive one, enabling her to identify the house of torture and propelling her to share the accounts with others.

Through the character of Julia, Cerda articulates an ethics of pain, one based primarily upon hearing the other. "To hear" is more than listening; it is a partial identification, an internalization of the story of the other and an assimilation of a portion of the pain and suffering of the other. For Cerda, it is the kind of authentic encounter with the other embodied in Julia's work that provides the basis for individual and collective healing. To come to terms with the past means, then, to face shared history collectively. In regards to state-sponsored terror or national catastrophes, certain individuals or groups of individuals are destined to bear the weight of history alone, to suffer disproportionately in relation to the rest of the population. In *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Caruth makes the essential claim that traumatic symptoms are first and foremost symptoms of *history*. "If PTSD must be understood as a pathological symptom, then it is not so much a symptom of the unconscious, as it is a symptom of history," she writes. "The traumatized, we might say, carry an impossible history within them" (5). In the case of state-sponsored violence, this "impossible history" that the traumatized carry within them is both personal and collective. Cerda suggests that we share in the burden of this collective history by listening to the stories of others and assimilating them into larger, national narratives.

*Una casa vacía* puts into question a number of essential components of restorative justice. First of all, it underscores the impossibility of return, either a return to the past or a reconstitution of the nation as it was in the past. Cecilia and Manuel cannot restore their failed relationship nor can Cecilia return to the "safety" of her childhood home. For Andrés, both his childhood house and his nation have become foreign to him. At the end, the now homeless and single Cecilia discovers in herself "el germen de una reparación" (294). "El resto tendría que empezar a reconstruirlo desde los cimientos. Y en esta noche tan larga comprendía que parte de la solidez de esos cimientos eran los silencios necesarios y la tranquila humildad" (294). Here again, in the use of the terms "reparations" and "reconstruction," the notion of restorative justice resurfaces. Like the process of rebuilding a house, restoration must start from the "foundation," from the bottom up, from the narratives and experiences of those who suffered. Such a process suggests a full disclosure of the events of the past and a shared sense of responsibility for this history. At the same time, the new foundations cannot erase away the old ones. Unlike the "empty house" that has been wiped clean of history, physical sites must be marked and commemorated. If a future is possible, this future will be indelibly marked by the past. Secondly, the work underscores the limits of what can be repaired. A note of cynicism accompanies Julia's work throughout the narrative. In regards to the depositions she has taken, she thinks, "¿Pero qué importaba quién los leyera! ¿Cambiaba eso las cosas? ¿Cambiaba eso la vida de las vendadas, de las violadas, de las aterradas, de las ultrajadas en esa misma casa?" (128). While Julia continues, nonetheless, to carry out her mission, her sense of despair underscores the irrevocable nature of catastrophic historic events. No matter how much of the truth of the past is revealed and how much justice is ultimately meted out to perpetrators, the lives of the individuals and families who were violated by the regime have been immutably damaged or destroyed, and the landscape of the country will be forever marked.<sup>34</sup>

Cerda's woman-centered universe concludes with the birth of a new oral history. Oral narrative becomes the vehicle by which the stories of survivors will be told and assimilated into the larger national narrative. On a metatextual level, the novel exemplifies the process by which stories become histories. The whole novel is structured as a *mise en abyme*, the embedding of Chelita's story within Julia's story within the novel's story. In a series of poetic passages, the text describes a kind of rite of passage in which individuals integrate the voices of others into their own. As Cecilia goes down the four flights of an

apartment building she's seeking to rent, for example, she experiences the same kind of associative trauma to which Julia has been subject. Hearing voices in her head, she feels fear and a sense of vertigo: "[S]iente que va cayendo, que la pendiente no tiene fin, que sigue bajando hacia algo muy horrible que no termina de llegar;... bajando a lo peor, como le contó la Chelita a la Julia, y la Julia a ella, y ella desde ahora, también, a quien quiera oírla..." (319-20). The book ends with the "[ú]ltimo grito de las olvidadas" (321), a verse in which the wounded, "las últimas ocupantes de la casa" (321), speak in their own voices, the voices of those who survived, those who disappeared, and those who were forgotten (243). The reader is the final link in the chain, the final addressee, and the final witness. Cerda's novel enjoins us to internalize the narrative and to pass it on.

### III. Conclusion

In regards to restorative justice, Cerda's *Una casa vacía* is of particular value both because it illustrates the ways in which fiction may bear witness to historical events in a symbolic mode and because it comments on the value of narrative or storytelling as well. In its impact on the reader, Cerda's work demonstrates the potential haunting power of works of art. Like Julia, the reader finds herself internalizing the testimonial account in the novel and caught up in the associative memory work of trying to imagine the horrors that the victims and survivors of the Pinochet regime suffered. The ability to render traumatic events is limited both on the part of the speaker and the addressee. In the same way that the speaker cannot find words to convey adequately the horrors she has experienced, the addressee is unable to perceive fully the horror of the events. The reader finds herself reaching a wall as she tries to conceive of unthinkable events and finds herself returning to the effort again and again. And in this attempt, this constantly reiterated, failed attempt, to grasp that which the mind cannot accommodate, the reader/witness understands to some extent the weight of the catastrophe. The value of literature, in this regard, is that it is *unsettling*. In its ability to convey the ineffable through poetic devices, gaps, absences, contradictions, and a lack of closure, it unsettles the reader and unsettles the past. As opposed to "official stories" which tie up the events of the past and promise a brighter future, literature troubles the waters in the present. This capacity of literature to interrogate and stir up sites of trauma is crucial in that it provides an impetus for readers (and, by extension, the public)

to engage in the work of bringing the past to account, whether this be in the form of memory work and the construction of monuments, memorials and public artworks; the collection of testimony and evidence for truth bodies; or legal actions designed to bring perpetrators to account.

Of course, not all committed or "testimonial" literature is restorative. In terms of aesthetics, works that draw redemptive or reductive narratives may act as literary corollaries to "official" political discourses that seek to put the past to rest. Dominique LaCapra cautions against works of art that falsify history and its real effects by providing a sense of spiritual uplift or by aestheticizing catastrophic historical events.<sup>35</sup> In terms of the audience, the work of art must reach readers/the public in order to have a restorative value, whether this value be psychological (the reader relates to the story and takes solace in it), emotional (the reader is informed and moved by the story) or pragmatic (the reader is informed and moved by the story *and* seeks to take action). This category is variable in that literary works have different effects on different readers and may not always have the capacity to reach a wide audience.<sup>36</sup>

In his emphasis on the importance of oral narrative and oral tradition, Cerda proposes a new form of storytelling. In the same way that Walter Benjamin underscores the centrality of a physical, communal space for storytelling in his famous essay on "The Storyteller," Cerda suggests that the transmission of traumatic historical material must be immediate, going from the "voice" to the "ear." This return to a more ancient mode of experience, to an "artisan form of communication," in Benjamin's terms, suggests that the only way to begin again is to return to the source of collective life (91). For Benjamin, storytelling has a pragmatic value, whether it be in the form of a moral, practical advice, a proverb or a maxim (91). The integration of the practical lessons of storytelling into the fabric of life is, in Benjamin's reading, the source of wisdom. In a similar fashion, Cerda suggests that the only way to prevent the past from recurring, the only way to ensure "nunca más," is for the grave lessons of the past to become part of the cultural and historical landscape. While Benjamin attributes the decline in storytelling to the rise of the novel and the impoverishment of experience in the modern age, Cerda invests the contemporary novel with a more communal and political value. For Cerda, the novel is a potential catalyst for authentic experience in that it may provoke the work of memory and help ensure the preservation of memory, memory being that which, in Benjamin's words, "creates the chain of tradition which passes a happening on from generation to generation" (98).

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>As historian Steve J. Stern points out, these numbers, which are conservative, constituted a significant percentage of the 1973 Chilean population of about 10 million. Stern provides more reasonable estimates of 3,500-4,000 deaths and disappearances, 150,000-200,000 political detentions, and over 100,000 cases of torture (*Remembering Pinochet's Chile*, xxi). Most of the egregious human rights violations occurred during the first five years of the military junta's rule (1973-78), the period of time covered by the amnesty the military government had granted itself. With the dissolution of DINA (National Intelligence Directorate) in August 1977, disappearances became less common, though practices of unlawful detention, executions and torture continued (Rettig Report, vol. 1, xxv).

<sup>2</sup>While the amnesty law is still in force, Chile has seen a surge in criminal prosecutions of dictatorship-era crimes in the past 15 years. Since the watershed disappearance case of *Poblete Córdova* in September 1998, in which the Supreme Court accorded a supraconstitutional rank to the Geneva Conventions, Supreme Court decisions have increasingly overridden both the amnesty decree and the statute of limitations. In an article on the Chilean Supreme Court, Marny A. Requa designates three phases in the development of "accountability jurisprudence" in Chile: a first phase (1990-97) in which the Supreme Court upheld the amnesty law of 1978; the "turning point" of 1998, and a third phase (1999-2007) in which the Court increasingly held human rights violations to the standards of international treaties and conventions (83-93).

<sup>3</sup>The Comisión Nacional de Verdad y Reconciliación carried out its investigation from May 1990 to February 1991 and issued its report in February 1991. The Comisión Nacional sobre Prisión Política y Tortura operated from September 2003 to June 2005 and submitted its report in November 2004. A complementary report that investigated over 1,000 additional cases was issued in June 2005.

<sup>4</sup>Hayner 14-15.

<sup>5</sup>See Hayner's *Unspeakable Truths* for a discussion of the potential value of truth commissions in criminal justice proceedings.

<sup>6</sup>The testimonial genre flourished across Latin America and in the Caribbean in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.

<sup>7</sup>Drawing on Dorfman's distinction between "sectarian" and literary (or "deliberative") accounts of torture, Kimberly Nance emphasizes the extent to which deliberative testimonial accounts reveal the suffering, damage, and sense of loss of integrity experienced by many political prisoners (39).

<sup>8</sup>Nance 1-18, 137-56. Critics of the testimonial genre point out the historical inaccuracies in testimonial narratives and the necessary subjectivity at the heart of the genre, while proponents argue for a broader notion of "truth." *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*, for which the author won the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize, launched the debate concerning the truth value of testimonial narratives. For further discussion of this debate, see Arias.

<sup>9</sup>Recent works treating the art and literature of the dictatorial and transitional period include Idelber Avelar, *The Untimely Present: Postdictatorial Latin American Fiction and the Task of Mourning* (1999); Lazzara, *Chile in Transition*; Ignacio López-Calvo, *Written in Exile: Chilean Fiction from 1973-Present* (2001); Alice A. Nelson, *Political Bodies: Gender, History, and the Struggle for Narrative Power in Recent Chilean Literature* (2002); and Roland Spiller, *Memoria, duelo y narración: Chile después de Pinochet: literatura, cine, sociedad* (2004).

<sup>10</sup>Notably, Requa attributes the growth in criminal prosecutions in Chile to national and international pressure: "The dramatic shift in jurisprudence, from inertia at the start of the transition to activism post-transition, can be understood as the consequence of indirect international and domestic political pressure on a conservative judiciary with new-found independence" (81).

<sup>11</sup>For a discussion of contemporary views on the relationship between truth and justice, see *Truth v. Justice: The Morality of Truth Commissions*, ed. Robert I. Rotberg and Dennis Thompson (2000); Mark Osiel, *Mass Atrocity, Collective Memory, and the Law* (2000); *Critical Issues in Restorative Justice*, ed. Howard Zehr and Barb Toews (2004); and *Restorative Justice: International Perspectives*, ed. Burt Galaway and Joe Hudson (1996).

<sup>12</sup>Cerda's Pinochet era novels include *Morir en Berlin (To Die in Berlin)* (1993) and *Sombras que caminan* (1999).

<sup>13</sup>Pearson 141-42. In a review essay on Cerda, Lon Pearson draws an interesting connection between Cerda's novel and E.T.A. Hoffmann's "Das öde Haus" ("The Deserted House"). According to Pearson, Cerda would have been familiar with Hoffmann's gothic tale. As in "The Deserted House," the rational resolution of Cerda's story is indeterminate, suggesting a persistent ghostly or haunting force.

<sup>14</sup>For a fuller discussion of the gothic elements of the work, see Cisternas.

<sup>15</sup>Steve Stern calls the period of 1983-1986, which was marked by two distinct cycles of protest, struggle and repression, a period of "great shakings" (*Battling for Hearts and Minds*, 249-286).

<sup>16</sup>Significantly, Ñuñoa is home to The National Stadium, a notorious site of detention, torture and death under the Pinochet regime.

<sup>17</sup>Rettig Report, vol. 1., xxxi.

<sup>18</sup>While the 1991 Rettig Report did not name perpetrators on the grounds that this would violate the due process of law, incriminating evidence was sent to appropriate courts of law.

<sup>19</sup>Stern, *Reckoning with Pinochet*, 36.

<sup>20</sup>Stern, *Reckoning with Pinochet*, 16.

<sup>21</sup>Quoted in Stern, *Reckoning with Pinochet*, 31.

<sup>22</sup>The Rettig report delineates those who disappeared after arrest as "*detenidos desaparecidos*," literally, "disappeared prisoners" (vol. I, 35).

<sup>23</sup> According to the Valech Report, over 85% of the cases of torture took place between September 1973 and August 1977 (569).

<sup>24</sup> The Valech Report indicates, “Los relatos entregados sobre lo vivido en esas circunstancias permitieron a la Comisión reunir antecedentes respecto de 1.132 recintos utilizados como lugares de detención en las trece regiones del país” (301).

<sup>25</sup> Lazzara 132.

<sup>26</sup> Valech Report, 81, 191.

<sup>27</sup> Rettig Report, vol. 2, 487-88; Valech Report, 530; Stern, *Reckoning with Pinochet*, 235.

<sup>28</sup> Stern, *Battling for Hearts and Minds*, 259. For methods of torture, see the Valech Report, 253-57.

<sup>29</sup> Stern, *Reckoning with Pinochet*, 296.

<sup>30</sup> Lazzara 129.

<sup>31</sup> Stern, *Battling for Hearts and Minds*, 113, 226. Monsignor Sergio Valech, president of the Valech Commission, was a former director of the Vicaría.

<sup>32</sup> In classic psychoanalytic theory, trauma is understood as a belated response to a violent event or series of events “outside the usual realm of human events” that was not or cannot be assimilated into the psyche (Quoted in Caruth, *Trauma*, 100). Individuals suffering from what is now termed post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) exhibit symptoms of physical and emotional stress, such as fear, anxiety, tremors, chills, hallucinations, recurring nightmares, flashbacks, numbness, and paralysis. In their reenactment of traumatic events through recurring nightmares or unconscious forms of “acting out,” traumatized subjects manifest a compulsion to repeat, a compulsion to return again and again to the site of trauma. In reference to Caruth’s interpretation of Freud’s reading of the legend of Tancred, in which the voice of the twice-wounded beloved cries out from the tree in which her soul is imprisoned, Lazzara reads Cerda’s novel as a “literary dramatization of [the] exigency to heed the voice that emanates from the wound” (125).

<sup>33</sup> On the likelihood of secondary trauma on the part of the secondary witness, LaCapra asserts, “[D]esirable empathy involves not full identification but what might be termed empathetic unsettlement in the face of traumatic limit events, their perpetrators, and their victims” (102).

<sup>34</sup> The Rettig Report addresses both the necessity and limits of uncovering the truth. “[A]lthough the truth cannot really in itself dispense justice, it does put an end to many a continued injustice—it does not bring the dead back to life, but it brings them out from silence; for the families of the ‘disappeared,’ the truth about their fate would mean, at last, the end to an anguishing, endless search” (Rettig Report, xxxi).

<sup>35</sup> See LaCapra, 14.

<sup>36</sup> In this regard, works such as Ariel Dorfman’s *Death and the Maiden* (1990), which has been considered “one of the most celebrated dramas of its time,” may

almost singlehandedly promote a local or national cause (Morace 135). The play has been performed in over 30 countries, and the film version by Roman Polanski ran in the U.S. and abroad (Weaver and Colleran 32).

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BODILY REMAINS: BODY OPTICS  
AND THE REVERSE PANOPTICON IN GABRIEL GARCÍA  
MÁRQUEZ'S *THE AUTUMN OF THE PATRIARCH*

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Much of the early twenty-first century has been defined by a burgeoning focus on biopolitics as an intersectional field of study. Clearly, an ideal region for such scholarship is Latin America. Indeed, the dawn of bio-power, the subjugation of bodies, and the control of populations are no more explicit than in Latin America. More specifically, Latin America's long history of dictatorships, which embody if not entirely epitomize Foucault's description of the power of life and death as "conditioned by the defense of the sovereign, and his own survival," underscores its biopolitical nature (Campbell and Sitze 41). As Gene Bell-Villada asserts:

Latin America, of course, is notorious worldwide for its military dictatorships, so much that certain words from its procedures and its ethos –*junta*, *incomunicado*, *político*, *número uno*—have infiltrated the sidelines of the U.S. political lexicon. As [Gabriel] García Márquez himself likes to remark, Latin dictators have achieved the status of a kind of world myth. (481)

The history of dictatorships, absolute tyranny, and sovereign authoritarianism in Latin America are indeed ubiquitous: Anastasio Somoza García, Augusto Pinochet, Gerardo Machado, and Rafael Trujillo are only some of the many

who have ruled mercilessly. Pinochet ordered the brutal murder of his friends, turned the capital of Chile, Santiago, into a torture camp, and disposed of bodies in the Pacific Ocean by tying corpses together and using helicopters to toss them into the sea. Rafael Trujillo's reign was characterized by absolute despotism and terror. Known for its infamous torture chambers *La 40*, *El 9*, and *La Victoria*, Trujillo's regime used electrical shocks, beatings, lashings with wires and plastic pipes, voltage charges to genital areas, attacks by vicious dogs, and repeated cigarette burns as forms of torture; thousands of men, women, and children were sent to clandestine prisons and never seen again (Galván 52). The well-known case of the Mirabal sisters, who were beaten to death by the Secret Intelligence (SIM) (an event immortalized in Julia Álvarez's 1994 novel *In the Time of the Butterflies*), exemplifies the absolute brutality of Trujillo's regime. When Trujillo was finally assassinated in 1961, his son Ramfis arrested those responsible, tortured them extensively in prison, and then served as a witness to their deaths (Galván 57-58). Trujillo's corpse was so unwelcome in the Dominican Republic that his family requested it be moved. As a result, his body was shipped on the boat *Angelita* to nearby Martinique and then flown to France, where he was buried at the Pere Lachaise Cemetery (Galván 58). As these examples reveal and as Alok Bhalla affirms, totalitarian dictatorship in Latin America has become "a part of our historical reality; and their ruthlessness, a part of our daily purgatory" (1597). As a result, Latin America has much to offer in terms of biopolitical studies, in particular due to the totalizing, collective experience of being subjected to tyrannical sovereign rule, terror, and torture for hundreds of years in diverse geopolitical arenas.

One of Latin America's most prominent, Nobel Prize-winning writers, Gabriel García Márquez, would naturally be a default choice for initial consultation. Many scholars have carefully explored García Márquez's politics as they relate to dictatorship and sovereign rule, whether they involve his friendship with Fidel Castro, with whom he united to denounce Batista's military dictatorship; his direct exposure to the dictatorship of Marco Pérez Jiménez in Venezuela, when he worked in Caracas; or his experience of Franco's diabolism when working in Barcelona on *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, a novel about a Latin American tyrant (presumably Venezuelan dictator Juan Vicente Gómez). While García Márquez's work is clearly indebted to a profound exposure to political life in Latin America, it has yet to be explicitly registered as biopolitical in nature. *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, published in 1975, serves as a means by which to initiate such an analysis. A novel that García Márquez

notes "loosely" resembles "geographical and emotional points of reference in the Caribbean coastal port of Cartagena in Colombia, [my translation]," *The Autumn of the Patriarch* engages in a panoramic contemplation of the myriad histories of Latin American dictatorships (Williams 63). As García Márquez noted during an interview with Raymond Williams, "All of the cities of the Caribbean have something in common," insisting that crafting a Caribbean novel is akin to "writing and leaving with a sack, and filling it with things as you go along [my translation]" (63). *The Autumn of the Patriarch*'s willingness to comprehensively explore Caribbean terrain makes it an ideal choice for the study of the Latin American biopolitical novel.

The question then becomes, of course, what makes *The Autumn of the Patriarch* biopolitical. Certainly Roberto Esposito's notion of the state-body, the idea that states are extensions of biological apparatuses, should prove valuable for a biopolitical reading. For, as Esposito notes, "the political is nothing else but the continuation of nature at another level and therefore destined to incorporate and reproduce nature's original characteristics" (Campbell and Sitze 354). In addition, Giorgio Agamben's view of the sovereign as "the originary structure in which law refers to life" also suggests, by default, that sovereign power produces a biopolitical body (28). As Agamben states, "It can even be said that the production of a biopolitical body is the original activity of sovereign power" (6). In this case, it is clear that where there is a sovereign body (such as that which clearly figures in this particular novel), biopolitical bodies manifest themselves in identifiable ways.

This state-body alignment, what Esposito describes as a parallel between the state and the human body, necessitates attending to the way in which the sovereign body becomes a literal representation of national health and national bodies as a whole. This rendering of the sovereign body as representation of national life, as indication of national health, and as emblem of national survival makes the patriarchal body's visibility a national imperative; that is, the viewing of the body is a biopolitical act, and the sovereign body's disappearance into the quasi-tombs of the presidential palace is cause for national alarm, what one might deem a state of emergency. As Monica Casper and Lisa Jean Moore observe in *Missing Bodies: The Politics of Visibility*, the body's erasure or status as "missing" can be highly traumatizing for a populace: "Thus 'missing' is a kind of invisibility, one characterized by a high degree of emotion, as with missing children or soldiers M.I.A. (3). In order to preclude this state of emergency, other certain biopolitical measures must be preemptively

taken: body stand-ins or doubles, the sighting of some sign or semblance of a body via the observation of the patriarch's body parts, and the development of a cadre of close and intimate "surveyors" who claim to have "glimpsed" the patriarch's body in order to ensure his and their own life and health.

While biopolitical measures perpetuating the myth of a sovereign body pervade the text, a closer study of body optics in *The Autumn of the Patriarch* reveals that viewing the patriarch's body is a surprisingly destabilizing experience for the sovereign body itself. The collective narrators' many encounters with the patriarch's body, and in particular his corpse, shift Foucault's panopticon of the state into the hands of the populace. The frenzy of narrators complicates the absolutism of the sovereign body, which is too messy, too incomplete, and too unidentifiable to be fully whole or substantiated as truth. That is, the panoramic vision of the myriad narrative voices that occupy the novel's viewing of the sovereign body in life and death subverts rather than reinforces the patriarch's power, providing new revolutionary possibilities for a Caribbean body politic haunted by dictatorship.

It is perhaps valuable at this stage to employ an understanding of how viewing the sovereign corpse of the patriarch could become a site for regeneration, creative change, agency, and revolution. For, more often than not, mourning the missing body—in this case, the remains of a dead tyrant—has been defined as a haunting, with the body serving as a sort of revenant that continues to remind the populace of the despotic reign that once was. Often a tyrant's remains have been so absolutely traumatic that corpses are desecrated, with tomb raiders seeking retribution after death. This is certainly the case in Latin America, where a surfeit of such occurrences abounds. The corpse of Juan Perón, whose Peronist party was accused of demagoguery while ostensibly touting populist ideals, evidences such a phenomenon, with tomb raiders hacking off Perón's hands in 1987 and stealing them "along with a saber, cap, and other items" ("Argentine Strongman's Corpse"). An even more ideal example is the corpse of dictator Augusto Pinochet of Chile, which was cremated to avoid what son Marco Antonio described as an unapologetic desecration of his tomb "by people who always hated him" (Usborne). (Interestingly, despite the absence of a corpse, the coffin was still transferred to the Chilean Military Academy and adorned with Pinochet's hat and sword [Usborne].) These examples provide a cross-section of how Latin America has responded to the bodily remains of its many tyrants and dictators. What these actions suggest is that viewing the corpse—which often includes manipulating it, uncovering it,

touching it, or removing it from its coffin—is a political act, one that is seen as a militant response to the sovereign body. Indeed, much of *The Autumn of the Patriarch* fixates on encountering the sovereign body after death and mourning the tragic experiences of the history and politics that this body represents.

Nevertheless, if one considers Walter Benjamin's definition of "the political and ethical stakes" of mourning the corpse, it is clear that the act of viewing the sovereign body after death need not necessarily be a simple regeneration of trauma or perpetual loss. In fact, as Benjamin attests, "to mourn the remains of the past hopefully is to establish an active and open relationship with history" (Eng and Kazanjian 1). This practice of historical materialism, the act of bringing the past to memory, "is to induce actively a tension between the past and the present, between the dead and the living" (1). The moment of production occurs when a continuing dialogue about loss and its remains (in this particular case, the act of viewing the sovereign body's remains) transforms into an act of hope. As David Eng and David Kazanjian attest, "Avowals of and attachments to loss can produce a world of remains as a world of new representations and alternative meanings" (5). These meanings yield the potentiality of viewing the sovereign body after death as something other than a recapitulation or repetition of national tragedy. Instead, viewing the sovereign body in *The Autumn of the Patriarch* is what Eng and Kazanjian characterize as a "volatile potentiality...rather than a pathologically bereft and politically reactive" experience (5). The multiple narrative voices of *The Autumn of the Patriarch* that observe the sovereign body after death resist the Foucaultian panopticon paradigm through a body optics of political resistance, thereby wielding the ability to deconstruct the sovereign body for a more hopeful Caribbean future. As Jo Labanyi observes, the people "establish an authoritarian account of the patriarch's life," foregrounding the notion that encountering a corpse can lead to a degree of political resistance in terms of both panopticon reversal and language (140). As a result, the body optics of *The Autumn of the Patriarch* is a reconstructive act, one that provides the collective narrative voice a means by which to deconstruct the sovereign body and initiate new potentialities for self-government.

The very beginning of the novel opens with such potentiality: what could even be described as therapeutic testimony. After two hundred and fifty years of tyrannical rule, vultures, in droves, break into the presidential palace. A community of voices encounters the half-eaten corpse of the patriarch, and a chorus of cacophonous wonder ensues. The community that views the body,

as Alok Bhalla observes, “discovers how to speak spontaneously and ‘in the redeeming grace of companionship’ after centuries of tyrannical silence and suspicion” (1597). The power of the spoken word is revealed when the collective narrator states, “We did not have to knock down the door, as we had thought, for the main door seemed to open by itself with just the push of a voice” (García Márquez 3). In addition to the magnitude of the collective voice, when the narrator finally finds the body “face down” in its “denim uniform without insignia, boots, the gold spur on his left heel,” the patriarch’s visage is rendered unrecognizable:

Only when we turned him over to look at his face did we realize that it was impossible to recognize him, even though his face had not been pecked away by vultures, because none of us had ever seen him, and even though his profile was on both sides of all coins, on postage stamps, on condom labels, on trusses and scapulars, and even though his engraved picture with the flag across his chest and the dragon of the fatherland was displayed at all times in all places, we knew that they were copies of portraits that had already been considered unfaithful during the time of the comet...no mortal had ever seen him since the days of the black vomit, and yet we knew he was there....” (García Márquez 3, 4).

The dissonance between an imagined body and an identifiable one foregrounds a certain element of traumatic confusion; but at the same time, it underscores the sovereign body’s own problematic contradictions. Indeed, as the narrator states, much of the body’s survival exists within legend, myth, and oral tradition: “[S]omeone had told about seeing his sad eyes, his pale lips, his pensive hand waving through the liturgical decorations of the presidential coach” (García Márquez 4). Stories circulate about bullets shot into the patriarch’s back that would go right through without harming him, or those shot from the front that would “rebound off his body back at the attacker” (García Márquez 43). Other rumors attest to his growing a third set of teeth at the age of one hundred and fifty, even when “in truth the vulture-ravaged body was no larger than that of any average man of our day” (García Márquez 43). The patriarch’s legendary status is compounded by history textbooks, which exaggerate his body, referring to him as a patriarch “of huge size who never left his house because he

could not fit through the door” (García Márquez 44). The myths surrounding the sovereign body continue to pervade the narrative during the third chapter, when the narrator, once again, suggests that the moment of discovery is defined by uncertainty. The narrator states that “no one could give in to the evidence that the senile body there gouged by vultures and infested with parasites from the depths of the sea was his,” attesting that there was “no trace of his life that could have led us to the unmistakable establishment of his identity” (García Márquez 80). Most notable is that the patriarch’s legendary status continues to punctuate the chapters even after his body undergoes the tradition of embalming. As the narrator states, “*He had skirted the reefs of so many earthly disorders, so many ominous eclipses, so many flaming tallow balls in the sky that it seemed impossible for someone from our time to trust still the prognostications of the cards regarding his fate*” (García Márquez 118). Media outlets have their fair share of responsibility for mythologizing the patriarch, for the newspapers still “display him to us as during ecstatic times and on the front page in his tenacious uniform...with more authority and diligence and better health than ever in spite of the fact that many years ago we had lost count of his age” (García Márquez 118). The myth of the patriarch is furthered by “the usual pictures” in which he dedicates well-known monuments or public installations that no one knew about in real life” (García Márquez 119). These legends are only compounded by what the narrator describes as multiple deaths. As stated, the patriarch has been discovered twice in this office, “alone and dead and dressed and dead seemingly of natural causes during his sleep, as had been announced a long time ago in the prophetic waters of soothsayers’ basins” (García Márquez 7). In all, legend and storytelling have constructed an unfathomable grandiosity over time. However, the many encounters with the corpse inject the text with a measured dose of realism, moving away from the realm of legend into the very specifics of the body. The body, beyond costume and other peripheral objects, is fully unrecognizable to the populace; and for that reason alone, the stamps, condom labels, and other propaganda used to perpetuate the myth are rendered at the very least exposed. In this way, encountering the corpse and failing to recognize the face are defining moments of the text. The body optics that occurs here reveals the sovereign body as a construction, a fabricated image, and a burlesque farce.

The instability of the body as viewed is reinforced by the many body stand-ins throughout the novel, which, while purporting to function as a way of sustaining the sovereign body, actually expose the sovereign body as an

ultimate fraud. The patriarch's doppelgänger Patricio Aragonés is a case in point. The patriarch's "simultaneous presence everywhere during the flinty years that preceded his first death, that going up as he went down, that going into ecstasy in the sea while in agony in unsuccessful loves were not a privilege of his nature," but rather the result of the "complete service and dog-like loyalty" of Patricio Aragonés, his perfect double" (García Márquez 9). This act of body doubling is certainly sincere in its desire for simulation: "He gave him his own food to eat, he gave him his own honey to drink with the same spoon so that he would at least die with the consolation that they had both died together" (García Márquez 19). Aragonés reminds him of this when, before his death by a poisoned dart, he proclaims "they would both meet death in a tie because all coins had all their faces on both sides" (García Márquez 21). However, the body stand-ins are ultimately exposed as a problem for sovereign rule more than a panacea. For example, Aragonés's sexual relations with the patriarch's many concubines in the palace create a multitude of children whose fathers are essentially unidentifiable: "From then on neither of them or any of the women either ever knew whose child was whose or by whom, because Patricio Aragonés's children were seven-monthers just like his" (García Márquez 12). In addition, the "first death" of the patriarch, which is actually Aragonés's, confirms the stand-in body as piece and parcel of the sovereign's body while at the same time an image of horror. When Aragonés dies, he indeed becomes a representation of the patriarch's death, which even his mother Bendición Alvarado believes has occurred for a certain period of time. When the patriarch witnesses the mirror image of himself during the funeral proceedings, his response to how his own body may be viewed is significant. He is "wounded by the horror and the shame of his own body of a military stud lying among the flowers, his face pale with powder, his lips painted, the hard hands of a dauntless young lady..." (García Márquez 26). The actual diminishment of the patriarch's body when replaced by the double is a complete erasure of the body as immortal: "[H]e felt raped and diminished by the inclemency of death toward the majesty of power, he saw life without him, he saw without a certain compassion how men were bereft of his authority" (García Márquez 27). Patricio Aragonés's literal disembodiment by assault groups is the ultimate deconstructive experience for the patriarch as a witness of his double's death. The patriarch watches as Aragonés's body is dragged through the streets, "feeling in his own flesh the ignominy of the spitting and the sick bed pans that were thrown on him as he went by, horrified by the

thought of being quartered and devoured by dogs..." (García Márquez 28).

The patriarch's response to what the narrator describes as a "profanation of his own body" conveys the absolute, unequivocal significance of the sovereign body vis-à-vis the torture of those who have endangered it. He binds and divides the assault groups, interrogating prisoners until he finally tires and hangs them "from a horizontal beam like parrots tied hand and foot with their heads down for hours on end"; after skinning one man alive, he prompts the prisoners' confessions and throws them to the crocodiles (García Márquez 34). The reign of purity that the patriarch attempts to then initiate after this event, proclaiming a general amnesty, inciting banners saying "God Save the All Pure who watches over the cleanliness of the nation," and even prompting the populace to beg for "the salt of health from his hands" suggests that the sovereign body's sacrilege calls for a cleansing that involves both civilian death and civic renewal. As a result, the patriarch builds "the largest stadium in the Caribbean," restores the March poetry festival, and resumes the election of a beauty queen in an attempt to characterize public health as commensurate with his own (García Márquez 34-35).

The patriarch's response to witnessing his death is also notable in that he resolves to ultimately extend his life by killing off the new government that has taken over since the funeral. In a sweeping exclamation of "God damn it, fuck death," General Rodrigo de Aguilar enacts a "butcher feast of the presidential guard" (García Márquez 31). The patriarch's response to the cabinet's holocaust is important, for he resolves to "only keep the presidential guard who are straight shooters," as well as "just a good minister of health which is the only thing anyone really needs in life" (García Márquez 30-31). This moment in the text reveals the ultimate result of Aragonés's death: a clear witnessing of the patriarch's mortality and his subsequent refusal to accept his death at all costs. The patriarch's own words convey such sentiments: "I don't intend to die again, God damn it, let other people die" (García Márquez 31). Ironically, the patriarch becomes the pre-viewer who witnesses his corpse and is terrified by his image: his body optics are equally powerful in representing the sovereign body as mortal and capable of disintegration. The patriarch's witnessing of the sovereign body in ruins is also monumental in that it reveals the dissolution of the very power the populace observes with the half-eaten corpse they encounter later on. In this way, Aragonés plays an importantly prophetic role in the text: he allows for a preview body optics of the patriarch's fall or demise that will later be encountered by the discovery

of the patriarch's corpse. It can be argued that this foreshadowing of a death before death suggests an insidious degree of the body's progression toward self-destruction. Regardless of how the patriarch responds to his death, the doppelgänger Aragonés represents a foreboding of the patriarch's fall much more than a preservative body.

In addition to the patriarch's body optics, the doubling of his body is also indicative of a notable level of psychological uncertainty. As the narrator suggests, the more the body proliferates, the more paranoid the patriarch becomes. The text observes that "his fierce struggle to exist twice was feeding the contrary suspicion that he was existing less and less, that he was lying in a lethargy, that the guard had been doubled..." (García Márquez 19). The patriarch's paranoia about his health reinforces this sense of diminishment and continues to pervade the narrative. This is revealed when he asks his sole Minister of Health about nightmares he has had about his death, at which point the Minister reveals that "his death has already occurred once in the history of men general sir" (García Márquez 85).

Interestingly, the patriarch's mother Bendición Alvarado's stand-in is also fatally flawed. When Bendición dies, the patriarch unwraps her "loathsome" body from the sheet and discovers an "identical body with the hand on the heart painted in profile on the sheet, and he saw that the painted body had no plague wrinkles or ravages of old age but that it was firm and tight as if painted in oil" (García Márquez 126). Bendición's painted body on "eternal linen," the image of the body that cannot be effaced even when using "nitrate rock" and "boiling it in lye," seems at first to be the paragon of immortality. This is, of course, reinforced by the pomp and pageantry of her funeral processions:

[T]he fame of the funeral ceremonies had come down to our times... the body had been carried in a solemn procession to the least-explored corners of his realm so that no one would go without the privilege of honoring her memory... mournful throngs who had come to see the power hidden in the shadows of the presidential coach. (García Márquez 127)

The parading of Bendición's body through the "nauseating vapors of the swamps" to be displayed in "backwoods public schools, in barracks on the saltpeter deserts, in Indian corrals" is not altogether unlike her son's own stints in his presidential coach. Likewise, the way in which they reconstruct her body

"in secret sessions as the cosmetics wore off" so that she can preclude any "suspicion of substitution" (namely, so that the townspeople cannot say that she was any different than the official portrait taken by a Venetian photographer) indicates the way in which Bendición literally and figuratively upholds the patriarch's invisible power (García Márquez 129). The canonization of Bendición and her transformation into a saint (once the nuncio is banished on a raft, of course, for questioning the validity of the painted sheet) reveals her body's importance in not only perpetuating the holiness of the patriarch's reign but the health of the nation as well. As stories about Bendición concur, "she held health in her hand, she was a living saint, father" (García Márquez 138).

However, long before the patriarch dies, we learn that the corpse the populace has been viewing is a complete sham. The preservation of Bendición's corpse "on a catafalque of ice" for public veneration "long before anyone thought about the merits of [her] sainthood and only to contradict the evil tongue that said you were rotting away before you died" is deconstructed by the fact that her body has been stuffed "just like the posthumous animals in science museums" and now weighs no more than a "sun-dried gourd, with the limbs falling off by themselves" (García Márquez 145). The ultimate act of betrayal is therefore not at all surprising: the patriarch's realization that the profanation of the sovereign body—in this case, his mother's body—comprises of selling the relics of the dead bride's gown:

the same ones who had printed the little cards and coined the medals with her portrait as a queen, aha, the ones who enriched themselves with curls from her head, aha, with the flasks of water drawn from her side, aha, with the shroud of diagonal cloth where they used door paint to sketch the tender body of a virgin sleeping in profile with her hand on her heart. (García Márquez 145)

Clearly, the preservation of the corpse as uncorrupted is a monstrous lie "before the avid eyes of the endless throng that filed through the main nave of the cathedral" (García Márquez 145). This body full of "a dusty stuffing that crumbled just by being lifted in the phosphorescent air," what the narrator describes as the "remains of the demolished mother," is the quintessence of a corpse that exists only as a surface of false relics and idolatry. The patriarch's retributive, "supreme" decision to override such vacuous pageantry, by declaring

his mother a civil saint and naming her “patroness of the nation,” reveals the absolute irreverent commitment to the sovereign body as nation, even when the perfidy of pomp and pageantry has foregrounded its falsehoods (García Márquez 148). The expulsion of the powers of the Holy See that proceeds such a declaration of “the patrimony of Saint Bendición Alvarado of the Birds,” and the rockets of celebration and civil canonization that follow, underscore the way in which the sovereign body continues to perpetuate its myth long after its fraudulent underpinnings are exposed.

Other stand-in bodies, such as the patriarch’s wife Leticia and especially his son Emanuel, appointed a military general at the time of birth and paraded around as a miniature representation of his father (Leticia takes him in his baby carriage to “preside over official acts as representative”), are also destroyed. As Giorgio Agamben suggests, the importance of the son in upholding the sovereign body cannot be eluded, for he is “already originarily and immediately subject to a power of life and death with respect to father. The *puer* son symbolically affirms precisely the cosubstantiality of the *vitae necisque potestas* with sovereign power” (89). Emanuel’s central role in the novel is, in fact, substantiated by multiple sons of tyrants throughout history. For example, Rafael Trujillo’s son Ramfis Trujillo “grew to be an extension of the ruling apparatus and became incredibly rich at the expense of the Dominican population. He was also in charge of sections of the Dominican military during his father’s regime....” (Galván 50). Notably, when Emanuel and Leticia are eaten alive by hunting dogs, their bodies, literally consumed by the animals, are so central that the presidential guard is eternally dishonored by its inability to preserve any more than the “bare bones scattered among the bloody vegetables” (García Márquez 187). Like the other defunct stand-ins, they “drown along with the dogs in a hellish whirlpool, [and] we could only see the instantaneous signs of some ephemeral hands reaching out to us while the rest of the body was disappearing into pieces” (García Márquez 187). The narrators’ recounting of the literal destruction of the sovereign body as represented by the deaths of multiple stand-ins suggests a shift in the Foucaultian panopticon. Instead of witnessing the torture of the *homo sacer*, the sovereign body and all of its stand-ins are ultimately destroyed. While not an exact stand-in in the text, other shadows purportedly serve a similar role in promulgating the sovereign body’s demise. When General Rodrigo de Aguilar, who is literally described as not only the patriarch’s “lifelong comrade” but the “tranquil shadow,” one of the “few mortals authorized to beat him in a game of dominoes,” is killed

off and served for consumption on a platter of “pine nuts and aromatic herbs,” García Márquez suggests that the consumption of the body can be an initial reference to the deterioration of the sovereign body (García Márquez 13, 117).

In addition to these destabilizing stand-ins, the body that can change form and move through walls presents an additional challenge for the sovereign body. General Saturno Santos, for example, possesses the capacity so that to “change his form at will, curse him, he could turn into an armadillo or a pond general, he could become thunder, and he knew it was true because his most astute trackers had lost his trail ever since last Christmas. . .” (García Márquez 55). While not all tricksters are ultimately subversive—Santos ends up becoming the patriarch’s right-hand man who “kissed the ground he had trod and asked him the favor of letting me serve you. . .”—he represents some of the challenges to come that manifest themselves in Manuela Sánchez’s body, which can move through walls “because she came and went as was her will” and disappears when she so desires (García Márquez 56–67, 63). She moves freely through the presidential palace into the patriarch’s room, “where no woman had ever entered or was to enter” (García Márquez 64). It is, indeed, significant that Manuela’s body is not only supernatural, but that her body optics offers a view of the patriarch that deconstructs the sovereign body and eventually foregrounds its tragedy. For example, when the patriarch goes to visit her in the “dogfight district” where she lives with her mother, Manuela sits down on the sofa next to him “where the gush of his fetid body odor would not reach her,” and then she “dares to look at him face to face for the first time,” examining his “bat lips,” “mute eyes,” and “the ring with the presidential seal exhausted on his knee, his baggy linen suit as if there were nobody inside...good lord, such a sad man” (García Márquez 71). Manuela’s ability to see the patriarch for who he is instead of how he is represented on coins and stamps provides a distinct counter-narrative to the national legend that is even more pronounced when she disappears during the eclipse the patriarch has prepared for her (García Márquez 79). As a result, she is one of the central figures for a study of the novel’s body optics.

In addition, to these subversive imposters and elusive bodies, the deconstruction of the sovereign body also occurs via the multiple narrators’ realizations, during many points throughout the novel, that the patriarch’s body exists of body parts more than anything else. The townspeople only see the “quivering lips, the palm of a hand which waved from the limbo of glory” on the presidential coach, or an “anonymous hand with a velvet glove which

waved from a window of the presidential stateroom” (García Márquez 15). In this way, the body optics before the revelation of a full-fledged corpse promote an imagined body, not an actual one. After a horrific hurricane wreaks havoc on the Caribbean, the patriarch proceeds to reconstruct the country as a result of its damage: “[T]he multitude crowded into the main square to glorify the most worthy one who had put the hurricane dragon to flight” (García Márquez 95). As the patriarch is led onto the balcony, he hears:

the unanimous clamor which got into his innards like the wind of an evil sea, long live the stud, because ever since the first days of his regime he understood the unprotected state of being seen by a whole city at the same time, his words turned to stone, he understood in a flash of mortal lucidity that he did not have the courage nor would he ever have it to appear at full length before the chasm of a crowd, so on the main square we only caught sight of the usual ephemeral image, the glimpse of an ungraspable old man dressed in denim who imparted a silent blessing from the presidential balcony and immediately disappeared, but that fleeting vision was enough to sustain the confidence that he was there. . . the only thing that gave us security on earth was the certainty that he was there. (García Márquez 96)

However, when the body is finally encountered in its full form, the collective narrators render the corpse unknowable beyond myth and symbol, insignia or uniform. As the corpse lies on the banquet table, the phrase “*There he was, then, as if it had been he even though it might not be*” suggests that the corpse as a whole body is inherently unstable. This, in turn, underscores the hoax of body parts that has pervaded the pomp and pageantry and display of the body—the moment of realization that the body is unrecognizable makes the autumn of the patriarch complete.

In addition to the problem of a body part as stand-in, the narrative body optics regarding the actual physical body is yet another way in which García Márquez deconstructs the sovereign body. Despite the patriarch’s attempt to portray the sovereign body as immortal, his body is depicted as dysfunctional. When the body is discovered at the beginning of the narrative, he is described as having “a herniated testicle the size of an ox kidney”; this is only reinforced

later on when the narrator describes his dragging feet, buzzing ears, hernia, and “rancid armpits” (García Márquez 6, 10, 17). His struggles with urination—the narrator describes him as bolting his door at night and urinating on the portable latrine in drops—are yet another example of sovereign incontinence (García Márquez 63). As Patricia Molen asserts, “Just as male potency comes to represent the Patriarch’s political power, the inability to control eliminatory functions becomes an ingenious symbol for political incontinence” (1). In addition, when the patriarch meets his soon-to-be wife Leticia Nazareno, he is forced to confront the extent of his “body of shit”:

the anxiety of his kidneys, the artillery battery that was his intestines, the mortal tearing off of the tender tentacle that pulled his guts out by the roots and turned him into a beheaded animal whose tumbling death throes sprinkled the snowy sheets with a hot and sour matter. (García Márquez 156)

The sexually defunct body and ailing body juxtapose the “urgencies of the body,” exposing the disease underneath his shroud of immortal health and longevity. The Minister of Health’s own observations reinforce such a portrayal, for he notes that “his arteries had turned to glass, he had beach-sand sediment in his kidneys, and his heart was cracked from a lack of love”; he is a man who has been betrayed by his own body (García Márquez 243-244). If the king’s body must also and above all represent the very excess of the emperor’s sacred life, which is isolated in the image, the ailing sovereign body as viewed by Márquez’s many narrative voices serves as a contrast to that image, not only because it cannot be even confirmed but because it possesses the image of dysfunction and fails to match the celebrated image. As Julio Ortega states, the reality of the patriarch is one of absolute contrast; he is a dictator “whose totalizing mythological dimensions run counter to his diminished and reductive individualism. . . his origins are uncertain; and his sexuality, a stigma [my translation]” (437). That the panopticon reveals such a decrepit portrayal is important, for the act of viewing the patriarch’s body, as we see with Manuela Sánchez’s body optics, exposes a different narrative than the national tale that has constructed the body as eternal, consistently healthy, and fruitful. As the patriarch ages, the narrator describes his fading memory, his decrepit feet, and his severe hearing loss in a clear attestation to his weakened body (García Márquez 120-121).

Another important aspect of body optics that subverts the sovereign body is the patriarch's absolutely merciless disposition of bodies. This is revealed at the very beginning of the novel when Aragonés dies and the patriarch's construction of his body is exposed. In fact, it's clear that Aragonés is a constructed double, one whose body has actually been created by the patriarch, making him an orphan and a victim of oppression and torture. The reader learns at this point that Aragonés's feet have been flattened by tamping hands and his testicles pierced by "a shoemaker's awl so that [he] would develop a rupture, then by making me drink turpentine so I would forget how to read and write..." (García Márquez 23). The narrative witnessing of such a body optics foregrounds the sovereign body as a destructive voice and a symbol of death, dependent on the "subtraction and extraction of goods, services, and blood from its own subjects" (Campbell and Sitze 373). For example, he rigs the national lottery, using children who pick his numbers and then jailing them in the thousands. When his human rights violations are discovered, he sends them up in "nocturnal boxcars to the least-inhabited regions of the country while he confronted the storm unleashed by the official and solemn declaration that it was not true" (García Márquez 103). After appeasing them with candy and toys, he orders his officers to "put the children in a barge loaded with cement, take them singing to the limits of the territorial waters, blow them up with a dynamite charge..." (García Márquez 106). He then kills off the officers who follow his orders, but only after decorating them with medals of loyalty. The patriarch's utter control of life and death—and time itself—intensely contrasts his own multiple deaths, suggesting that the sovereign body is not reconstructive but instead rests on the deaths of civilians as much as on the promise of his personal health and resurrections. The conscious display of others' deaths becomes perhaps just as important for the patriarch as their erasure. In the case of the leper who tries to assassinate him, the general orders the body's dismemberment into parts to be strewn and put on display in a variety of different places around the country, so that there would be "no one who didn't know how those who raised their hands against their father ended up..." (García Márquez 113). General Rodrigo de Aguilar's betrayal, and his resultant display on a platter, is yet another case in point:

Entered on a silver tray stretched out full length on a garnish of cauliflower and laurel leaves, steeped with spices, oven

brown, embellished with the uniform of five golden almonds for solemn occasions and the limitless loops for valor on the sleeve of his right arm, fourteen pounds of medals on his chest and a sprig of parsley in his mouth, ready to be served at a banquet on comrades by the official carvers to the petrified horror of the guests as without breathing we witness the exquisite ceremony of carving and serving, and when every plate held an equal portion of minister of defense stuffed with pine nuts and aromatic herbs, he gave the order to begin, eat hearty gentleman. (García Márquez 117)

At a later point in his reign, he employs the electric chair, visiting a horror laboratory in which they employ political prisoners to essentially test "the throne of death," which leads to electrical outages in the city (García Márquez 179). And the ultimate disposal of bodies occurs with the employment of José Ignacio Saenz de la Barra, whose main role is to sustain the sovereign body by killing as many citizens as possible. With de la Barra's attestation that "with every six heads sixty enemies are produced and then six thousand and then six million, the whole country, God damn it," the holocaust and continuous barbarism of the nation's populace remain in place in order to protect the sovereign's body. The narrative's inclusion of such a body optics and its exposure of such destruction allow readers to see both the sovereign body's instability alongside the authority to kill in order to maintain sovereign rule.

Most importantly, though, it is the failed reconstruction of the patriarch's corpse by the populace that serves as a sign of the sovereign body's mortality. The failure of the collective narrator's attempts to procure the "stamp of authority he needed if we were to put him on display for the masses" signals the deconstructing of the body more than its reconstitution (García Márquez 157). When the narrators have discovered the body, "when we finished taking out the rotten husks of the cows and putting a little order into that fabulous disarray," they realize that there is no way of telling if the corpse "looked like its legendary image" (García Márquez 157). The result of such dissonance is a literal attempt to reconstruct that image, scraping the body with fish scalers to remove the deep-sea shark suckers, washing it down with creolin and rock salt to fix marks of putrefaction, and powdering the face with starch to hide the burlap repairs and paraffin stuffing used to restore the patriarch's face. However, their re-creation ultimately fails: "[N]ot even the glass eye stuck into

the empty sockets could give him the stamp of authority he needed if we were to put him on display for the masses” (García Márquez 157). The complete failure of the sovereign body’s reconstruction after death attests to the end of its history. This is reinforced by the narrative’s allusion to a certain inability to reconstitute the past, during which “there was no other nation except the one that had been made by him in his own image and likeness where space was changed and time corrected by the designs of his absolute will” (García Márquez 159). There is temporal meaning to such a realization, suggesting that the fall of the patriarch can be interpreted as the failure to reconstruct, redecorate, and revive the corpse. The defunct sovereign body therefore symbolizes a certain degree of revolutionary hope, the notion that there is some sense of a future ahead that can eclipse the corpse and attain some semblance of national—and even regional—closure and renewal.

In essence, Gabriel García Márquez’s *The Autumn of the Patriarch* can serve as a conduit for understanding the Latin American biopolitical novel. While Robin Fiddian has namely explored “body matters” in García Márquez’s *Leaf Storm*, scholars have yet to seriously unite García Márquez with Latin American biopolitical studies. Yet, as Fiddian himself attests, “the body is a conspicuous and recurrent theme in García Márquez’s fiction,” in particular as an instrument of resistance and a metaphor of the text (79). If readers also end with a corpse in *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, a renewed focus on the post-mortem existence of the Latin American body, and how it relates to the body politic, seems warranted. The mortuary scenes and onset of *rigor mortis* in García Márquez’s work unveil the potentiality for myriad biopolitical readings and open up the possibility for greater and more serious study of Latin American biopolitical literature. *The Autumn of the Patriarch* is an ideal example of the potential of such biopolitical readings. By uniting diverse voices in “the unity of all against the despotism of centuries,” Gabriel García Márquez employs a “plebeian presence through Caribbean song” in order to deconstruct the sovereign body both literally and figuratively (Bell-Villada 481). Using a body optics of testimony, what could be described as “alternating the voices of testimony [my translation],” García Márquez explores the way in which sightings of the body can yield new potentialities for a future Latin America (Ortega 439). The “frantic crowds who [take] to the streets singing hymns of joy at the jubilant news of [the patriarch’s] death” and “the music of liberation and the rockets of jubilation and the bells of glory that announced to the world the good news that the uncountable time of eternity had come

to an end” suggest that the sovereign body in death signifies social renewal instead of tyrannical immortality. In this way, García Márquez offers readers a new way of using sovereign bodies for social reconstitution and recovery. The “disembodied god...the fabricated newscasts, false medals of imaginary victories, and even an official imposter” are supplanted by a chorus of jubilation, a dissolution of the sovereign body into a corpse with glass eyes and stuffed arms, a transformed effigy of what it was once (Tobin 67).

While numerous scholars would like to believe that the patriarch’s power resides in the stuffed corpse, this interpretation isn’t supported by the text’s final scene. The jubilation that ensues as the literal death of the patriarch is announced suggests that the dictator is no longer immortal as corpse—and that the corpse, unlike the body, indicates a new era for Latin America. Perhaps surprisingly, then, the terror-infused *The Autumn of the Patriarch* is a novel of hope, revealing how biopolitical novels can yield new approaches to the body that can be reconstructive in nature.

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## ARTISTIC EXPLORATION AND SUBJECTIVE TRANSFORMATION IN MARIO MENDOZA'S NARRATIVE

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Colombian narratives of the turn of the twenty first century present individuals in extremely vulnerable conditions of psychological distress in order to underline the subjective crisis that affects a substantial percentage of the population. These texts identify some of the sources of violence that contribute to an environment of desperation and hopelessness: The evident violence of armed groups, criminal organizations, and common delinquency, and the veiled violence of global consumer capitalism. The most evident symptoms of psychological distress are individual's inability to identify one's place within society, a feeling of stagnation, and a lack of direction and sense of self-worth. Writers seek to illustrate the pervasiveness of evil and emphasize its inevitability. At the same time, these narratives aim to create an emotional affect to encourage a sense of social responsibility or at least an awareness of the prevailing social injustice. Furthermore, these narratives aspire to be a space for the inception, negotiation, and construction of alternative paths of self-definition and social inclusion. An example of this type of production is Mario Mendoza's work, which proposes a narrative of denunciation against marginalization and corruption.<sup>1</sup>

In his novel *Apocalipsis* (2011), Mario Mendoza states his desire to pay back an old debt acquired with *La ciudad de los umbrales* (1992) by immersing his characters into the depths of a new urban inferno. Mendoza published seven other works in between the years 1992 and 2011. *Apocalipsis* brings this fictional universe full circle. The protagonists of these nine novels have

one element in common: they all attended the same art seminar. Consequently, these works constitute a fictional universe that derives from this shared experience of artistic exploration. There is a constellation of characters: Simón Tebcheranny, Marcos Salamanca, Gerardo Montenegro, Horacio Villalobos, Marcelo Tafur, and Samuel Sotomayor. Some of them reappear in different novels, either as friends who communicate through letters or references to the past in casual conversations. *Apocalipsis* (2011) encompasses all prior works and as a central station it constitutes the location where all stories merge and find their conclusion. In *Apocalipsis*, the reader finds out that each character has written at least one novel, some as many as three, and that the titles coincide with each one of the novels published by Mario Mendoza. Consequently, all of these writers are Mendoza's fictional alter egos. I have no intention, however, to explore the relationship between the authorial voice and the fictional characters. My objective is to observe Mendoza's proposal on the process of subjective transformation that influences the artistic production of all of these characters. I propose that in Mendoza's narrative, art supports subjectivity as it provides individuals with the materials to transform pain into knowledge.

By creating this rhizomatic constellation of artistic explorations, Mendoza illustrates the commonality of elements and conditions that motivate different processes of subjective transformation through art. In Mendoza's narrative, art is performative, produces realities, and has the potential to support individuals' escape from subjectification. *Mapa Bogotá*, for example, is an artistic installation, developed by Samuel Sotomayor in *Cobro de sangre* and at the same time it is a metaphor of the subjective and artistic processes developed by all the members of the seminar. This map is relevant within the constellation of Mendoza's works because the elements that constitute its inception and development reflect the processes of subjective transformation proposed in the nine novels. These processes consist of four different stages that I will describe in the following pages: a new understanding of the city's surface, the cleansing of the doors of perception, becoming with the city, and creation of a work of art.

### The city as the object of artistic exploration

Mendoza's works emphasize the artists' struggles with the object; their preoccupation with a narrative project that seeks to capture the city's sublime images. Following the twentieth century literary tradition, Mendoza's works

point to the idiosyncratic character of the Latin American context, which resists any imposition of a European narrative model. Their initial goal is to position the city as an artistic referent, "¿cómo convertir a Bogotá en una ciudad literaria, o en un referente novelesco?" (*Apocalipsis* 247). However, they soon realize that Bogotá is not Paris and that whoever tries to approach it takes the risk of succumbing to its dark force, "cuando se sienta a escribir con la ilusión de construir una obra sublime, no puede hacerlo... ese escritor es perseguido por las voces temblorosas que emiten las zonas oscuras de la ciudad moderna" (*Apocalipsis* 97). The objective, then, becomes an ambitious, almost contradictory enterprise, to immerse oneself completely in the depths of the city while at the same time finding a way to avoid being a victim of its corruption.

Mendoza's novels are diagnostic narratives. They present a symptomatology of the mental disease that affects a substantial percentage of the population. Some of his characters display severe symptoms of paranoia, depression, and delusion, while others present milder manifestations of anxiety, fear, and sadness. The indigence that overflows the streets shows that this psychological deterioration paralyzes individuals. Citizens are indifferent to the struggle of thousands of homeless and displaced people. State institutions appear pervaded by corruption and the dynamics of power involve practices of marginalization and persecution.

The protagonists in each novel have similar stories of misfortune; their lives have been marked by their relatives' death, either from assassination or mental illness. The combination of social conditions, personal tragedies, and a particular sensitivity towards reality places these characters in a marginal position. These narratives identify the prevalence of alcoholism, drug addiction, and mental illness as symptoms of the impact of violence and corruption on the population's psyche. The protagonists will do anything to avoid falling down the same path. Furthermore, as Simón Tebcheranny explains in *Scorpio City*, they cannot identify themselves with consumer society's imperative of self-realization, entrepreneurship, and economic productivity: "No encajo. Me he quedado fuera, como un engranaje suelto o como un piñón alejado de la maquinaria a la que inicialmente perteneció" (168). Consequently, the art seminar is not solely a space where they can explore their intellectual interests, but in a way, the last resort for survival. Art becomes the only alternative that can support individuals' escape from a vicious cycle of violence and mental illness.

Violence and corruption reproduce and multiply like rats. In fact, Bogotá's citizens are described as rodents in hell's sewer, as *Scorpio City*'s narrator states, "[s]er bogotano es pertenecer a las cloacas del infierno. Por eso aquí ciudadano es sinónimo de roedor" (19).<sup>2</sup> In this scenario, the options are reduced to two: either attack or be devoured. *Scorpio city*'s character, Sinisterra, is cornered by death squads committed to social cleansing, and his body is "semidevorado por las ratas" (164). Mendoza's artists, then, propose a third option: if they are all rats, instead of going after each other, they must assume the rodent qualities of movement and evasion; they must flee through the depths in order to reach the city's thresholds. If the city is a shared experience of suffering and survival, and as a menacing entity it eliminates the possibility of rest, then one must perpetually flee. The key is to find thresholds and avoid being cornered in a stalemate. Mendoza's narrative adheres to the Kafkaesque character of the human that becomes animal in order to escape itself and subjectification. Accordingly, the mole/rat's digging/exploration of the furrow requires in the first place a change of vision on the perception of the space.<sup>3</sup>

### Urban geology

The city's distribution of stratified territories reveals an underlying micro-political hierarchy; its landscape is divided as a grid, crossed by avenues and streets, along which "unos mamíferos se desplazaban siempre con los objetivos predeterminados en la cabeza" (*Apocalipsis* 162). Each line delimits a territory of social and cultural belonging. Individuals identify themselves according to this grid and distinguish themselves from the other who is seen with apprehension. The control machines target specific territories of indigence and promote paramilitary interventions of social cleansing. To escape this persecution, the rodent alternative requires a new understanding of the city's space. This new approach envisages the city as a multi-dimensional surface that has depth and numerous potential trajectories that lead to unpredictable thresholds. A vertical perspective of different layers superimposed on the city's surface replaces the horizontal separation between the downtown and the periphery, South and North, the red zone (prostitution district) and the pink zone (exclusive upper-class neighborhood).

Marcos, *Apocalipsis*'s narrator, defines the landscape as an urban geology, the exploration of the multiple spaces that constitute the city, "urdí la hipótesis de una geología urbana, de una serie de capas que iban componiendo la ciudad,

unas sobre las otras o al lado de éstas, tejiendo una red espaciotemporal que yo deseaba captar con mi cámara de fotografía" (162). These layers, like the Bergsonian planes of reality, are not imagined or hidden, they coexist parallel to other realities; they simply require a certain suspension to be perceivable.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, this emphasis on layers or plateaus reveals that Mendoza's narrative is influenced by his readings of Deleuze and Guattari's work. In his first novel, *La ciudad de los umbrales*, for example, the epigraph from *A Thousand Plateaus* introduces one of the essential propositions of the novel, that travelling does not require long journeys. The objective is not the imperial conquest of unknown lands. On the contrary, there is no need to leave the city or undertake any journey; travelling is about an exploration of the smooth spaces that allow the individual to experience all the intensities. The rodent alternative and urban geology proposed by Mendoza dialogue with Deleuze and Guattari's distinction between smooth and striated spaces.

According to these authors, "even the most striated city gives rise to smooth spaces" where the individual envisions new modes of being in the world (*ATP* 500). Mendoza's subject as rodent/geologist is Deleuze and Guattari's urban nomad, explorer of a horizonless milieu, for whom there are no forbidden territories. Mendoza's nomad takes long walks without a specific destination in mind, gets on any random bus, and descends at any point to continue walking, he transverses the city, immerses himself in the most obscure and lawless environments, interacts with the indigents, prostitutes, street vendors, musicians, house wives, employees, the young and the elderly. The inception of artistic projects such as *Mapa Bogotá* and *Puertas* requires, in the first place, an attitude of surrender; the artist must wander the streets, offering his senses, waiting, hoping, trusting, that the city might reveal those smooth spaces. The urban geology is an immersion on what constitutes the city's delirium.

While the striated geography of the city territorializes individuals within social classes, the urban geology reveals that the city has different layers defined, not by a group of individuals, but by indissoluble, fluid, and permeable collectivities. When Mendoza's narrators point to the city's delirium, they refer not only to the psychological phenomena displayed by its citizens but also to the prevalence of a heterogeneous content in their modes of existence. The nomadism of the urban geologist allows him to observe the social, political, tribal, and racial content of the city's delirium, which contains multiple time-spaces that converge and coexist alongside,

Una Bogotá primitiva, prehistórica, llena de hordas de recicladores de basura, de tribus con garrotes en las manos que hacen fuego debajo de los puentes... estamos en la prehistoria, estamos en el Medioevo, estamos en el presente, y estamos también en el futuro. (*Apocalipsis* 163)

The multiplicity of these anachronistic spaces contrasts with the uniformity of the modern metropolis. For the individual who is trying to escape the subjectification imposed by modernity, the experience of these spaces is reassuring; he becomes aware of the existence of alternative forms of life. The city's delirium demonstrates that there is a libidinal flow that prevents collectivities from being controlled, shaped, and stratified. It asserts the existence of certain collectivities that resist modernity's complete exhaustion of subjectivity.

In her essay "Figuras de la ciudad en la literatura colombiana contemporánea: ¿Infierno o laberinto?" María Angélica Semilla emphasizes the destructive elements that prevail in Mendoza's descriptions. She concludes that to wander in this inferno is to experience the concentration of all the destructive forces that have marked the history of humanity:

El espacio urbano y su habitante desvelado dan cuenta de las mutaciones y desgarramientos de una modernidad pervertida, en la que las figuraciones arquetípicas se fragmentan y se dispersan, y en la que las fuerzas oscuras de la destrucción saturan el mundo. (56)

I agree with Semilla in that Mendoza's narrative is both for his characters, and his readers, a confrontation with the most obscure forces that inhabit the city. This urban geology, however, is not just a diagnosis of the wasteland that results from modernity; it is also an exhibition of the heterogeneous, dynamic, and mutable qualities of the urban cultures: "Esta urbe que suma distintos pliegues en su interior inaugura un nuevo barroco entrópico tercermundista en constante proceso de construcción y de mutación" (*Apocalipsis* 163). These collectivities, which live in the margins as dregs of society, generate their own sense of self as part of the collective subculture that embraces them. Despite the homogeneous imperative of modernity, these subcultures continuously generate processes of subjective transformation.<sup>5</sup>

One example of these subcultures is the community of recyclers of *El*

*cartucho*. A consumer society that maintains a utilitarian attitude towards objects and individuals, sooner or later finds itself drowning in a sea of disposed elements, which requires cleansing mechanisms. In Mendoza's narrative garbage disposal and social cleansing are parallel, undifferentiated practices that are necessary to ensure the wellbeing of a privileged class and maintain "el círculo vicioso de los apegos y los consumos" (*Scorpio* 131). The pejorative denomination *desechables* illustrates society's tendency to discard non-productive individuals. On the other hand, the labor of recycling goes beyond the retrieval of raw materials that reenter the cycle of production. For the families that find their sustenance in this activity, it is a form of resistance against society's propensity for disposal. At the same time that they collect "pedazos rotos de muñecos, bracitos y piernas de plástico que aparecían a veces entre papeles y residuos de metal" (131), they take in those who, for many reasons, find themselves homeless, wandering the streets as walking dead. Instead of acquiring and disposing, they collect and rehabilitate, which entails a form of resistance against the destructive force of the consumer society.

*Scorpio city* illustrates this particular form of solidarity that persists in the streets, despite the scarcity of sources, in Sinisterra's rescue by a recycler, "que recorría el lugar con su carro de madera y divisó [su] cuerpo arrojado en el andén, y presintió, por el pelo enmarañado, la barba y las ropas en desorden, que era uno de los suyos" (125). This last expression "uno de los suyos" emphasizes a sense of community among those who cling to survival despite society's mechanisms of social cleansing. After this episode, and longing for human contact, Sinisterra builds his own recycling cart "con ayuda de dos basureros que le demostraron una cierta solidaridad e ingresó a la comunidad de recolectores de basura del Cartucho" (131). Among the recyclers he finds a place and a purpose. All individuals partake in a common space where they sleep and cohabit. Sinisterra calls them *la tribu*, the tribe, not only for their anachronistic practices — they have no purchasing power, no property or formal employment, and they use campfires to keep warm — but also because they protect each other from the continuous threat of squads of social cleansing. As the narration progresses the violence escalates and *la tribu* has to activate its own mechanisms of defense, which only makes the fight more vicious. Many people die and one may think *la tribu* is destined to disappear but the streets receive disposed individuals every day.

Like the recycling subculture, the rap performers of Ciudad Bolívar generate processes of subjective transformation despite the homogeneous

imperative of modernity. They create a politicized, protest-based, and community oriented discourse that combines both lyrics and bodily expression in order to construct the image of a disarticulated body. Their performative “giros, contracciones, retorcimientos, ritmos veloces, convulsiones y respiraciones agitadas” (168), and uncensored lyrics stress an individual resistance to domination as part of a larger collective oppositional objective. *Scorpio city*’s narrator places the rap subculture in opposition to the cult subculture in order to emphasize their differences. Both have the ability to mobilize masses and create a multiplicity of realities. However, while the cult practices “un nuevo comportamiento insectívoro urbano” (168), in other words manipulates individuals into accepting one specific truth and a homogenous body, the rap culture continuously challenges individuals to question and resist dominance, and to maintain individual freedom of thought and expression:

La gran masa popular está siendo movilizada a través del oído: la secta, el predicador, el orador extático que exorciza, anuncia, sana, clama y profetiza nuevos mundos. Una energía se apodera de miles de cerebros e inventa modos de vida y percepciones colectivas... En esas frecuencias nuestro cerebro es controlable. El rap: un movimiento de contracultura que despierta la atención sobre el fenómeno del oído. El predicador versus el rapero. (168)

Art supports subjective processes that allow these marginal individuals to turn “los infiernos interiores en fuerzas positivas” (170). Their lyrics question the injustice of economic distribution, paramilitary brutality, racism, consumer capitalism, and denounce the country’s internal conflict’s impact on its youth. The rap subculture exploits the potential of music to transform hate, fear, and pain into a positive expression of solidarity and empowerment. They get together to generate a space to share ideas, but in their unity they maintain a sense of self-respect for their individuality. They find in this artistic expression a new sense of being in the world. They find agency in their power to voice their own vision of the world and produce new cultural and artistic products. The rap subculture is one of many examples that give evidence to the city’s phenomenon of social mutation, which resists stratification within categories of class, race, legality, or political affiliation. Mendoza’s protagonists observe these subcultures and become aware of the mutability and dynamism

of reality. The material, language and sensations, to produce their own artistic contribution of alternative realities lies in front of their eyes provided they assume the geologist understanding of space and are open to new ways of perceiving the world.

### Doors of perception

Mendoza’s characters, like the Romantics, understand the need to alter one’s vision to get access to these alternative spaces. Samuel’s “aventura consistía en abrir nuevas puertas en su conocimiento de la realidad” (*Cobra* 121). William Blake’s words on the doors of perception in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, “if the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, infinite” (36), convey the imperative that launches these characters’ journey. From the first novel, *La ciudad de los umbrales*, the city of thresholds, Mendoza displays a process where each of the protagonists immerses in the city in order to cleanse their perception and access the world and themselves in a new and unforeseen way. Marcos in *Apocalipsis* identifies these doors almost by chance when something in a narrow alley attracts his attention and curiosity, “me tropezaba con lo que yo denominaba puertas, es decir zonas que comunicaban con otras realidades” (82), and gradually, his intuition guides him in the exploration and experience of these spaces, “sentía que mi mente se transportaba a otros espacios y a otros tiempos” (82). Despite this straightforward affiliation with the romantic imperative, Mendoza’s narrative turns to a Zen Buddhist perspective when it comes to the definition of the ego. While for the romantics the self should be decentered to become a moral agent and a superior individual, Mendoza’s characters go beyond to propose a complete stripping of the ego.

Mendoza’s narrative is consistent in the definition of a fundamental problem: the lack of identification with the hegemonic subject position generates a crisis of subjectivity. Modernity limits individuals’ ability to generate any life style outside global consumer capitalism. To counteract modernity’s exhaustion of subjectivity, subjectification as the culmination of a process of reflection on one’s position and value in the world, Mendoza’s narrative proposes, like Michel Foucault, the refusal of this reflection. Foucault encourages modern people to stop thinking about the I, instead “promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries” (51). In fact, this is a fundamental event

in the subjective transformations that take place in the novels *Buda Blues*, *Los hombres invisibles*, and *Cobro de sangre*. In *Buda Blues*, Sebastian explains that it is the ego that produces pain and suffering. Buddhist practice teaches him to take some distance from his ego; this allows him to understand that pain is simply an element of life. The objective is to defeat the ego that makes the individual believe he is the victim of life's cruelty. It is not an easy task, since subjectification has created a petrified ego thanks to "toda la maquinaria que la tradición nos inoculó desde el mismo instante en que nos engendraron" (187). However, it is a worthy enterprise, to empty out the ego is the best way to "afirmar la vastedad y la grandeza de la vida" (187). Gerardo Montenegro, *Los hombres invisibles*, makes a promise to himself to "nunca más caer en la trampa del yo" (298). Respectively, Marcos, *Cobro de sangre*, comes to the realization that in order to transform one's subjectivity, it is necessary to stop reflecting on himself and start exploring "el mundo gracias a la extinción de una subjetividad torpe y deslucida. Quizás la máxima aventura sea escapar la identidad, huir y ponerse de parte de lo exterior" (*Cobro* 119). The process of subjective transformation becomes an effortless succession of stages once the individual escapes the normative subjectification of modernity's individualism.

### Becoming

In order to find the city's doors and thresholds, and access "the experimental milieu" that allows for a new vision, the artist must strip himself of everything that differentiates him from the objects that surround him; he must become, following Deleuze and Guattari, "a body without organs" (165). This objective requires sharpening the senses and allowing the surrounding elements to reveal their tones and hue. As Jean-François Lyotard emphasizes, one must listen, concentrate, clean the mind as much as possible, and fall into a state of complete openness, for the experience to take place.<sup>6</sup> From a distant observation of the people in downtown during rush hour to an intimate contact with a lamp-post in the outskirts, every experience requires the complete abandonment of one's sense of self and the submission of one's senses to the exterior. Stripping the self and surrendering one's body to the sensations that emanate from all objects is what motivates a process of becoming, which begins with the intuition of one's molecular quality. Samuel's installation *Mapa Bogotá* derives from a close encounter with the objects he finds along his excursions through the city,

Eso, siéntelo, pálpalo, contéplalo, huélelo... haz de cuenta que tú no eres tú y que te has transformado en el jarrón. Te desvaneces, te esfumas en el aire y comienzas a tomar su forma, a adquirir sus tonos y matices, y te quedas ahí, inmóvil en un rincón esperando que alguien se acerque para echarte un poco de agua y depositar dentro de ti un ramo de flores. (*Cobro* 118)

Becoming a lamp-post or a vase is not a metaphor for a particular mental state or the metamorphosis that makes individuals turn into something else, but the observation of a different perspective on individuation. As the gap between the body and the exterior is eliminated, the individual connects with what constitutes the matter of the whole universe; it is not the discovery of a new material but the reencounter with what constitutes our essence, since "las personas no son una partícula errante atrapada en su miseria infinitesimal," but "una vía de tránsito que atraviesa la materia entera" (*Cobro* 118). Savoring the exterior, one can have an experience of one's self; it is not a separation from the individual but an emotive and sensuous modality of being. It is in a way a process that goes in the opposite direction of subjectification; instead of working towards the definition of individuality, the artist enters the zone of indetermination that preceded his differentiation from the general matter of the universe.<sup>7</sup>

The aesthetic experience, as an immersion into the non-human universe, is tantamount to the absorption of a highly concentrated dose of life's intensity. For many of these characters, who find humanity and identity a burden too hard to bear, this molecular experience is like a gulp of oxygen that gives them a break from their suffocating desperation. Samuel, for example, addicted to the thrill of every encounter, decides to wander a different neighborhood every day in order to experience "instantes de transformación súbitas y veloces que le permitían introducirse en aquello que palpaba con los dedos estremecidos y excitados" (*Cobro* 124). Once the mask of subjectification is removed from the artist's senses he can experience the universe of forces that coexist in a virtual realm, waiting to be activated by his touch.

This is the phenomenon of affect. Once the individual has experienced this block of sensations, he can never return to his prior state; his own sense of self and his relationship with the exterior suffers a radical transformation.<sup>8</sup> If the solitary folding upon oneself in order to define an identity and place within

society has left all of these characters in a desperate and desolate subjective crisis, a second option for individuation is to find that sense of self by entering into relation with other elements, including people, places and objects. Therein lies the importance of Samuels' reference to Eduardo Zalamea Borda's novel *4 años a bordo de mí mismo*,

He sentido el grito de felicidad de la mujer poseída y el grito de dolor del hombre que se suicida... a mi olfato han llegado todos los olores: el de la sangre, mareante y mezclado siempre con la locura... he oído, he gustado, he olido, he tocado, he visto... Sí, he vivido 4 años a bordo de mí mismo. (370)

Wandering in a city where poverty, discrimination, and other forms of social injustice can be seen in every street is a painful experience. Exposing oneself to the elements and dangers of the exterior requires a certain detachment from what is known and safe. Mendoza's characters venture into the streets when their relatives or lovers die, and there is no home to return to. Indigence aggravates their dissolution, anger, and pain. However, the same process of becoming with inanimate objects, will also take place with their fellow citizens.

Yo no quería retratar iglesias famosas ni monumentos nacionales, sino el dolor que escondían las calles de mi ciudad, el sufrimiento, la desesperanza que habitaba en el corazón de un alto porcentaje de la población y que tarde que temprano se notaba en su mirada cabizbaja... Yo era el cazador de ciertas penas ocultas... se podían ver los rastros del dolor del mundo. (*Apocalipsis* 59)

Their contact with the city has taught them that even though art cannot be a depository of memory, it is a potential vehicle to transform pain into knowledge. There is no way to mitigate pain, especially confronted with the death of one's relatives, as it is the case of Marcos, the photographer, whose father has committed suicide. As Marcos takes pictures of his father's body, he recognizes that the path towards the definition of an alternative subjectivity is related to his artistic goals, "convertir el sufrimiento en una fuerza positiva, en un aprendizaje, en un camino de iniciación, en literatura o en fotografía. Un artista es hijo de sus dolores más profundos" (*Apocalipsis* 87). This knowledge

is not a cognitive knowledge in the usual sense that the individual describes, recreates, or represents its meaning. It is a pathic knowledge that is found in the way the encounter with others has affect on the individual.<sup>9</sup>

### Creation

The sensations provided by the thresholds beyond the city's doors give the artists a new point of subjectification, the I that folds upon itself finds a new objective: the creation of alternative realities. If the modern city can only show its ugly face, the artist's task is to be the explorer that finds new regions and points to their existence through art, "elegir cierto tipo de contraluz que iluminara el sector con una intensidad mágica, que transmitiera una energía extraña" (*Apocalipsis* 82). The artist that offers himself to the task of wandering the city and surrendering to its will is rewarded with the sight of these thresholds or doors. The city reveals itself to its devoted observer and provides him with the sensations that serve as material for the work of art. It is the way the city maintains its fluid and transformative quality. Works of art such as Samuel's *Mapa Bogotá* and Marcos's *Puertas* come to join the heterogeneous material of the city.

In the case of *Mapa Bogotá*, the installation invites the body to participate through the different sensations. It is an installation that has four components: a three dimensional mockup used to display different textures and densities, a manuscript entitled *Están hablando* where the author registers his experience in the city, a compilation of recordings labeled and organized according to each neighborhood, and a collection of fragrances distributed along the mockup. It motivates the undertaking of a different kind of encounter with the sounds, smells, and images of the city. *Mapa Bogotá* is not determined by its extension or its accurate representation of the city (ironically the police assume it is a mockup that represents terrorists' targets). It is a map of intensities that can take the individual into a transformative immersion. This artistic project has no closure; it is in constant transformation and requires different elements that complement the mockup. It has the quality of a universal library that paradoxically contains the whole and adds perpetually elements to its catalogue. It is the culmination of an artistic goal of allowing alternative universes of reality to be visible.

The work of art, far from being representational or interpretative, is a piece of independent reality, "una construcción con dimensiones múltiples que

se cruzaban de mil maneras, generando modelos diferentes a cada segundo, como un rompecabezas que hacía y deshacía mapas permanentemente” (*Apocalipsis* 118). The artist is not his producer but the medium and beneficiary of an experience of subjective transformation. As he encounters these doors, he immerses himself momentarily in these sensations, and he is able to leave behind the pain and anger of loss. He finds a new subjectivity, a new purpose, to be the city's instrument of transformation and production of new realities.

The rodent alternative of perpetual flight does not entail an escape into a better world; on the contrary, “en lugar de conectarse con bellezas sublimes que dejan la realidad intacta, lo que habían hecho era descender a los infiernos para demoler los cimientos y agrietar esa realidad que ya no podían soportar más” (*Apocalipsis* 278). The artist digs deep into the entrails of the city to become one with a city that endures social injustice and violence. He acquires a knowledge that allows him to use this pain and turn it into the force that feeds his art.

Mendoza's novels constitute a painful exploration of different routes, both physical and mental, through “la ciudad de los umbrales.” Like the city, Mendoza's narrative is an urban geology. Each novel is an independent reality but a layer within a fictional universe. Instead of achieving a totalizing narrative, the artists' nomadic undertakings allow them to find fissures in the fluid zones of the urban landscape that point to the possibility of mental, psychological, and physical escapes. The reader is like Mendoza's characters a wanderer who goes from one story to another observing the flows of communication among the different layers. Following the narrative's approach, the reader must sharpen his/her senses and find the thresholds within this universe and create his/her own realities. This is the narrative's political dimension; despite the subjective crisis of a society traumatized by violence, corruption, and social injustice, art has the potential to motivate the exploration of new modes of existence.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Mario Mendoza has written eleven novels including *La ciudad de los umbrales* (1902), *Los hombres invisibles* (2007), and his latest *La melancolía de los feos* (2016), five compilations of short stories, and five works for young adults. In 2002 he was awarded the Seix Barral Biblioteca Breve Literary Prize for his novel *Satanás* (2002) and in 2007 director Andi Baiz adapted it to film, which afforded the author international recognition.

<sup>2</sup> *Scorpio city's* narrative voice is Simon Tebcheranny, a member of the Art seminar, who writes the story of Leonardo Sinisterra.

<sup>3</sup> Paula Andrea Marín Colorado in her study “La novela colombiana reciente ante el mercado: críticos contra lectores. Los casos de Mario Mendoza, Jorge Franco, y Santiago Gamboa,” explains that some of the critical reception on Mendoza's works define it as “una estética de la consolación” (17); a nihilist social criticism, which instead of elaborating a critical analysis of the causes and implications of social injustice, accepts its inevitability and assumes an escapist attitude. I concur with those critics in regards to the confrontation with a cruel reality, but I believe that Mendoza's proposal is not a simple unconcerned alienation from reality. It is on the contrary, an alternative approach to the social reality with different mechanisms.

<sup>4</sup> From *Matter and Memory*: “These planes are not given as ready-made things, superpose the one over the other. Rather, they exist virtually, with that existence that is proper to things of the spirit” (322).

<sup>5</sup> “The smooth spaces arising from the city are not only those of world-wide organization, but also of a counterattack combining the smooth and the holey and turning back against the town: sprawling, temporary, shifting shantytowns of nomads and cave-dwellers, scrap metal and fabric, patchwork, to which the striations of money, work, or housing are no longer even relevant” (*ATP* 481).

<sup>6</sup> “[B]ecome open to the “It happens” rather than the “What happens” [and *this*] requires at the very least a high degree of refinement in the perception of small differences... you have to impoverish your mind, clean it out as much as possible, so that you can make it incapable of anticipating the meaning” (*Peregrinations* 18).

<sup>7</sup> “Art as a zone of indetermination, of indiscernibility... that immediately precedes their natural differentiation... Life alone creates such zones where living beings whirl around, and only art can reach and penetrate them in its enterprise of co-creation” (*WIP?* 173).

<sup>8</sup> Guattari says that by allowing individuals access to new “incorporeal universes of reference” they can experience processes of resingularisation—a process of reordering ourselves and our relation to the world (*Chaosmosis* 7).

<sup>9</sup> “Knowledge of being-in-the-world, of a sphere of for-itself, implies a pathic apprehension which escapes energetico-spatio-temporal coordinates. Knowledge is first of all existential transference, non-discursive transitivism. The enunciation of this transference always occurs through the diversion of a narration whose primary function is to promote complex refrains, supports of an intensive persistence and an event-centered consistency” (Guattari *Chaosmois* 61).

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## HOW BRAZILIANS BECAME FRENCHMEN; OR FERDINAND DENIS AND 'COLONIALITY OF POWER'<sup>1</sup>

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### I—Literary Histories and 'Coloniality of Power'

Let us start in *medias res*. As posited by Anibal Quijano, Latin American elites have historically defined themselves in Eurocentric terms, reproducing a logic of colonial exploitation in a new independent context. This transference of a colonial mindset and prejudices to postcolonial Latin America he termed "coloniality of power." According to Quijano, after independence the continent's elites consolidated themselves, on the one hand, by placing Western Europe as a teleological goal for Latin America, claiming it to be the future of other "primitive" local societies and, on the other, by naturalizing the idea that the world and their own societies were divided into different races, with Europeans as a privileged group (540-1). The creole elites, as the natural inheritors of the colonial administration, benefitted from such understanding of the reality, for it justified their ruling position in their own countries. Similarly to Quijano, Paulo Emílio Salles Gomes pointed out that the specificity of colonization in Brazil, where almost the entirety of the national elite and a large part of the population was made out of European descendants and immigrants, led to an easy assimilation of a Eurocentric perspective in the country: "[a] peculiaridade do processo, o fato do ocupante ter criado o ocupado aproximadamente à sua imagem e semelhança, fez deste último, até certo ponto, o seu semelhante" (77).<sup>2</sup> According to Salles Gomes, the Brazilian intelligentsia who fought for political independence from Europe easily incorporated a European power

structure and cultural perspective into their new independent context for they had spawned from the colonizers themselves and were not much different from them. The transference of perspective described by both critics cannot be imagined without the importation of European culture and, more specifically, literature to Latin America, a process that began with colonialism, but that continued to mark the continent after its independence. In Brazil, the conscious transference and adaptation of a colonial point of view to a postcolonial reality can be seen at work in the first literary history written about the country; that is, in Ferdinand Denis's 1826 *Resumé de l'Histoire Littéraire du Brésil*, a book that became a touchstone for those studying Brazil in the nineteenth century and of which most propositions were accepted both in Europe and in Latin America. In this essay, I explore Denis' sometimes forgotten literary history, and the role it had in advertising French romanticism in a newly independent Brazil, what helped lay the seeds for Quijano's "coloniality of power." Denis' prescriptive language and French romantic reading of Brazil can help one understand why Latin American intelligentsias, after political independence, did not seek an epistemological revolution, but continued to live and think within a largely colonial mindset.

Throughout the nineteenth century, literary histories like Denis' *Resumé* were central for the definition of country's collective identities and for reinforcing—consciously and unconsciously—a Western European reading of reality for the newly independent intelligentsias of Latin America. In order to sustain and confirm their national political autonomy, early nineteenth-century elites in Brazil and elsewhere tried to claim that each country had a particular identity (or spirit) determined by its geography, climate, and ethnicity and that this identity justified their country's organization as one particular national state, both separate from its neighbors and, in the case of Latin America, from the Iberian ex-metropolises. As Jonathan Arac points out,

“the history of literature, in its own history, has been inseparable of the emergence of the nation-states around 1800 and the subsequent proliferation of nationalities-in-information through collective scholarly and public practices that have produced national selves capable of being aware of their own, newly defined, shared accomplishments and heritages” (33).

In this aspect, Latin Americans followed *pari passu* the examples of their European counterparts and wrote their own literary histories, which owed much to certain European models, with a special emphasis to Friedrich Bouterwek's (1765-1828) *Geschichte der Neueren Poesie und Beredsamkeit* (1801-1819) and Sismonde de Sismondi's (1773-1842) *De la littérature du midi de l'Europe* (1813) (Zimmerman, 16-17). In Brazil, several works appeared in the years following the country's 1822 national independence, most of them done under the auspices of the Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro (IHGB), the imperial government's think-tank founded in 1838, which was responsible for forging a Brazilian national identity under the Pedro II's government (Schwarcz, 176-225). Though some of these works acknowledged the presence of an indigenous culture in Brazil, they kept a European approach to it, reproducing, now with nationalistic colors, the same colonial propositions of before. In other words, these works largely saw Indigenous Brazilians mostly as exotic source material for the development of creole literature. Among the most relevant works published in Brazil, along with Denis 1826 book, one can cite Januario Barbosa's *Parnaso Brasileiro* (1829), Varnhagen's *Florilégio da Poesia Brasileira* (1846), Norberto da Silva Sousas' *História da literatura Brasileira* (1859) and Ferdinand Wolf's *Le Brésil Littéraire* (1863). All these works, some with more commentaries, some with less, some resembling mere compendiums, some resembling modern analytical literary histories, they were all faithful to their European models. Denis' *Resumé de l'Histoire Littéraire du Brésil*, being the first work of its kind to consider Brazil independently from Portugal, became an important influence on the subsequent works of its kind and an unsurpassable reference to those writing about Brazil during the first half of the nineteenth century. Furthermore, as the country's intelligentsia struggled to defend their own independence from their Iberian ex-metropolis, the authority of a literary history written by a Frenchman made their argument easier to support. To fight the Portuguese desire to reintegrate Brazil to its diminishing Empire, Brazilians could offer Denis' book as a proof that enlightened Europeans also saw their country as an independent one, even though this meant aligning themselves with another European nation, as well as the propagation of certain European aesthetic common places and ideas about their country, as I will discuss later on.

## II—Denis, the First Brazilianist

How and why Denis ended up in Rio de Janeiro and decided to write the first literary history of Brazil only four years after the country's independence is still somewhat unclear. According to Maria Rouanet, Denis' relation to Latin America began as a casual one. Originally from a family of tradesmen and not a man of letters, Denis became a specialist on Brazil by chance when, in 1816, on his way to India, he made a small stopover in Rio de Janeiro. Not finding a ship to continue his itinerary, or captivated by the country's natural beauty and landscape, Denis' short stay in Brazil turned into a long and prolific three years sojourn. During his time in Brazil, he not only perfected his language skills and learned about the local culture, but also collected enough information for a lifelong career dedicated to Latin America. Back in France, he wrote several books and articles on Brazil, Portugal, and South America, and soon became a reference for other intellectuals (including Brazilian ones) interested in these regions and cultures.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, holding a post as librarian at the *Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève* in Paris, Denis had the resources and institutional position to help others who were also interested in Brazil, making him a reference on issues related to the country in France and beyond. The lack of resources on Brazil, the precariousness of the country's cultural institutions, and Denis' willingness to help supply information to anyone interested in its culture and history also made him an instrumental figure in the development of a Brazilian national intelligentsia after independence. Denis' correspondence includes letters to and from several Brazilian writers, intellectuals, diplomats, and even Dom Pedro II (1825-1891), Brazil's last emperor, who reigned from 1840 to the country's republic proclamation in 1889. Furthermore, Denis made both his office at Saint-Geneviève and his own house symbolic extensions of the Brazilian embassy in France. He frequently received and helped Brazilian artists and intellectuals who arrived in Paris and answered requests from his Brazilian friends for information and books, which were rare and expensive in nineteenth-century Brazil (Rouanet, chapter 3; Broca, 119).

I will explore Denis' work in more depth in the next section. For now it is enough to point out how nineteenth-century Brazilian writers treasured Denis' work and Franco-German romanticism, which sprung of the work of better known writers Germaine de Stael (1766-1817), René de Chateaubriand (1768-1848), and Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859), among others. Denis' influence in Brazil can be seen in the country's foundational text of literary

criticism. Gonçalves de Magalhães' (1811-1882) 1836 romantic manifesto, published in the magazine *Nitheroy*, leaves no doubt as to Denis' role in Brazil's intellectual formation. While Magalhães claims to expand Denis' reading of Brazilian literature, which he says is "longe de ser completa" (14),<sup>4</sup> his essay nevertheless reproduces and accepts most of Denis' propositions. Following the Frenchman's lead, Magalhães compares pre-colonial Brazil with medieval Europe, and sees in Native Americans and the colonial period the same mythical and nationalist potential Europeans saw in its knights and the Middle Ages. Like Denis, Magalhães too chastises the "literatura sem um caráter nacional pronunciado" (23) of colonial Brazil, which was composed mostly of the neoclassical poets of *Arcadismo*, and suggested that Franco-German romanticism was a better alternative for the country.<sup>5</sup>

Denis' influence can also be seen in the most important Brazilian literary debate of the first half of the nineteenth century. In response to the thesis advanced by General de Lima (1796-1869) and the Portuguese José da Gama Castro (1795-1873), who claimed that there was no Brazilian literature, but only a larger Portuguese one, Brazil's national intelligentsia defended its political and literary independence from Portugal in the magazine *Minerva Brasileira* (1843-1846) (Coutinho, chapter 4). In this debate, Denis' 1826 book is constantly called up as an authoritative source by those arguing for the separation of Brazilian and Portuguese letters. Both Santiago Nunes Ribeiro (?-1847) and Norberto de Sousa e Silva (1820-1891), the two most influential critics of the period, emphatically drew on Denis to defend their positions. Ribeiro, the most lucid critic of his generation, used Denis as a starting point for his defense of Brazilian literature and briefly discussed some of the Frenchman's propositions, with an emphasis on his claims that colonial Brazilian literature was insufficiently Brazilian. For Ribeiro, however, it was a mistake to project romantic expectations onto eighteenth-century literature as Denis and Magalhães had done: "não é lícito exigir de um século aquilo que ele não pode dar" (29).<sup>6</sup> Ribeiro goes on to discuss the origin and originality of Brazilian literature, as had Denis before him, though, more original than Magalhães, he distances himself from Denis and tries to see Brazilian colonial literature with positive and independent eyes. Norberto de Sousa Silva, a less provocative but more prolific critic than Ribeiro, aligned with Denis on almost every single point of his writings. Norberto's literary history of Brazil, published as a series of articles in the 1860s, reproduces most of Denis' suggestions, including, notably, Denis' criticism of Brazilian colonial literature, his horror of classical

(Greek and Mediterranean) settings in eighteenth-century Brazilian authors, the comparison between colonial Brazil and medieval Europe, and the centrality of Santa Rita Durão (1722-1784) and Basílio da Gama (1741-1795) for the national canon. For Sousa, “O ilustre Sr. Ferdinand Denis” (200),<sup>7</sup> together with Magalhães, is at the center of any understanding of Brazilian literature and should be the basis for the country’s independent literary developments.

### III—The *Résumé de l’histoire littéraire du Brésil*

Denis’ *Résumé de l’histoire littéraire du Brésil*, following his European models, is a work organized chronologically by century and covers Brazilian literature from Pêro Vaz de Caminha’s (1450-1500) first letters describing the new discovered land to the pre-romantic poet Basílio da Gama, and emphasizes poetry over other types of texts, following the common early nineteenth century understanding of *belle-lettres*. The actual literature surveyed by Denis, however, given the precariousness of Brazilian literary culture at the period, is limited, and the *Resumé*’s importance comes mostly from its primacy and the well-done reproduction of the leading European theories of the time, now applied to Brazil. When Denis published his book, Brazil had already gained its political independence, which supplied him with the precedent to think the country’s culture separately from Portugal’s—that is, as an independent entity that, although owing a great deal to the older Portuguese tradition, also needed to be considered within its own specificities. It is important to note, however, that although Denis’ work claims independence for Brazilian letters, it still presents Brazilian literature as an appendix to a longer Portuguese literary history and tradition. Denis’ work on Brazil was published together with his larger Portuguese literary history under the title “*Résumé de l’Histoire Littéraire du Portugal suivi du Résumé de l’histoire littéraire du Brésil*,” and while he dedicated 500 pages to Portugal, the Brazilian section was five times shorter.

Yet, because of the work’s importance to Brazilian letters, Denis’ literary histories of Brazil and Portugal would become a work associated primarily with Brazil. Brazilian nineteenth century intellectuals saw in the word “suivi” a political act of cultural independence, regardless of the book’s actual configuration. Denis’ reading of Brazil, however, was not much different from other European intellectuals who had travelled throughout colonial Brazil. His earlier work, aimed at a French public, was not unusual and had had a somewhat cold reception. Denis’ writings before the *Resumé*, that is, are quite common

for the period and were overlooked among other similar works published in France by better-known European travelers and scientists, such as Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859), Johann Baptist Ritter von Spix (1721-1826) or Carl Friedrich Philipp von Martius (1794-1868). In a review of Denis’ *Scènes de la Nature sous les Tropiques* (1824), for instance, the then-young French critic Sainte-Beuve suggested that Denis’ efforts could be more valuable in helping to organize the still incipient Brazilian literary tradition, instead of adding to the mass of works travelers and scientists had already published about the region in France (Rouanet, 218). The *Resumé*, then, can be seen as a response to such challenge; as an attempt to start organizing the country’s national literature within a French romantic model, and to contribute to the growing cultural scene in Brazil, which since the 1808 transference of the Portuguese monarchy to Rio de Janeiro and the subsequent 1822 national independence was rapidly becoming more dynamic. The weak reception of Denis’ work prior to the *Resumé* most likely influenced his turn towards a Brazilian audience concerned with the national character of its own literature; Denis’ perspective, nonetheless, remained that of a European who was used to write as someone immersed in an early French romantic tradition that read the continent as exotic and exuberant. Intentionally or not, Denis’ literary history became, among Brazilians themselves, a propagator of such a reading, which was also marked by the normalization of race exploitation and the teleological centrality of Western Europe for Latin America’s progress and modernization.

This is not to say that literary histories like Denis’ did not mean advancements for Brazil. Works like the *Resumé* demanded the articulation and rationalization of Brazilian literature and culture. “A literary history,” writes Arac, “cannot simply find its objects and lay them out in order. It must actively define and organize its materials, and there are strategies, problems, and consequences that arise from the various possible choices made in organizing” (25). In the case of nineteenth-century Brazil, to write a literary history was to consider the relationship between the local reality, the older colonial tradition, and the European models brought from abroad, themes that, *mutatis mutandis*, are central to cultural criticism in Latin America to this day. That is, Denis’s work starts to consider the role and place of Brazil both in history and in a global world marked by economic but also cultural exchanges. In organizing his literary history, he articulated certain positions that were central for the development, later on, of more critical readings of Brazil, such as the already mentioned Santiago Nunes Ribeiro, but also that of José de Alencar

and Gonçalves Dias, who tried to think the country within its own specificities and find an appropriate literary form to praise it. In Antonio Candido's words, "[a] presença no Brasil de pré-românticos como [Denis] foi importante, pois uma vez que as condições do país os convidam a assumir a atitude literária diferente do Classicismo, foram levados a aplicar no nosso caso o que fornecia, neste sentido, a teoria europeia" (V.2, p. 322);<sup>8</sup> that is, works like Denis' were important steps into modernizing Brazilian cultural life.

Yet, in doing so, Denis, together with other European and Brazilian artists and intellectuals from the period, directed Brazilian literature towards a specific romantic model that shaped Brazil's national identity within a specific framework. Considering that it is exactly in the first half of the nineteenth century when a Brazilian literary system is constituted—with authors, circulating books, and readers—and that it is only with the transition from eighteenth-century Neoclassicism to nineteenth-century Romanticism that a national tradition appears in Brazil—understood as the influence of one national generation over the next one—as posited by Antonio Candido, Denis' book is published at a crucial moment for Brazilian culture, and suggests the framework with which Brazil would write itself in the 'world republic of letters'. Denis laid the basis for how Brazil would try to integrate itself in the Western literary system as an individual tradition; a basis that, as I explore further on, and as Quijano and Salles Gomes have also shown, largely mirrored the European colonialist mindset that continued into the twentieth century and that privileged Europeans, understood as a race, as the natural leading group for the continent.

#### IV—Denis' French framework

The ideas proposed by Denis in the *Resumé* are a patchwork of different European theories circulating in nineteenth-century Europe and which, as aforementioned, have had what appear to be three main influences: Germaine de Staël, François-René de Chateaubriand, and Alexander von Humboldt. *Grosso modo*, Denis' reading of Brazilian nature and indigenous populations was a transposition by the letter of these authors' ideas. From Humboldt, for instance, Denis took the interest in exuberant tropical tableaux, and invited Brazilian writers to focus on the country's exotic nature as their main trope. "Que les poètes de ces contrées," he wrote, "contemplant la nature, qu'ils s'animent de sa grandeur, en peu d'années ils deviendront nos égaux, peut-être nos maîtres" (519).<sup>9</sup> Moreover, if a poet speaks of anything besides this very

specific nature, or if, as the neoclassical poets of Brazilian eighteenth-century *Arcadismo* did, they decide to set their works anywhere besides the tropical jungle, they receive the critics' scolding: "tout cela ne convenait guère à un poète brésilien habitant des pays où la nature étale le plus de splendeur et majesté" (570-1).<sup>10</sup> Nature, and a very specific one at that, was for Denis the main topic Brazilian authors should focus on; and the European aestheticizing and exotic reading of the Americas should be the goal of Brazilian literature (Guilhermino Cesar, 28). Another central influence for Denis was Madame de Staël and her seminal work *De la littérature: considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales*, from 1800, which was central to French romanticism and its assimilation of German Aesthetics. Denis seemed to accept Staël's understanding of northern and southern literatures, attributing to Brazil all the characteristics of the "warmer" Mediterranean literatures analyzed by Staël, in opposition to the assumedly colder and more sober German and English traditions. For Denis, "un climat délicieux les entraînaît à leur insu: poètes de la nature, [the men of the new world] en avaient célébré la beauté; soumis aux passions nobles et ardentes, ils chantaient leur pouvoir" (515).<sup>11</sup> That is, for Denis, the Brazilian climate and reality made the country's literature necessarily closer to the Mediterranean traditions than to that of the colder northern European countries. And, extending this logic, the tropical idiosyncrasies of Brazil also suggested the necessity to think the country independently from Portugal, what justified Denis' decision to separate Brazilian literature from that of the older Portuguese Tradition.

The third important influence in Denis' work, and in Brazilian Romanticism as a whole, is the French writer and philosopher François-René de Chateaubriand. If Humboldt influenced Denis' reading of Brazilian nature and helped him link America with a primeval past (Mary Louise Pratt), Chateaubriand helped Denis see the literary potential of Brazil's native inhabitants. Published in 1801, Chateaubriand's *Atala*, an independent section of his *Génie du Christianisme* (1802), established the tone and enthusiasm with which Denis would portray native Brazilians and the role he attributed to them in the Brazilian letters and civilization. In 1824, as a section of his *Scènes de la Nature sous les Tropiques*, Denis published his own version of an indianist narrative, "Les Machacalis," heavily based on Chateaubriand's work. The eurocentrism of Chateaubriand's and Denis' reading, and its importance in the propagation of the European colonizer and creole elites as a privileged race, something central to Quijano's 'coloniality of power,' makes it necessary to

spend a little more time with Chateaubriand than we did with Humboldt and Staël. In contrast to the eighteenth century readings of Rousseau and Montaigne, Chateaubriand offers an ambiguous reading of “the savage,” in which he acknowledges both his literary potential and his lack of civilization, now read as a negative characteristic. If Native Americans were a rich aesthetic source, a new and exotic reality that could enrich European literature, they were also ambiguous creatures, for they no longer had the same intrinsic “goodness” of Rousseau’s and Montaigne’s “noble savages.” Chateaubriand, because of his strong Catholicism, distances himself from any idea of intrinsic good in the native other and attributes goodness to religion. That is, instead of coming from the savage’s isolation from modern civilization, as was the case in Rousseau, good had to come from the contact with the Christian God and Western European culture. From this perspective, the natives needed religion in order to be civilized and become good, even though their naiveté might be in their favor: “Dieu vous pardonnera, à cause de la simplicité de votre coeur” (123).<sup>12</sup>

This is the same Eurocentric reading propagated by Denis’ *Resumé*, which incorporates the dichotomy explored by Chateaubriand, both suggesting the importance of native Brazilians as tropes for Brazilian literature, but also defending the superiority of western civilization and the necessity to assimilate indigenous populations. For Denis, Brazilian literature should look for raw material in the mythical times when Native Americans dominated the country: “Son temps des fables mystérieuses et poétiques, ce seront les siècles où vivaient des peuples que nous avons anéantis, qui nous étonnent par leur courage, et qui ont retrempe peut-être les nations sorties du vieux monde (...) Leurs combats, leurs sacrifices, nos conquêtes, tout présente de brillants tableaux” (517).<sup>13</sup> Native Brazilians should be one of the main sources for Brazilian literature, and Brazilians should “pénétre[r] au sein des forêts, qu’on interroge les nations libres, leurs campagnes sont encore animées de pensées vraiment poétiques” (518).<sup>14</sup> The aesthetic importance attributed to native Brazilians, however, does not mean a return to distant times and Denis still believes in the importance of the new institutions as well as of western civilization and western ideas for the development of Brazilian literature and society. Moreover, in keeping with Chateaubriand’s ambiguity towards the American other, Denis establishes the irreversibility of the white man’s conquest of the continent, inviting Native Americans to join the Europeans, who are “fiers d’être de la race des vainqueurs” (524),<sup>15</sup> and help them build this

new world in the image and likeness of his own Western Europe. Although all races, for Denis, have something to offer to the Brazilian letters and should work for the greatness of the young nation (523-5), the Europeans and their American descendants are clearly the privileged group that should direct this process, while native Americans should be a source of inspiration and object of study. For Denis the colonial divide between races remains part and parcel of the new independent nation, an idea that the Brazilian ruling classes had no trouble in accepting.

### V—Denis’ Prescriptive Style

It should be clear, by now, that Denis’ work is not original in the theoretical stances it takes, though the object chosen (Brazilian literature) is, to some degree, a novelty. Influences in and of themselves do not explain the cultural dynamic of the period nor account for the developments that happened thereafter; they can help, nonetheless, us better understand the process by which ‘coloniality of power’ came into being. In a country like Brazil, which had no lettered culture prior to the arrival of the Portuguese and where the ruling class was made up mostly of European immigrants and descendants, the colonizer had little obstacles in shaping the colonized, for the division between the one and other was never that clear, and the only culture understood *qua* culture became the one emanating from the central Western European nations. Looking at how these influences were interpreted and used by Denis, but also how he prescribed them to Brazilians, is an important step towards understanding how a colonial mindset continued to shape the national elites of Latin America after independence. When Denis and others applied their European frameworks to Brazilian letters, they had to face the fact that the reality of Brazil was different from the ones in the cultural powerhouses that had produced their analytic model; or, in Roberto Schwarz words, they had to deal with the “disparidade entre a sociedade brasileira, escravista, e as ideias do liberalismo europeu” (12).<sup>16</sup> In the *Resumé* such discrepancy is evident, as well as Denis’ desire to direct the country’s reality and culture to fit his pre defined positions, transforming his vision for Brazilian literature into a reality. Denis’ *Literary History*, instead of focusing on the past developments of a tradition, focuses on its future and lays a map for the country to get there. Part of Denis’ work—with emphasis on his first chapter: “Considérations générales sur le caractère que la poésie doit prendre dans le Nouveau-Monde”<sup>17</sup>—is aimed explicitly at directing Brazil

to match the Franco-German romantic framework he already had, transferring Denis own expectation to his Brazilian readers.

Denis shows in the *Resumé* great disappointment with Brazilian letters, for they do not (yet) seem to be aligned with the romantic influences and ideologies he is bringing from Europe: “Les Américains,” he writes, “n’ont point fait toujours sentir dans leurs productions les effets de la nature qui les inspirait; avant d’être libres il semblait qu’ils voulussent oublier leur patrie pour demander à l’Europe une partie de sa gloire” (535).<sup>18</sup> He laments that Brazilian letters, up until then, were not concerned with representing the exotic Latin America European writers were interested in. For Denis, this was a waste of potential. According to Humboldt, Chateaubriand, and Denis writing about this exotic reality was the contribution the Americas could give to world literature. Writing about what was exotic for France and Germany was, in the international division of literary labor, what was attributed to Americans and what Denis suggests for Brazilians in his work. That is, for him, Brazilians should turn themselves into a local version of European Romanticism, which could then offer exotic images and language back to Europe; Brazilians should not waste their time reproducing classic paradigms. As a result of the not yet romantic reality of Brazilian letters, Denis develops a prescriptive attitude on his writing. The entirety of the *Resumé*’s first chapter is a romantic prescription for Brazilian writers. In order to break with Brazilian neoclassical literature and align Brazilian letters with nineteenth-century French expectations, Denis suggests “le chemin que doit prendre la poésie dans le Nouveau-Monde” (XIX);<sup>19</sup> and, as aforementioned, asks “que les poètes de ces contrées contemplant la nature, qu’ils s’animent de sa grandeur, [et] en peu d’années ils deviendront nos égaux, peut-être nos maîtres” (519).<sup>20</sup> Denis’ prescriptive style shows how the transference of his worldview to Brazilians is not a side effect of his work, but one of its main goals.

Writing in 1826 with a romantic mindset Denis had no option but to be disappointed with what he encountered. He would have to wait ten more years to see the publication of the magazine *Nitheroy* (1836), and the rise of the Francophile Gonçalves de Magalhães and his group as the leading intelligentsia of the country, and more than twenty years to see the publication of Gonçalves Dias’ (1823-1864) *Primeiros Cantos* (1847), the book that consolidated the establishment of a national version of romanticism in Brazil. When Denis was writing, Brazilian literature was still in a transitional moment between eighteenth-century Neoclassicism and a nineteenth-century aesthetics (hence

still abiding by classical forms and themes) and could only have made the romantic Denis impatient. His discontent and subsequent influence, however, were central in producing a work that would help direct Brazilian literature and culture, after independence, towards a version of Franco-German romanticism, which would mask under a discourse of modernity and liberalism the continuation of a colonial logic of racial and social exploitation.

## VI—Problems and Limitations

The result of Denis’ disillusioned and prescriptive style is worth exploring. As mentioned earlier, writing a literary history entails creating a narrative and selecting works. Not by chance, Denis chooses to emphasize in the *Resumé* the works of Santa Rita Durão and Basilio da Gama, which already pointed towards Romanticism. His work has in its center Durão’s *Caramuru* (1781) and da Gama’s *Uruguay* (1769), works that, according to Antonio Candido, are situated exactly in the transition between Neoclassicism and Romanticism that Brazilian letters went through in the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century. Epic poems that have at their center the national landscape, but also the encounter between mythologized indigenous inhabitants and the Portuguese colonizer, these works were heavily influenced by the colonial reading of the continent, and tried to create stories that explained and, to a certain degree, justified the Iberian rule of the region. Denis praises these works’ interest in Brazilian elements, their representation of “teinte locale” (535),<sup>21</sup> while criticizing their formal weaknesses and their observance of classical paradigms (the epic) which, since Denis always quotes the metrifed poems in French prose translations, is already diluted in the *Resumé*. In Denis’ reading of these poems, the emphasis is never form, which is still neoclassical, but always content, what brings Durão and da Gama closer to a romantic aesthetic and emphasizes the “indianist” thematic that Denis was looking for and that will later on be made into the official aesthetic movement of Brazil’s Second Empire.

The limitation of Denis’ ideological (romantic) biased reading of Brazilian letters and neoclassicism (*Arcadismo*) becomes clear in his analysis of the eighteenth-century Brazilian poet Claudio Manuel da Costa (1729-1789). For Denis, although da Costa is a good poet—“Ses poésies jouissant d’une juste célébrité” (573)<sup>22</sup>—he is not yet fully a Brazilian poet, one who sings the praises of Brazil’s landscape and exotic reality: “mais peut-être est-il devenu

trop européen dans ses images: il paraît dédaigner la belle nature qui l'entoure; ses églogues semblent soumises aux formes poétiques imposées par les siècles précédents, comme si l'habitant des campagnes du Nouveau-Monde devait rencontrer les mêmes images que celles qui nous sont offertes" (573).<sup>23</sup> The fact that da Costa chose classical forms and themes is not a surprise, since he is still writing within a neoclassical framework, placing his metrical poems in a mythic Arcadia, under the Romanized pen name of Glauceste Satúrnio. What Denis' preconceived romantic framework does not allow him to realize, however, is that da Costa is also one of the first authors to inscribe the Brazilian landscape into his poetry, exploring the geography of his native Minas Gerais. As Antonio Candido writes, "embora uma inspeção superficial da sua obra possa sugerir o contrário," da Costa is the neoclassical poet "mais profundamente preso às emoções e valores da terra." And, "[s]e as imagens correntes valem alguma coisa para compreender os poetas, esta presença da rocha aponta nele para um anseio profundo de encontrar alicerce, ponto básico de referência, que a impregnação da infância e adolescência o levam a buscar no elemento característico da paisagem natal" (V.1, p.80).<sup>24</sup>

Denis, however, is incapable of seeing the Brazilian nature in da Costa's poetry. The overwhelming tropical nature explored by Humboldt and Chateaubriand, always linked to the excesses of the tropical climate and forest, was not da Costa's reality and hence it does not appear in his poetry. A poet from Minas Gerais, where the landscape is marked by rocks and hills, as the poet Carlos Drummond de Andrade (1902-1987) will later confirm, da Costa integrates his actual reality, and not the exotic nature of the tropics, into his poetry. A poetics of rocks and hills was not part of Denis' French romantic horizon of expectations and passed unnoticed in his reading of the poet. That is, da Costa's imagery becomes an unsurpassable stone in Denis' path and Denis' own romantic ideology, in this case, proves to be a limitation, a smoke curtain that compromised his reading of the poet in favor of his pre defined idea of what Brazilian literature should be. Denis' narrow Eurocentric mindset was invested in a very particular reading of Latin America, a reading that ended up accepted and embodied by Brazilians themselves throughout the nineteenth century. In consciously working to transfer his French romantic perspective to his Brazilian colleagues, Denis collaborates to what Walter Mignolo has termed "epistemological dependence," a phenomenon that still marks Latin America today. The only form nineteenth-century Brazilians knew how to look at their own reality was the one they learned from his European counterparts,

leading them to unacknowledged reproduce their prejudices and mistakes. That is, Denis' transfer to Brazil of a European reading of the Americas, which privileged a narrow understanding of the country's reality and possibilities, helped set the stage for the continuation of certain colonial prejudices and limitations after national independence. If Quijano's 'coloniality of power' is a complex phenomenon that involves economy, politics and culture, consolidating and naturalizing epistemic dependency seems to be the contribution literature offered it, and one that can be clearly perceived in Denis' *Resumé*.

## VII—Conclusion

To read Denis is to see how, in nineteenth-century Brazil, the colonized was constructed by the colonizer into the latter's image and likeness; how, in the case of romanticism, the European ideological model was imported and accepted in the country without much mediation and that the theoretical model itself preceded in at least ten years the literature it was supposed to describe and discuss. With their eyes turned to Europe, Brazilian elites reproduced the ideological constructs and cultural life of the colonizer, imposing certain European desires and proposals without the necessary mediation of the historical, social and economic differences between the regions. Such *pari-passu* and little mediated importation of interpretative models limited Brazilians' understanding of their own country and reality, and helped justify the reproduction of racial exploitation and a colonial mindset in postcolonial Brazil, all while maintaining a modern and liberal discourse. The *Resumé* leaves clear the role the letters had in this process; in how literature played a role in the construction of a world marked by racial prejudice and social inequality that benefited the elites who, in the case of the Americas, had spawned from the colonizers themselves.

Not by chance, Denis' prescriptive literary history was translated into Portuguese in 1835 and adopted in 1837 as the official textbook of the Colégio D. Pedro II, the empire's model school, becoming a central text for the teaching of the country's elite, influencing generations of writers and politicians to come.<sup>25</sup> If we remember that, as Antonio Candido points out, "a nossa crítica romântica se desenrolou, até [Silvio Romero's] a *História da literatura brasileira* (1888), como um repisar das premissas do *Resumé*" (V II, 329),<sup>26</sup> the importance of Denis for the transference of a Eurocentric point of view to Brazil cannot be overemphasized. The logic of copy and acceptance of foreign models, which

is at the basis of “coloniality of power,” was well established when in 1888 Silvio Romero produced his own reading of the country’s literature, declaring the end of the Romantic paradigm in Brazil. As Candido points out, however, Romero substitutes “Denis por Taine” (329),<sup>27</sup> continuing to adopt almost by the letter a foreign understanding of his country that justified its into different races and the myth that Western Europe was America’s future.

When placed within its historical context and the larger questions posed by Anibal Quijano, Roberto Schwarz and Paulo Emílio Sales Gomes, Denis’ work gains new importance, for it helps us understand a process that marked Brazilian cultural life in a crucial moment of its history, i.e. when the country was consolidating its political and cultural independence from Portugal. It helps explain the continuation of Eurocentric prejudices and practices by the liberal independent cultural elites of Latin America and the naturalization of prejudice and racial exploitation in the country. Although works like Denis’ no longer have critical interest as consulting material, they certainly have a role in helping us understand the processes by which ideological formations were, and are, established in the fringes of Capitalism and of the ‘world republic of letters.’ They deepen our understanding of the ideological exchanges taking place on a global scope, while retaining a sense of historicity, a crucial element of any critical cultural reading. The *Resumé* helps us understand how, from a disappointed first moment, the colonizer came to see in Brazil exactly what he was looking for, giving his blessing for the country to follow its own independent path, which happened to be the same path the colonizers themselves had imagined for them.

Ten years after Denis’ *Resumé*, Eugène de Monglave (1796-1873), another traveler who had visited colonial Brazil, and who became the president of the Parisian Historical Society, said that: “Frappés désormais d’un cachet original, [Brazilians] n’ont rien à redouter d’une ancienne ou d’une nouvelle concurrence. Le désert est franchi; M. de Magalhaens [sic] et ses amis guident le peuple vers la Terre Promise” (*Nitheroy V. II, 07*).<sup>28</sup> The irony and contradictions of such a statement, of the European colonizer blessing the colonized culture he himself had created, remain for us, with the distance of history, to observe and criticize. Gonçalves de Magalhães, Denis, and their peers certainly took Brazilian literature and society to the ‘Promised Land;’ it only happened that their promised land was only promised to a few and, like in the European colonial nations where it had first been imagined, it was built on a logic of racial and class exploitation, an uncanny reality that still haunts us today.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank my colleagues Adi Gold, Ana White-Nockleby, Prof. Luiz Valente, Prof. Michelle Clayton, and Prof. Vilma Areas for reading and making valuable suggestions and corrections to earlier versions of this essay.

<sup>2</sup> “The peculiarity of the process, the fact that the occupier created the occupied to his image and likeness, made the latter, to a certain extent, its lookalike.”

<sup>3</sup> Among many other works, Denis published translations into French of important colonial documents on Brazil: “Lettre de Pedro Vas de Caminha sur la découverte du Brésil. XVIe. Siècle.” (1821); History works on both Brazil and other Latin American countries: *Lé Brésil, ou Histoire, moeurs, usages et coutumes des habitants de ce royaume* (V. I and II 1821 and volumes III IV 1822) and *Buenos Ayres et le Paraguay, ou Histoire, moeurs, usages et coutumes des habitants de cette partie de l’Amérique* (1822). He also wrote a Humbodtean series of tableaux on Brazilian and tropical nature: *Scènes de la nature sous le tropique* (1824). Beyond, his literary histories of Portugal and Brazil include: *Resumé de l’histoire littéraire du Portugal, suivi du resumé de l’histoire littéraire du Brésil* (1826), he also wrote travel memoirs, both fictionalized and auto biographical: *André, le voyageur. Histoire d’un marin* (1827) and “Voyages dans l’intérieur du Brésil” (1831). For a complete list of Denis publications, see Rouanet pp. 299–322.

<sup>4</sup> “far from complete”

<sup>5</sup> “A literature without a pronounced national character”

<sup>6</sup> “It is unfair do expect from a century what it cannot give us.”

<sup>7</sup> “the illustrious Mr. Ferdinand Denis”

<sup>8</sup> “The presence in Brazil of pre-romantics like Denis was important. Since the country’s conditions invited a move away from Neoclassicism, these authors had to apply to our case what the European theories had to offer in this new direction.” (V2. p.332)

<sup>9</sup> “That the poets of these regions contemplate nature; that its grandeur enliven them; and in a few years they will become our equals, or even our masters.”

<sup>10</sup> “All that is not convenient for a Brazilian poet, for one who inhabits a country where nature displays an excess of majesty and splendor.”

<sup>11</sup> “a delightful climate influences them regardless of their will: poets of nature, they have celebrated beauty; and under the influence of noble and ardent passions, they have sung nature’s power.”

<sup>12</sup> “God will forgive you because of the simplicity of your heart”

<sup>13</sup> “These are the times of mysterious and poetic fables, the centuries when lived the people we have annihilated. People that impressed us for their courage and got the attention of the old world nations. Their wars and sacrifices, our conquests, it all presented wonderful tableaux”

<sup>14</sup>“go into the forests; we should question the free nations, their campaigns are still moved by truly poetic thoughts.”

<sup>15</sup>“proud to belong to the winners race”

<sup>16</sup>The “disparity between the slave society of Brazil and the principles of European liberalism” (19)

<sup>17</sup>“general considerations on the character poetry should take in the New World”

<sup>18</sup>“Americans,” writes Denis, “have not made the effects of the nature that inspired them present into their literary works; before being free, it seemed that they wanted to forget their own country and ask Europe for a portion of its glory.”

<sup>19</sup>“The path that poetry should take in the New World”

<sup>20</sup>“That the poets of these regions contemplate nature; that its grandeur enliven them; that in a few years they will become our equals, or even our masters.”

<sup>21</sup>“local color”

<sup>22</sup>“His poetry enjoys a well-deserved fame”

<sup>23</sup>“Maybe he became too European in his images. He seems to disdain the beautiful nature that surrounds him; his eclogues seem to abide by literary forms of earlier centuries, as if the inhabitant of the depths of the New World should find the same images offered to us”

<sup>24</sup>“though a superficial analysis of his work might suggest otherwise,” da Costa is the neoclassical poet “who is closer connected to the emotion and values of his land.” And, “if the use of images are worth anything to understand poets, the presence of rocks in his poetry points towards his longing to find a solid foundation, a basic point of reference, that the strong presence of his childhood and young years make him seek particular elements of his native land.”

<sup>25</sup>For more, see the website of the Brazilian National Library dedicated to Ferdinand Denis: <[http://bndigital.bn.br/francebr/ferdinand\\_denis\\_port.htm](http://bndigital.bn.br/francebr/ferdinand_denis_port.htm)>

<sup>26</sup>“our romantic criticism developed itself, up until the *História da literatura Brasileira* (1888), as a repetition of the Resumé’s premises”

<sup>27</sup>“Taine for Denis”

<sup>28</sup>“Now that Brazilians have the die for originality, they do not have to worry for a new rivalry; franc is the desert; - Mr. Magalhães and his friends are leading their people to the Promised Land.”

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