

Octavio Paz and Gendered Spaces: Nature and the Search for the Other in *Libertad bajo palabra*

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Abstract: Nature is a central thematic element in *Libertad bajo palabra*, by Octavio Paz, as it acquires the characteristics of a living, autonomous entity, most often female. Paz conflates nature with woman in order to find union with the Other. In so doing, Paz prioritizes certain natural spaces and elements throughout this collection of poetry. In sum, this study will show that the natural environment is an indispensable aspect of Paz's poetry as it enables him to develop his lifelong preoccupation with *otredad*.

Keywords: Octavio Paz, nature, *otredad*, *Libertad bajo palabra*, gendered spaces

Much of the criticism on the poetry of Octavio Paz had focused on aspects such as the search for the other and the concept of *otredad* or on the cyclical view of time, and significantly less so on his use of the environment. However, this latter element is still pivotal in trying to gain a better understanding of the more commonly examined aspects of his poetry. This study will focus on the various ways in which Paz uses natural imagery and the aims for which he appropriates such imagery. The natural world is an animate entity which is often conflated with humankind, above all the human (and frequently female) body, and is an essential poetic vehicle which Paz uses in his quest to bridge the gap between self and the Other.¹

¹ Enrico Mario Santí has synthesized Paz's essential definition and understanding of *otredad* as, in the poet's words, "poetry marked by 'a simultaneous perception that we are people without ceasing to be who we are, and that, without ceasing to be who we are, our true being lies elsewhere'" (269, 270). The Other is understood to live within all people, and as a result of this philosophy, the search for the Other is also the search for Self, as Santí succinctly explains: "Poetry, Love, and the Sacred—the poem, the lover, and God—mean, for Paz, the three ways to a radical absolute, what he calls *Otherness*, which in the end turns out to be the experience of an encounter with ourselves. According to Paz, poetry reconciles with the Other who lies within each of us" (270). Similarly, Susana Hernández Araico defines *otredad* in terms of humankind's search for what is already within: "Sujeto al cambio, el hombre siempre anda buscando al otro que lleva dentro de sí mismo" (231). Rodney Williamson considers the *yo-tú* dialogue of *otredad* in Jungian terms: "the 'yo'-'tú' dialogue is the necessary pre-condition for the union of opposites, of subject and object, consciousness and the unconscious, which leads, according

This study will focus on poetry taken from the initial compilation of collected poems titled *Libertad bajo palabra. Obra poética [1935-1958]*, first published in 1960. Though an exhaustive analysis of the use of the natural world during Paz's career as a poet would be impossible for the length of this study, it will become evident that nature in Paz's poetry accomplishes several tasks. Very frequently, the natural world is treated as animate, as certain common elements, such as the sea, the sky, and various topographical forms are given human qualities. The reader sees how the natural environment is accorded an identity, one which very often helps the poetic voice achieve union with an unnamed Other—most frequently a female. Oftentimes the natural world acquires female-gendered characteristics as well. Paz also uses specific images such as trees, water, and the earth in order to convey a sense of connectedness with the Other, especially in poetry infused with eroticism. On other occasions, the natural world becomes the Other which Paz's poetic voice aims to reach. In this poetry nature becomes a necessary element by which Paz attempts to close the space between self and other, leaving the *soledad* which so preoccupies his poetic voice. As the collection progresses, the reader notes that Paz uses nature as a backdrop by which the poetic voice seeks plenitude and fulfillment with his eroticized partner, and on occasion as a fundamental element in his metapoetic quest for the way in which to write of his subjects. Indeed, *Libertad bajo palabra* has been characterized as a “group of poems clearly dominated by the amorous theme which dramatizes the intensity of life both in the lovers' relationship and in their participation in the simple world of nature” (Goetzinger 233). In sum, while Paz may not necessarily be considered a “nature poet” in exactly the same vein as other Latin American contemporaries such as Pablo Neruda,² it will become clear that the environment is an indispensable element—alive, complex, often gendered, and deeply rooted in the poet's psyche—which Paz uses in his search for completeness and unity.

Many of the poems from *Libertad bajo palabra* in which Paz's use of nature is most clearly visible come from one of his earlier collections, *Bajo tu clara sombra [1935-1939]*, which in turn is divided into several sections, having been written and published at different times. Within this collection, the initial section of *Primer día [1935]* is notable

to Jung, to fullness of being and the construction or enrichment of what he calls the self, which he referred to as the process of “individuation” (15). Finally, Hugo Verani sees *otredad* as a matter of reflection of the self: “El hablante se contempla a sí mismo y encuentra a un desconocido, a otro que no acaba de ser y no acaba de desaparecer; sin dejar de ser uno mismo, vive y se mira vivir como si fuera otro. Todo parece ser reflejo de otro reflejo, simulacro de una presencia.” (“Octavio Paz: el poema como caminata” 55)

² Guillermo Sucre offers the following assessment comparing Paz and other Latin American poets with respect to the use of the natural world: “the telluric concepts in [Paz's] poetry are somewhat removed from the tellurism found in some Latin American poets from the Argentine Leopoldo Lugones to the Chilean Pablo Neruda: descriptive exuberance, geographic enumerations, an almost interminable list of elements of nature—everything, of course, crowded with metaphors. Nature in Paz is always free from accumulative and picturesque excesses. Only a few elements are necessary to make the presence of Nature felt; those elements, while very material, seem to be very archetypal” (9).

for several poems (primarily sonnets) which set the tone for the development of the nature theme for Paz's work. Sonnet II is a prime example in which Paz likens the natural world to a human body for the sake of finding fulfillment with what is understood to be a female Other (1960: 15). Specifically, it is the sea which stands out in the poet's attempt at grasping his feminine object and inscribing her within verse:

El mar, el mar y tú, plural espejo,
 el mar de torso perezoso y lento
 nadando por el mar, del mar sediento:
 el mar que muere y nace en un reflejo.

El mar y tú, su mar, el mar espejo:
 roca que escala el mar con paso lento,
 pilar de sal que abate el mar sediento,
 sed y vaivén y apenas un reflejo.

De la suma de instantes en que creces,
 del círculo de imágenes del año,
 retengo un mes de espumas y de peces,

y bajo cielos líquidos de estaño
 tu cuerpo que en la luz abre bahías
 al oscuro oleaje de los días.

Here the reader notes how the sea forms a mirror in which his unnamed "tú" is reflected, and how it also becomes an element used to inscribe and contain this anonymous object.

The repetition of "El mar y tú" in the initial lines of the first two quatrains helps to establish the bond between the natural and the human worlds, as each element reflects its animate qualities in the other. On the one hand, the sea itself is accorded human traits. On the other, the sea also becomes an element which highlights Paz's focus on the instant, specifically the concept of the extraordinary instant as characterized by Martin Heidegger, in which Paz's poetic voice attempts to grasp his true self.³ The sea, often an image associated with eternity due to its vastness, in this case also acquires instantaneity, as seen in "el mar que muere y nace en un reflejo" of line 4. The second stanza adds the image of a cliff—an image of strength and durability—which rises out of the sea, and also the reference to a "mar sediento," a symbolically "thirsty"

³ Myrna Solotorevsky has described this concept of the instant as an exceptional or extraordinary moment, and not a daily occurrence, in which, according to Heidegger, "fulgura el ser" (536). Though her focus is primarily on *Semillas para un himno*, the concept can be applied to other poems in which Paz focuses on the instant.

sea engaged in its own quest for finding the true instant along with Paz's voice. Yet this same sea is "apenas un reflejo"—as it is important to note that this part of the poem centers on the search for the Other and for the extraordinary instant, not on the actual achievement thereof. Raymond D. Souza has noted Paz's focus on this instant as both erotic and cosmic, along with its dialectical nature: "[T]here is the subject of the 'instante amoroso,' or sexual climax, by which the poet achieves harmony with the essential rhythm of the universe and the ultimate synthesis, the synthesis of the individual with the universe takes place" (63).

The two tercets provide the reader further insight into the concept of time as an aggregate series of instants. For Paz's "yo," here is specifically one month in time which he associates with the sea and the Other, clearly noted through the simple elements of the "espumas" and "peces" comprising that one month. This unnamed Other opens up the continuum of time and breaks the constant cycle of one day leading into the next. This is accomplished through the Other's body, which "abre bahías / al oscuro oleaje de los días." Indeed, it is the body of a human being which conjoins nature in its own metaphoric "body" to help Paz's poetic persona find the exact moment in which self and other are bridged. The erotic component is what helps define Paz's conception of male-female coupling and this act of conjoining, as Agustín Pastén has noted (72).⁴ Finally, this poem's use of the sea creates a bridge between the conscious and the unconscious, as Rodney Williamson states: "The unconscious sea and the 'tú,' the conscious construct, become a 'plural mirror,' reflecting each other back and forth. The mirror thus becomes both a metaphor for the poetic dialogue and the symbolic cornerstone of the poem's architecture" (25).

Sonnet III is a more explicit attempt at using nature to help cross the divide between self and other (15, 16). More specifically, this sonnet creates a set of gendered spaces in which nature and woman are conflated into one entity.⁵ In this case the thematic focus is the conjoined space of the natural cosmos and the female body.

Del verdecido júbilo del cielo
 luces recobras que la luna pierde
 porque la luz de sí misma recuerde
 relámpagos y otoños en tu pelo.

⁴ Note Pastén's appraisal of *otredad* in this context; we see "el encuentro entre dos seres esencialmente incompletos mediante el erotismo" (72). Other critics have gone even further, suggesting that not only is the erotic act essential to one's encounter with *otredad*, but something far larger; for example, Marcela Labraña characterizes this erotic union as a "proyección del cosmos" (50). Additionally, the figure of woman in specific poems such as those of *Primer día* is itself not only a link between the poet and the universe, but also a microcosm in itself; see Tarroux-Follin (35).

⁵ Paz does not limit his association of woman and the natural world to these earlier texts. For much of his vocation as a poet, Paz had conflated the natural world with female identity, both physically and psychologically. See, for example, Ricardo Gullón's study, "Reverberación de la piedra," which focuses largely on "Piedra de sol."

El viento bebe viento en su desvelo,
 mueve las hojas y su lluvia verde
 moja tus hombros, tus espaldas muerde
 y te desnuda y quema y vuelve yelo.

Dos barcos de velamen desplegado
 tus dos pechos. Tu espalda es un torrente.
 Tu vientre es un jardín petrificado.

Es otoño en tu nuca: sol y bruma.
 Bajo del verde cielo adolescente,
 tu cuerpo da su enamorada suma.

A number of natural motifs stand out to describe the topography of the female Other. In the first quatrain, the sky, the moon, and natural light draw the reader's attention to this unnamed woman, as that which is human is now transported to a celestial plane. Her body is further likened to the wind and the rain in the second stanza, continuing the association of her hair with the autumn from the preceding stanza. The wind and the water suggest fluidity and smoothness, characteristics which help to demarcate the body. Naked and pure, this woman—again, a sexualized object on the part of the poet—also acquires paradoxical traits, as seen in the expression “quema y vuelve yelo.” It is both nature and the woman who are alive and animate; both are conflated in an eroticized portrait of the Other which Paz's voice aspires to join.

Water imagery, either directly or indirectly, is used again in the first tercet (“Dos barcos de velamen” and “torrente”) to describe the female body, suggesting fluidity and timelessness.⁶ At the same time, the “jardín petrificado” that forms the abdomen suggests firmness. Finally, Paz returns to the autumn in treating another erogenous zone of the woman, the nape of her neck, in the second tercet. The “yo” of the poem suggests playfulness and youthful abandon in treating the sky as “adolescente,” before returning to the body in the last line. Paz's poetic voice immerses itself in his love for an eroticized woman and also achieves union with the entire world. This process, in which Nature and the “tú” are conflated, is what Williamson has characterized as a

double process: the transformative ‘greening’ of nature, in which the ‘tú’ is or becomes a series of natural elements (ice, waterfall, a petrified garden), and the process of conscious perfection, in which through ‘magistry’ the green is

⁶ Paz often uses water as a sign of desire in later poetry as well as in these texts; see Martha Nandorfy, “‘Petrificada petrificante’ (1976).” Here, she observes that “el agua es signo del deseo porque el deseo siempre se refiere a la ausencia” (585). Paz's use of water imagery is, of course, not limited to these earlier poems, and evolved over time. See Elsa Dehennin, “Stone and Water Imagery in Paz's Poetry,” where the author examines *Cántico* and *La estación violenta* for ways in which Paz uses these natural motifs.

turned into purest, reflected gold. The ‘magistry’ in this case, we may assume, is that of the artist. (29)

Both the female body and the environment are sexualized spaces and become intertwined. This becomes an essential part of Paz’s poetry, as Enrico Mario Santí observes: “the analogy between the woman’s body and the world, woman as a source of knowledge” (266).⁷

Finally, “Mar de día” continues the process begun in the sonnets above in which nature is treated as an eroticized female body (17, 18). In this instance, it is a solitary strand of hair which provides the impetus for the poetic voice to seek out unity with the environment. Though not a sonnet, “Mar de día” is another brief poem which grants the earth characteristics of a human body, while Paz’s poetic voice achieves unity with a female other through the lens of nature:

Por un cabello solo
 parte sus blancas venas,
 su dulce pecho bronco,
 y muestra labios verdes,
 frenéticos, nupciales,
 la espuma deslumbrada. (17)

The entire world becomes a human body, in many respects one which takes on the female form of the desired Other. The woman’s strand of hair illumines the entire world and creates a sense of openness and oneness with the universe, as seen later in “Por esa luz en vuelo / que parte en dos al día” (17) and “el universo roto / mostrando sus entrañas” (18). Everything in the sea becomes visible and animate thanks to the hair, from deep sea creatures to waves on the surface, and from octopi to undersea mineral deposits such as coal. Even seaborne algae acquire human traits, likened to “lentas cabelleras.” Paz then calls this one strand of hair “entre mis dedos llama, / vibrante, esbelta espada,” an image of fire, passion, and power, in spite of its diminutive size. Woman acquires the force and fury of nature at the same time that nature acquires the bodily features of a human female, and Paz ends the poem with an implication of achieving unity with his desired Other and with the world at the same time: “Por un cabello solo / el mundo tiene cuerpo.”

⁷ Some scholars have observed Paz’s association with woman and the natural world, though often in other texts. Anne Marie Remley Rambo authored one early study of how Paz appropriates the female presence, and observed the following regarding gender identity and natural spaces: “Paz metamorphizes familiar objects into objects of Nature and intermingles the two worlds. In this atmosphere of his own creation, the poet is linked philosophically and physically to woman and hence to all natural life. We find the figure of woman related to the Nature symbols of trees and water which suggest fecundity, profundity and the power of life. The woman is seen indirectly in the manifestations of these things” (261). Additionally, for further study of the sonnets of *Libertad bajo palabra* and their variants, see Lombó Mulliert, “Octavio, sus sonetos. Notas sobre las variantes de *Libertad bajo palabra*.”

Though the object of the poetic voice's attention is female, it is the natural world which provides the foundation for inspiration here. As María Vázquez observes, "En su visión del mundo, [Paz] encuentra su inspiración principalmente en la naturaleza y en la mujer. Sin embargo, es la naturaleza la que se convertirá en su fuente de inspiración primera y la que lo llevará a reflexionar sobre su propia naturaleza" (107). *Primer día* thus sets the stage for the ways in which Paz will treat nature throughout the rest of *Bajo tu clara sombra* and its component sections, at the same time that it shows him beginning to develop as a poet. In general, *Libertad bajo palabra* will heavily involve the association of nature, feminine identity, and the need to bridge self and Other. As Daniela Chazarreta notes,

esclarecemos que en la mayor parte de sus menciones, la naturaleza que se hace presente en *Libertad bajo palabra* constituye un orbe apartado del ser humano. Sin embargo, la otredad o ajenidad del orbe natural se diluye o intenta diluirse a partir de la configuración del paisaje que consolida el anhelo o voluntad de analogía, imperante en la cosmovisión paciana. En esta línea leemos el poemario a partir de los siguientes principios: por una parte, se plantea una voluntad de analogía en la cual la mujer resulta ser la intermediaria predilecta entre la otredad (la naturaleza) y el sujeto poético, ambas instancias ampliamente fundamentadas y analizadas por la crítica; por otra parte, la dicotomía naturaleza / cultura se resuelve a partir de la categoría de paisaje. ("Naturaleza y paisaje" 227, 228)

In short, Paz's poetic search here is the search, in many ways, for authenticity (231, 232).

Bajo tu clara sombra [1935-1938], first appearing in 1937 and republished in different parts in the following decade, is a smaller collection unto itself as well as one longer poem, divided in ten sections of unequal length (19-29). This poem continues the pattern begun several years prior, in which nature and woman are often conflated and in which Paz seeks to achieve union with the feminine Other through the environment. This poem, whose title reflects the paradox of light and shadow as projected by the female Other, centers on the subject's quest for wholeness with the latter. In this poem, the relationship between the female presence and the natural world can best be described as symbiotic; one gives life to the other and is reflected in the other. Hugo Verani's observations regarding a later poem, "Piedra de sol," are applicable to this earlier collection as well: "La mirada del poeta convierte el cuerpo de la mujer en un cuerpo cosmogónico; por vía analógica, el amor libera las pasiones y restaura un estado de plenitud... El hablante recorre el cuerpo de la mujer-naturaleza-cosmos como si fuera una celebración de la unidad de lo natural y lo humano, de lo material y lo abstracto." (*Octavio Paz: el poema como caminata* 96)

In the interests of staying within the parameters of this essay, only several sections will be discussed. After the poetic subject directly addresses his love and implores it to give him its voice (19, 20), the fourth section metapoetically begins

with his stated intent—“Tengo que hablaros de ella” (21)—and shortly thereafter shows this woman to be at the center of the natural cosmos (“La huella de su pie / es el centro visible de la tierra,” 22). Yet her location within the world is paradoxical in another way as well—“encadenado y libre”—suggesting that at once she is free in being a part of the universe that surrounds her yet bound in her being apart from the one who wants to find completeness in her. Her importance is seen not only as someone desired by the speaker’s voice; indeed, it is this woman who acts as a harbinger of life and nature’s bounty, suggesting springtime:

su voz, alba terrestre,
nos anuncia el rescate de las aguas,
el regreso del fuego,
la vuelta de la espiga,
las primeras palabras de los árboles,
la blanca monarquía de las alas. (22)

Nature’s bounty and animate qualities are evident but are made so by the unnamed Other. In fact, it is the entire cosmos which is brought to life by this feminine object, one whose very living essence is intertwined with hers: “se enciende su sangre cada noche / con la sangre nocturna de las cosas.” Paz must speak to his reader of her, of her “fresco costumbre,” “simple tormenta,” and “rama tierna.” (23) Woman encapsulates the qualities of nature and birth commonly ascribed to her throughout literature (though most commonly as written by men).

The sixth section of the poem contains numerous imperatives directed at his female object, as Paz calls attention to the world and all its living elements. This natural environment is conflated with the woman, and throughout this section Paz shifts imperatives from “mira” to “toca,” asking her to symbolically touch both him and herself. The world and all its power are visible in much of this section:

Mira el poder del mundo,
mira el poder del polvo, mira el agua.

Mira los fresnos en callado círculo,
toca su reino de silencio y savia,
toca su piel de sol y lluvia y tiempo,
mira sus verdes ramas claras al cielo,
oye cantar sus hojas como agua. (24)

The poem acquires a notably sensorial aspect in engaging both the woman’s and the reader’s sight and sound. Nature is accorded the familiar traits of a human body, a tendency already familiar in Paz’s work. However, the focus shifts from nature’s body

to the bodies of both his poetic alter ego and the woman inscribed in this work. As a result, Paz charges the poem with a noticeably erotic element.

The following two stanzas illustrate the poem's eroticism and continue to the conflate nature with the Other:

Toca mi piel, de barro, de diamante,
oye mi voz en fuentes subterráneas,
mira mi boca en esa lluvia oscura,
mi sexo en esa brusca sacudida
con que desnuda el aire los jardines.

Toca tu desnudez en la del agua,
desnúdate de ti, llueve en ti misma,
mira tus piernas como dos arroyos,
mira tu cuerpo como un largo río,
son dos islas gemelas tus dos pechos,
en la noche tu sexo es una estrella,
alba, luz rosa entre dos mundos ciegos,
mar profundo que duerme entre dos mares. (24, 25)

Both the male narrative self and the female object of desire become sexualized, within a framework of nature which itself is used to describe the human body. Through this process Paz's voice comes closer to achieving its goal of finding communion with the Other. Of note is the particular image of light, especially the graphic characterization of the female body as various representations of light—"estrella," "alba," or a "luz" which connects two symbolically blind worlds, that of self and other. The woman's "light" brightens a dark world in which Paz's poetic persona hopes to break out of his *soledad*. This sexual encounter with a woman is achieved by placing her on a level equal to that of the entire world. This erotic conjunction of self and other via the natural world has a certain sacred character, as Blas Matamoros notes, a trait "que se vincula con la utopía de cohesión instantánea del mundo: la visión mística, el orgasmo y el acto poético son episodios privilegiados de esa tentativa" (20).

The seventh section continues the poem's established tendency to focus on different body parts, starting from the "cuerpo" in general to various specific areas thereof, including the "garganta," "vientre," "tobillos," "muslos," "pecho," "cuello," "manos," "labios y dientes," and "ojos" (25, 26). Many of these same elements are treated as representations of nature, such as "un vientre que amanece" and "un pecho que se alza / y arrasa las espumas." (25) Water, so often used as a symbol of sensuality and eroticism as much as one of purity, is something desired which escapes the poetic voice—"Esto que se me escapa, / agua y delicia oscura, / mar naciendo o muriendo" (26)—but which also provides some ambiguity. The sea may either be dying or being born, suggesting the ongoing nature of time as well as the simple ebb and flow of

the timeless sea. The woman's lips, teeth, and eyes all strip the narrative voice of its clothing and transport it to a celestial sphere where the instant—what Paz searches for on so many other occasions—is attainable, “donde vibra el instante.” It is there where Paz's voice can find “la plenitud del mundo y de sus formas.” As the poem begins to conclude, the female body and the male narrator are transported to a celestial sphere, suggesting timelessness once again.⁸

Lastly, the ninth section begins with an Adamic invocation as Paz wants to name his interlocutor, the earth, whereas previously it was the woman who was the antecedent of the poet's “tú”:

Deja que una vez más te nombre, tierra,
y que mi lengua sepa a tu sustancia.
Mi tacto se prolonga
en el tuyo sediento,
largo, vibrante río
que no termina nunca,
navegado por hojas digitales,
lentas bajo tu espeso sueño verde. (27)

The river again is accorded the characteristics of eternity, like the sea seen earlier, and once more the poem is infused with a tactile quality. The section begins to conclude with a strophe of equal length addressing the object as “Tibia mujer de somnolientos ríos,” as a “pabellón de pájaros y peces,” and as a “paloma de tierra,” all suggesting peace and harmony with the natural world (28). However, Paz also calls this woman “mi muerte” and ends the poem by declaring to her, “en un amor más vasto te sepulto.” Woman will be his partner to the end; yet, he will also “bury” her in his unending love. The woman is at once a sexual object, a stated object of love, a symbol of life and a representation of nature itself.⁹ Taken together, the varied sections of this one long poem show an “estructura arquetípica que imita claramente la naturaleza,” along with “la búsqueda del poeta de una unión mística con la tierra,” as Michael Moody has described (592). The natural environment is an essential component to understanding the poet's quest for finding wholeness.

⁸ This concept of the instant is not only understood to be the erotic coupling described earlier; indeed, it includes an element of not being limited by time. Israel Rodríguez explains this, as seen in his study of “Piedra de sol”: “El instante es más que una superposición del pasado, del futuro y del presente, es una concentración atrapada del tiempo en un instante. Este instante echa raíces y da frutos de tiempo” (108).

⁹ It should be noted that not once is the female offered an opportunity to speak. Such embedding of traditional gender roles is not surprising and still a sign of male privilege, though Paz had at least acknowledged male privilege in other texts. For a brief description of how Paz examines traditional gender roles in Mexico, see Adelaida R. Del Castillo, “Mexican Gender Ideology.”

Asueto [1939-1944] contains a number of shorter poems returning to the theme of *soledad/otredad* and the search for connection to a wider cosmos. This smaller collection, also part of the larger compilation of works published under *Bajo tu clara sombra*, recycles many of the same motifs and elements taken from the natural world seen earlier in Paz's work. Elements of the earth, the water and rivers are present as vehicles by which Paz articulates his larger concerns regarding the search for the Other and for plenitude. Several poems from this short collection are notable; this study will discuss two. The sonnet "Junio" shows how the poetic persona aims to achieve timelessness via the month of June—traditionally the end of spring and the harbinger of the summer season—and the central motif of a river (65). In this instance, the element of the water is fundamental in helping to establish the poet's quest for eternity and the transcendence of time.

Llegas de nuevo, río transparente,
 todo cielo y verdor, nubes pasmadas,
 lluvias o cabelleras desatadas,
 plenitud, ola inmóvil y fuente.

Tu luz moja una fecha adolescente:
 rozan las manos formas vislumbradas,
 los labios besan sombras ya besadas,
 los ojos ven, el corazón presiente.

¡Hora de eternidad, toda presencia,
 el tiempo en ti se colma y desemboca
 y todo cobra ser, hasta la ausencia!

El corazón presiente y se incorpora,
 mentida plenitud que nadie toca:
 hoy es ayer y es siempre y es deshora.

Paz's interlocutor is ostensibly the river, bringing with it images of light and transparency. But this river itself is a metaphor for the month of June, something that comes and goes with each passing year. The seasonal setting provides an idealized time in which the poet's memories are activated and are brought to the present. Not only does June bring with it "cielo," "verdor," and "nubes," but also human form, reminding Paz of an amorous union with the Other. The second stanza focuses on this, via such physical elements as "manos," "labios," "ojos," and "corazón." Everything becomes both transcendent (the "eternidad" of the third stanza) as well as immanent (the "presencia" immediately thereafter), as the natural world serves as a vehicle by which Paz's poetic persona breaks free from the constraints of time and simultaneously acquires presence in the here and now. No one can remove this timeless

quality from the human heart, as the final stanza implies, as plenitude is achieved thanks to this river/month. One bears in mind Fredrik Sörstad's characterization of how Paz treats *otredad* generally: "el énfasis se sitúa en la presencia del otro en el sentido de desdoblamiento del yo que pone de manifiesto su trascendencia, esto es, su aspiración a rebasar constantemente los límites de su ser." (328) Paz even echoes Francisco de Quevedo in the final line, "hoy es ayer y es siempre y es deshora," as the boundaries separating past, present, and future are dismantled and the temporary becomes eternal.¹⁰

Then, "Noche de verano" treats the night as a human body, as night provides the time during which one can feel nature as an animate entity and during which one can also achieve union with it (65, 66). Again, nature—via the central image of a summer night—is the catalyst in the poet's search for *otredad*. Like the two preceding poems, "Noche de verano" conveys its message in a brief space, this time in only five stanzas.

Pulsas, palpas el cuerpo de la noche,
verano que te bañas en los ríos,
soplo en el que se ahogan las estrellas,
aliento de una boca,
de unos labios de tierra.

Tierra de labios, boca
donde un infierno agónico jadea,
labios en donde el cielo llueve
y el agua canta y nacen paraísos.

Se incendia el árbol de la noche
y sus astillas son estrellas,
son pupilas, son pájaros.
Fluyen ríos sonámbulos,
lenguas de sal incandescente
contra una playa oscura.

Todo respira, vive, fluye:
la luz en su temblor,

¹⁰ Quevedo's sonnet treats a different theme altogether, the brevity of life, yet the intertextual echoes of timelessness remain. The sonnet reads as follows: "¡Ah de la vida!... ¿Nadie me responde? / ¡Aquí de los antaños que he vivido! / La Fortuna mis tiempos ha mordido; / Las Horas mi locura las esconde. // ¡Que sin poder saber cómo ni adónde / La Salud y la Edad se hayan huido! / Falta la vida, asiste lo vivido, / Y no hay calamidad que no me ronde. // Ayer se fue; Mañana no ha llegado; / Hoy se está yendo sin parar un punto: / Soy un fue, y un será, y un es cansado. // En el Hoy y Mañana y Ayer, junto / Pañales y mortaja, y he quedado / Presentes sucesiones de difunto" (158, 159).

el ojo en el espacio,
 el corazón en su latido,
 la noche en su infinito.

Un nacimiento oscuro, sin orillas,
 nace en la noche de verano.
 Y en tu pupila nace todo el cielo.

This summer night also appears as a mildly eroticized female partner. The unnamed object of the poem, the *tú* addressed by the speaking subject, is the first to achieve union with the night, embodied from the very beginning of the poem. Water imagery, seen throughout the poem and initially so in the “ríos” of line 2, suggests the continuous presence of the natural world as well as life. Water is not the only natural element, however; the earth of the second stanza is also granted corporeal form, whose metaphoric “labios” suggest the power to communicate with humanity and which provides a *locus amoenus*, as seen in “paraísos.”

The intensity of the summer night is even more visible in the third stanza, as the burning tree of the night acquires human characteristics as well (“pupilas”). All of nature is alive during this one summer night, a normally brief period of time which soon acquires permanence, as seen in its “infinito.” However, it is neither merely the natural cosmos nor specifically the summer night which are alive; indeed, it is also the *tú* which comes alive and which embodies the entire natural world. Something is born, unbounded by time or other limitations (“Un nacimiento oscuro, sin orillas, / nace”); this “birth” suggests the presence of another living entity during the summer night. At the poem’s conclusion, the entire cosmos becomes encapsulated in the interlocutor’s “pupila,” as the human eye reflects the natural world surrounding it. Paz’s poetic voice achieves unity with its desired partner and with the rest of the universe simultaneously.¹¹

This study will conclude with an examination of three short poems taken from *El girasol [1943-1948]*. Paz continues his poetic search for finding fulfillment in the figure of the Other within the context of the environment.¹² The body and the world become conflated yet again, while Paz uses nature as a means by which to describe his unnamed female object. “Escrito con tinta verde” is an instance in which Paz metapoetically “writes nature;” in this case, the poet’s own words craft a space

¹¹ One must note how nature also provides a means by which humankind can reflect upon itself, as well as a setting through which the gap between *soledad* and *otredad* is bridged. Paz covers this later in his book, *Los hijos del limo*, as Jorge Román Lagunas notes: “la naturaleza es un elemento de la correspondencia universal; es una imagen de nuestras vidas” (84)

¹² Judith Goetzinger describes the significance of this section, as one which contains “‘seeds’ of a positive faith in life” and in which the “theme of loss and solitude is still maintained, but more often in the aspect of nostalgia for the perfection and peace of a world seen through a lover’s eyes” (229).

in which humankind is linked to the cosmos (84). Only four stanzas long, this poem metaphorizes the act of writing in some ways as a product of nature, as one can see immediately from the phrase “tinta verde.”

La tinta verde crea jardines, selvas, prados,
follajes donde cantan las letras,
palabras que son árboles,
frases que son verdes constelaciones.

Deja que mis palabras, oh blanca, descendan y te cubran
como una lluvia de hojas a un campo de nieve,
como la yedra a la estatua,
como la tinta a esta página.

Brazos, cintura, cuello, senos,
la frente pura como el mar,
la nuca de bosque en otoño,
los dientes que muerden una brizna de yerba.

Tu cuerpo se constela de signos verdes
como el cuerpo del árbol de renuevos.
No te importe tanta pequeña cicatriz luminosa:
mira al cielo y su verde tatuaje de estrellas.

Here, the reader sees a conjoining of the act of creating a written product with life as created by nature. More specifically, the written word here creates the natural cosmos inscribed within the poem, which in turn is conflated with a female body.

The first stanza briefly details the creative process by which this natural world is constructed. Literary discourse itself is treated as a natural entity in its own right, as words become sturdy and visible “árboles” and sentences become “verdes constelaciones,” as groupings of thoughts in the same manner as a constellation is a grouping of stars. The second stanza continues the creative process by Paz’s voice now addressing his female interlocutor, as he in turn is responsible for writing his desired love object much the same way that he writes the natural world. He implores her to let him cover her with his words as leaves cover a snowy field or ivy covers a statue. Unlike most of the poems seen thus far, in this case the female body, the quest for *otredad*, and the natural world are combined this time with the willful act of literary creation or poesis; as Gustavo Correa has observed, in this collection, “la figura femenina aparece como mediadora y, aún más, como vía de identificación con el cosmos y de experiencia poética incandescente” (492). The remainder of the poem further likens a woman’s body to the topography of the earth. It is within nature, and at the end of the poem specifically within the celestial sphere, where woman becomes eternal; of

course, Paz wrote texts like these from a heterosexual male perspective. Lloyd King has noted Paz's gender identifications: "For Paz, woman is the embodiment of the eternal feminine which in cosmic terms is complementary to the male intellectual principle, and therefore eroticism has a fundamental psychic significance" (48). Both woman and the cosmos are encapsulated in the "signos verdes" of this poem written in symbolic "green ink," much the way that the color green reflects living vegetation.¹³

"Visititas" is a much shorter composition in which nature itself becomes the object of the poet's quest for *otredad* (85). Nature "visits" the poet at night and helps him to achieve plenitude. This poem suggests harmony and tranquility:

A través de la noche urbana de piedra y sequía
entra el campo a mi cuarto.
Alarga brazos verdes con pulseras de pájaros,
con pulseras de hojas.
Lleva un río de la mano.
El cielo del campo también entra,
con su cesta de joyas acabadas de cortar.
Y el mar se sienta junto a mí,
extendiendo su cola blanquísima en el suelo.
Del silencio brota un árbol de música.
Del árbol cuelgan todas las palabras hermosas
que brillan, maduran, caen.
En mi frente, cueva que habita un relámpago...
Pero todo se ha poblado de alas.
Dime, ¿es de veras el campo que viene de tan lejos
o eres tú, son los sueños que sueñas a mi lado?

The context of this poem is somewhat unique: in this case, nature is the desired Other for Paz and proves to be a powerful antidote to the daily pressures of living in the city. In crafting this poem, Paz advocates for a communion with nature even in the midst of modern urban life. Though in some ways the relationship between humankind and nature here can be seen as an I-thou relationship, it also becomes one best characterized as part-whole, as seen elsewhere. Initially, nature may seem separate from humankind, yet it is Paz's analogic vision which bridges the two; as Chazarreta states, "El primer

¹³ This conflation of nature and the female body also includes the notion of fertility, a concept seen throughout human history and in other works by Paz. As Chazarreta notes, "La mujer se vincula con la noción de la fertilidad que ingresa a partir de la mención de la lluvia, de la luna y de Semíramis (diosa de la fertilidad y de la belleza). Se enlaza, además, con la antigua noción de lo eterno femenino; es un intertexto cultural construido a través de deidades y figuras femeninas diversas a lo largo de su obra y emparentado con la naturaleza. La mujer es concebida, inclusive, como un puente, un pasaje a la otredad, la realidad de un tránsito... presente en el personaje del cuento infantil, Almendrita." ("Dilemas del otro" 142)

aspecto que sobresale en esta concepción es la otredad de la naturaleza, su carácter autónomo y ajeno al hombre. En segundo lugar, emerge de estas palabras una noción que atraviesa la estética de Paz: la cosmovisión analógica, es decir, la construcción de paralelos entre el hombre y su entorno.” (“Entre la piedra y la flor” 2) The natural world peacefully invades his artificial realm of a room and extends its bodily form out to him. The eternal flow of the river¹⁴ is also clearly visible, as are the sky and the sea in their vastness. The central image of the tree itself becomes a discursive presence, as its metaphoric leaves are the “palabras hermosas” which nature uses to communicate with the narrator. Through this, we see a communicative symbiosis between humankind and nature, as the poem suggests a dialogue and an engagement with each other. Although this poem does not treat the environment ostensibly as a gendered entity or as an object of sexual desire, this same environment becomes an indispensable part of the poet’s life and allows him to have a lyrical voice.

Finally, “A la orilla” returns again to the common association of femininity with the natural world within Paz’s search for companionship and communion (86). Again, the reader notices the night as the time in which this unity is forged, along with the juxtaposition of light amidst the dark:

Todo lo que brilla en la noche,
collares, ojos, astros,
serpentinadas de fuegos de colores,
brilla en tus brazos de río que se curva,
en tu cuello de día que despierta.

The human body suggested in these lines encapsulates the natural world, including the now-familiar trope of the river and its continuous, life-affirming presence. Light-dark contrast is visible in the second stanza, “La hoguera que encienden en la selva,” which along with a giraffe’s long neck and the eye of an insomniac, become tired of waiting. The poem shifts from imagery of brilliance and being awake to somnolence, as Paz exhorts his interlocutor, “Apágate, / para brillar no hay como los ojos que nos ven: / contéplate en mí que te contemplo.” Unity with the Other is achieved during this time frame of the night, and again it is the natural environment which grants Paz the words with which to affirm life and unity. He exhorts his partner to sleep, likening her directly to the “terciopelo de bosque, / musgo donde reclina la cabeza.” The poem concludes with an oneiric and even metapoetic image of Paz writing his words during a dreamlike state during the night, only to have them erased by the same night: “La

¹⁴ The river appears as a motif for movement and flow elsewhere in Paz’s work, sometimes distinguished from elements such as the tree, often seen as a symbol of plenitude and unity with the Other. See Hernández Araico, where she explains the function of these two motifs in “Piedra de sol” (232). In other works beyond the scope of this study, Paz maintains the image of the river as a symbol of life and of eternity. See, for instance, Magis for an examination of the river (and of water more broadly as well) in *La estación violenta* (138).

noche con las olas azules va borrando estas palabras, / escritas con mano ligera en la palma del sueño.” This grants a certain measure of timelessness and eternity, as the human form and the natural world become conjoined yet again.

To conclude, it would be simplistic to label Paz merely as a “nature poet” or “nature writer,” as some might be tempted to do. In this instance, one does not merely see hymns of praise for nature, nor a particular nationalist rendering of humankind’s place in nature (such as what is visible in nineteenth-century Romanticism). Instead, the natural world is an indispensable tool for Paz as he attempts to find his own identity vis-à-vis the presence of another and to inscribe that search within the lyric. Without the natural world, there can be no completion with the Other; the gap between *soledad* and *otredad* could not be sufficiently bridged. This is visible not only in these sections of *Libertad bajo palabra* but also in later publications, such as *¿Águila o sol?* and the long poem, “Piedra de sol.” Additionally, the concept of the natural world as a bridge can be seen in the work of other Latin American poets, such as José Lezama Lima Vicente Gerbasi; in Chazarreta’s study of their work alongside Paz’s, she notes, “El paisaje... se presenta como una categoría que religa, que concilia.” (“Convertir la naturaleza” 9)¹⁵ Indeed, it is partly through the natural world that Paz infuses his poetry with a sense of undertaking a walk or a journey, a phenomenon visible in much of his work, as Verani had recently studied.¹⁶ One is to hope that we may see future study of Octavio Paz and his manipulation of the natural world, and that readers may better understand how something so central to his thought—the search for *otredad*—came into being through nature.

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¹⁵ Chazarreta discusses the meanings of spatiality and landscape in Gerbasi in greater detail in “Dimensiones del espacio: el trópico en la poesía de Vicente Gerbasi.” This cosmovision, thus, is not limited exclusively to Paz.

¹⁶ Verani’s monographic study, *Octavio Paz: el poema como caminata*, illustrates how the concept of taking a walk, winding one’s way through word and image, pervades nearly all of Paz’s poetic output throughout his career, heavily influenced by the travels he had undertaken throughout his life. A highly thorough analysis, this in many ways lies beyond the scope of this study.

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“Mejor esto que nada”: Employment and Exploitation in Pablo García Casado’s *Dinero*

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Abstract: Even before the worldwide economic crisis of 2008 began, the prose poems in Pablo García Casado’s *Dinero* (2007) continued the exploration of the potential and pitfalls of socially engaged poetry already taking place in Spain during the first two decades of the twenty first century. These poems trace the visual dimensions of a range of economic interactions that link and divide bosses, employees, customers, and families, setting the stage for readers to draw their own conclusions regarding the scenes and dynamics presented by these poems.

Keywords: Pablo García Casado; 21st century Spanish poetry; prose poetry; socially committed poetry; cinematic techniques in poetry

The first two decades of the twenty first century have seen the publication of a series of key books dealing with the history of socially engaged poetry in twentieth- and twenty-first-century Spain. Some of them, like J. Lechner’s *El compromiso en la poesía española del siglo XX* (1968, reissued in 2004), Fanny Rubio’s *Las revistas poéticas españolas, 1939-1975* (1976, reissued in 2004), and a critical edition of Leopoldo de Luis’s *Poesía social española contemporánea. Antología (1939-1968)* (1965, 1969) prepared by Fanny Rubio and Jorge Urrutia in 2000, represented a reissuing of texts first published during or shortly after the Franco dictatorship, while new studies like Juan José Lanz’s *La revista Claraboya (1963-1968): un episodio fundamental en la renovación poética de los años sesenta* (2005) and Miguel Ángel García’s *La literatura y sus demonios: Leer la poesía social* (2012), addressed poetry from the same period. A number of other important contributions to this field have come from key poets and critics like Jorge Riechmann (1962-), Antonio Orihuela (1965-), Antonio Méndez Rubio (1967-), and Luis Bagué Quílez (1978-) and have explored not only the history of socially engaged poetry but also its possibilities and pitfalls. Individual contributions like Méndez Rubio’s *Poesía sin mundo: Escritos sobre poética y sociedad, 1993-2003* (2004) and *La destrucción de la forma (Y otros escritos sobre poesía y conflicto)* (2008), Riechmann’s *Resistencia de materiales. Ensayos sobre el mundo y la poesía y el mundo* (2006), and Bagué Quílez’s *Poesía en pie de paz: Modos del compromiso hacia el tercer milenio* (2006)

had collective counterparts in the form of the *Leer y entender la poesía* volume dedicated to *Conciencia y compromiso poéticos* (2002) and the *Voces del Extremo* poetry festivals held in Moguer and coordinated by Orihuela beginning in 1999. This comingling and coexistence of engagements with socially engaged poetry highlights the variety of forms of this phenomenon in circulation during this period as well as the continued importance of lyrical interventions in the social, illustrating what Jacques Rancière has termed the “paradoxes of political art.”

As he explains in *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* (2010), a commonly held view is that “[a]rt is presumed to be effective politically because it displays the marks of domination, or [...] leaves the spaces reserved for it and becomes a social practice” (134-35). This system relies on what Rancière defines as “the *pedagogical* model of the efficacy of art,” which “posits that what the viewer sees [...] is a set of signs formed according to an artist’s intention” (136, 135-36). “By recognizing these signs,” he explains, “the spectator is supposedly induced into a specific reading of the world around us, leading, in turn, to the feeling of a certain proximity or distance, and ultimately to the spectator’s intervening into the situation staged by the author” (136). Although Rancière ultimately critiques this common opinion regarding art’s political effectiveness, he does leave space for the subversive potential of works of art that reconfigure viewers’ modes of engagement with the visible and the sensible. Artists, in his view, “are those whose strategies aim to change the frames, speeds and scales according to which we perceive the visible,” and critical art in particular “aims to produce a new perception of the world, and therefore to create a commitment to its transformation” (141, 142). While the rhetorical jump from a new perception of the world to a newfound commitment to its transformation might seem abrupt, it is in fact built upon three steps: “first, the production of a sensory form of ‘strangeness’; second, the development of an awareness of the reason for that strangeness and third, a mobilization of individuals as a result of that awareness” (142). This extension of Viktor Shklovsky’s discussion of estrangement provides a way of reading otherwise not explicitly political texts in political terms (Shklovsky 12).

Pablo García Casado (Córdoba, 1972-) is a writer who believes that poets should exhibit an emotional engagement with the scenes, themes, situations, and scenarios they present (qtd. in Duque Amusco 218). His work has been included in important anthologies like *Feroces: Radicales, marginales y heterodoxos en la última poesía española* (1998), *La Generación del 99* (1999), *Veinticinco poetas españoles jóvenes* (2003), *La inteligencia y el hacha (Un panorama de la Generación poética de 2000)* (2010) and, in English translation, *New European Poets* (2008). The appearance in 2013 of *Fuera de campo. Poesía reunida* confirmed the critical and commercial recognition that followed the publication of García Casado’s first book, *Las afueras* (1997), which received the Premio Ojo Crítico de Radio Nacional de España and was a finalist for the Premio Nacional de Poesía. In addition to this collection, which inspired *Estar en las afueras también es estar dentro*, an homage volume that appeared a decade later, *Fuera de campo* also included García Casado’s next two books, *El mapa de América* (2001) and *Dinero*

(2007), which were subsequently followed by *García* (2015) and *La cámara te quiere* (2019). Each of these collections has contributed to a poetic trajectory characterized by thematic coherence, provocative language, and a blending of voices and registers. Some of the themes explored by these books include love and sex (*Las afueras*), the visual and discursive imaginary of American road movies (*El mapa de América*), money and its role in society (*Dinero*), and the dynamics and consequences of the adult film industry (*La cámara te quiere*). A key formal turning point in this thematic arc can be traced in the use of prose poems in *Dinero*, a form that García Casado has continued to use in his subsequent collections.

By revealing and calling attention to current social, political, and economic conditions and their concrete impact on individuals through a lens marked by filmic aesthetics, the thirty-eight prose poems that make up García Casado's *Dinero* situate themselves within and extend an already established tradition of socially engaged poetry in Spain. Reviews of this collection generally point to its non-dogmatic character while recognizing that this quality does not preclude the presence of social critique (Rico 19; Villena, "Lírica" IV; Villena, "Poesía" 60). Luis Antonio de Villena cautions against seeing this collection as a return to the social poetry of the 1950s and 60s, framing it instead as an example of "una poesía realista, que tiene en cuenta la vida corriente y lo narra todo para que de lo entredicho brote la poesía agridulce de la desesperanza" ("Lírica" IV). Villena also sees in these poems a lyrical quality, a key characteristic traced by Francisco Díaz de Castro in his framing of García Casado's texts as "unos poemas en prosa cuya cualidad lírica se acentúa gracias a la retórica de la depuración, a la sugerencia precisa, al juego de personas verbales, a la música del metro tradicional que se deja oír en los momentos justos" (33).

The prose poem can be an especially apt vehicle for rethinking the visible and the sensible in an era marked by especially rapid changes in technology and an ever-increasing emphasis on the visual, since, as Marta Agudo and Carlos Jiménez Arribas explain in the introduction to their anthology of Spanish prose poetry produced in Spain between 1990 and 2005, "[e]l poema en prosa [...] viene marcado por la búsqueda de nuevas expectativas de lectura, nuevas rutinas visuales, nuevas formas de considerar el hecho poético" (13-14). Rather than framing prose poetry negatively through the absence or lack of verses, Agudo and Jiménez Arribas instead argue that "pese a que el valor representativo del párrafo se base en una ausencia, la del verso, y sea portador, por tanto, de un significado negativo, el lector que se acerca a él lo valora justamente en su afirmación, es decir, como *presencia*" (14). This presence is made up of "la estructura paragrafática y, en consecuencia, su constitución oracional" (13), providing shape, structure, and identifiable formal elements for the reading of prose poetry.

The prose poems that make up *Dinero*, grouped in three sections ("Con el sudor de tu frente," "Trampas," and "Colmenas"), rely on a cinematic framing and presentation of the scenes delineated for and presented to readers. In particular, these poems employ the framing and staging of shots, close-ups, zoom outs, editing and cutting to create, frame, and arrange images in strategic ways. In the case of García Casado's early poetry,

Isla Correyero asserts that his poems “son como esos videoclips independientes en los que con poquísimos recursos económicos se consigue un retrato completo de lo que quieren narrar. Y lo hacen con ingenio y arte” (126), while Antonio Lucas frames his work as “una experimentación lúcida que tiene uno de sus cimientos no en el cine exactamente, sino en algo más concreto: en la confección de un fotograma sin volutas” (9-10). The presence of these techniques in García Casado’s work dovetails well with his work as the director of the Filmoteca de Andalucía in Córdoba, a position he has held since 2008. Visuality and the blending of different media also played a role in the release and promotion of *Dinero*, in the form of a website featuring a video including photographs by Thomas Canet and a public recital featuring projections of these same images and guitar accompaniment by Jesús Requena.

Recalling the three-part progression outlined by Rancière in which the production of strangeness and awareness of it are employed to inspire social change, I propose that García Casado’s work exposes, explores, and exploits the strangeness created by the economic underpinning of society and its often-violent material impact on society and people. The poems that comprise *Dinero* employ a variety of different perspectives to depict a larger market volatility that trickles down through the everyday experiences and existence of a variety of figures. In short, these poems present both the visible and invisible economic relationships and dynamics that govern contemporary social life in Spain and rely on chains of economic interactions encompassing employers, employees, and customers as well as the impact on families associated with these economic transactions.

The atmospheres created in these poems and rhetorical structures and techniques used to create them remind us of the texts that Germán Labrador Méndez has termed “historias de vida subprime” (571). These accounts of the experiences of those affected by the economic crisis are akin to *microrrelatos* for Labrador Méndez, and the question of how and where they circulate plays a crucial role in their political effectiveness (568, 566). In general terms, this critic considers life stories to be “una tecnología de imaginación política [...] que permite que se piensen y vean cosas que antes no eran visibles, ni pensables” (562-63). This “technology” relies on some of the assumptions regarding political art discussed by Rancière, since, according to Labrador Méndez, “[e]sta capacidad de la *historia de vida* de hacer visible lo que antes no era visible tiene que ver con salir de círculos personales, familiares, grupales, locales, a espacios que sean de tipo público. Gracias a ese movimiento surge la posibilidad de obtener efectos políticos, en la medida en que una audiencia, de pronto, es asaltada por vidas que desconocía y que de pronto *conoce*” (566). This form is not without its limitations, though, since it cannot add a human element to normally impersonal larger processes without integrating the lives in question into larger schemes and narratives governing how lives are understood (564). By including elements of both poetry and prose, García Casado’s texts seek to avoid totalizing representations without sacrificing comprehensive accounts and images of economic exchange and the multiple people involved in these exchanges.

These people and their perspectives appear in the form of monologues, dialogues, and conversations that seek to explain—and in some instances explain away—larger economic machinations, justify inequality, and account for a seemingly inherent and even inevitable need to settle for less than ideal working conditions. Perspective and narrative point of view are crucial for the construction of these texts insofar as they show that people speak from a certain point of view—often tied to a job—and that any given situation includes multiple perspectives and voices. The use of both individual and purportedly collective voices in the form of first-person singular and first-person plural perspectives highlights the different degrees to which individuals and groups are affected by economic situations and raises the question of who can speak on behalf of the groups in question and defend their interests. The potential risk involved in employing forms akin to what we might call a “grammatical solidarity,” though, is that of co-opting the shared struggles of employees into a discourse of larger economic trends representing an equalizing force of sorts among employers and employees, thus blurring the boundaries between and privilege of certain members of these groups.

Once we determine who is speaking in these poems, determining who they address is critical because “to read a poem,” William Waters argues in *Poetry's Touch: On Lyric Address*, “is [...] to enter an underspecified communicative act” (8), since “poetry [...] enacts—for us, as readers, now—not so much a stable communicative situation as a chronic hesitation, a faltering, between monologue and dialogue, between ‘talking about’ and ‘talking to,’ third and second person, indifference to interlocutors and the yearning to have one” (7-8). This sort of instability is multiplied throughout *Dinero's* poems since each seems to present its own communicative situation, many of which include a “you” addressed by García Casado's speakers. Any discussion of the pronoun “you” or any of its surrogates should necessarily incorporate a discussion of the reader, Waters argues, since “it avails nothing to discuss poetry's pronouns without involving the question of the reader's experience” (14), in particular because “we as readers may feel in second-person poems, in a poem's touch, an intimation of why poetry is valuable, why it matters to us, and how we might come to feel answerable to it” (2). Such a feeling can be especially strong “because *you* tends to hail; it calls everyone and everything by their inmost name. The second-person pronoun is address itself” (15). Even in cases when specific interlocutors are named in poems like those that make up *Dinero*, the sheer volume of instances of “hailing” can lead to a situation in which “[t]he *you* that (perhaps) calls to the reader [...] makes palpable poetry's claim on being read, [...] its claim to make an accidental reader into the destined and unique recipient of everything the poem contains or is” (15), in the process drawing readers into the scenarios and predicaments presented by these poems.

The texts I will discuss in the present study focus on both large and small constituencies and range from clearly defined and often mediated work environments towards representations of money and its impact beyond clearly delineated and isolated work contexts. The primary focus of my analyses, though, will be the

difficulty of securing and maintaining gainful employment, the hardships and degradation imposed by employers upon their employees, and the complex dynamics that accompany collecting debts. As we will see, Pablo García Casado's poems employ twenty-first century means of literary production to present twenty-first century issues surrounding employment and economic survival, in the process both informing readers and potentially encouraging them to act upon their surroundings.

“Así está el mercado”: Uncertainty and Un(der)employment

While the first two poems I will discuss share the same title—“Profesional”—they present very different perspectives. The scene presented in this pair of poems that open García Casado's collection is an all-too-common one: the laying-off of a group of employees in favor of a cheaper labor force. The first poem begins with a third-person description in the preterite of the actions of a person we later discover is the boss, who, the poem's anonymous speaker explains,

[l]legó puntual a la sala de reuniones. Dibujó una curva descendiente e hizo preguntas que nadie pudo responder. Confirmó todos los rumores, los planes para los que no contábamos. Habló muy claro y sin alzar la voz, no se detuvo en las valías personales, no dejó una puerta abierta. Rápido y limpio, mejor así. Teníamos dos horas para recogerlo todo, a la una se incorporaba el nuevo equipo. (11)

The definitive and matter of fact style of firing these employees is highlighted by the clear-cut division between the use of a series of verbs in the preterite at the beginning of sentences and clauses to signal the boss's actions and the use of the imperfect in the poem's final sentence to present the tasks imposed upon the employees, both old and new. The questions the boss asks are framed metonymically within the context of the abstract economic picture painted by a graph he draws, showing how concrete individuals are caught up in larger economic systems. Although only one individual is speaking in this poem, this person seems to speak as part and on behalf of a larger collective group of soon to be unemployed workers. The absence of a clear addressee or interlocutor leaves the reader in a precarious situation as potentially either overhearer-eavesdropper or intended addressee-interlocutor.

The second poem entitled “Profesional” provides another view of this same scene and its aftermath, in this case from the point of view of the boss, who uses a combination of present tense verbs and gerunds to describe how his now former employees

[v]an recogiendo los objetos personales, las fotos de sus hijos, una carta con mi firma que turbará sus sueños: el beso tras la firma de escrituras, el azul de las pruebas de embarazo. Todas las horas esperando en el coche bajo el sol y la lluvia, esperando nada, soportando las llamadas de los clientes. *Esta máquina*

es una mierda, no sirve para nada, ¿qué hay de la garantía?, quiero mi dinero. Todas las mentiras en nombre de la empresa y de sus hijos. Oigo arrancar sus vehículos, les oigo maniobrar en el aparcamiento, demorándose. (12)

This second vision of the same scene offers readers a combination of visual and auditory elements and can be divided into three sections, the first and last of which each comprise one sentence and take place in the present. This present features the now ex-employees collecting their personal effects, which include the letter—bearing the boss's signature—that represents the termination of their employment and has clear repercussions for these ex-employees and their personal lives. In a match-cut of sorts, this initial signature sparks a flashback to a kiss following a seemingly more positive signature accompanying the purchase of a residence—a significant financial commitment—before jumping again to the blue indicator on a home pregnancy test whose color might be similar to that of the ink of the signatures mentioned earlier. This focus on the pregnancy test is then juxtaposed with all of the work and difficulty people have endured to provide for the children featured in the photographs that would have been facing employees while they were on the phone with angry customers.

The emotive impact generated by the confluence of visual and auditory stimuli in this case has an intriguing counterpart in the poem's final sentence. The fact that the boss hears—but does not see or perhaps does not want to see—his employees begin to drive their cars away could, on the one hand, be seen as evidence of a shift from a visual engagement with the scene of employees leaving to an audible one, perhaps representing an attempt by the boss to distance himself from the situation, both by not looking at his employees and by downplaying his role in their firing by referring only to the presence of his signature on the letter instead of the act of him signing it. One could also argue, though, that such an effort to distance himself from the situation and its consequences has the opposite effect, since placing the ex-employees out of frame ends up calling attention to the implicit visibility of the boss in frame—and his act of hearing, but not necessarily listening—while the consequences of his signature and actions are audible. The title and content of the pair of poems entitled "Profesional" both point simultaneously to big picture economic phenomena as well as the experiences of individuals who, whether they want to or not, form part of these larger systems. Both poems also leave readers feeling a sense of uncertainty and instability resulting from the sudden lack of employment.

While the poem entitled "Una nueva filosofía" begins and ends with a slightly more stable situation, it is nonetheless haunted by a sense of underlying uncertainty and precarity that leaves readers wondering whether the poem's title should be taken at face value. The situation of workers within a family unit to which they are held accountable structures this text in which the speaker seems to feel an obligation to explain—and perhaps even justify—his or her new job to an interlocutor. While the interlocutor in this case seems to be an unnamed person whose well-being depends in some way on that of the speaker, echoing Waters's discussion of lyric address, the

unstable and ambiguous communicative contexts traced thus far in *Dinero* leave open the possibility that readers of “Una nueva filosofía” might also feel like addressees of this speaker. This dialogic scenario is played out as a dialectic between contingency and hope tinted by an overall tone of resignation. The poem’s speaker both highlights and downplays the temporary nature of the new job, explaining that “[n]o es mucho para empezar, de momento es lo que pueden ofrecerme. Es sólo temporal, hasta que salga algo mejor” (17). The speaker’s role in this case appears to be a particularly passive one, since he or she relies on the hope of a better opportunity that an undefined “they” can offer in the future. This passive role is further developed in a more direct appeal to the speaker’s addressee that uses apostrophe to frame the speaker’s helplessness as the result of “the market” and “competition”: “Tienes que entenderlo, así está el mercado, hay mucha competencia. Mejor esto que nada” (17). Abstract concepts like these are used to present scenarios in which workers are expected to be happy to have any sort of employment at all and find themselves at the mercy of the larger economic system in which they must necessarily participate (to the extent that it will actually let them truly do so).

Articulating the benefits of the opportunity to achieve professional success by climbing one’s way up the corporate ladder is the next rhetorical tool the speaker employs to convince their interlocutor of the benefits of the new job. Such a discourse, at least in this case, reinforces passivity by requiring the employee to “[e]mpezar así, desde abajo, que te valoren profesionalmente” (17). This way of presenting such a process of professional advancement incorporates the speaker as a grammatical object and uses the subjunctive mood to present the possibility and hope—but by no means a guarantee—of professional success. The one doing the “valuing” in this case is the boss, who appears in the poem’s next sentence when the speaker explains that “[e]l jefe está contento conmigo, quiere hacer un equipo sólido. Una forma nueva de trabajar, por objetivos, una nueva filosofía” (17). While the reader is not privy to the addressee’s reaction to the hopeful tone of this description of the new work situation, it seems reasonable to imagine a certain degree of skepticism from readers who have read the pair of “Profesional” poems that precede this one, in particular when it comes to the reference to the boss’s desire to create “un equipo sólido,” as they would have already witnessed the act and impact of replacing one “equipo” with another.

Despite the hope and optimism expressed by the speaker regarding the upside of this new situation, a period of austerity will be necessary in the meantime, for, as the speaker explains, “[e]ste mes tendremos que apretarnos un poco. Es lo que hay, míralo de otro modo, no está tan mal. Al fin y al cabo es dinero” (17). Beyond ending with an appeal to the overarching need to settle for what is available given the difficulty of the market and overall economic conditions, the speaker also ties him or herself to the addressee and places both figures together in this situation by way of a first-person-plural verb. This forced grammatical participation calls to mind Suzanne Gearhart’s reframing of Louis Althusser’s discussion of interpellation. This form of implicit interpellation would seemingly differ from Althusser’s generally negative vision of

this phenomenon, though, which is based primarily on the figure of the policeman who hails a suspect (129-31). Even if the scenario presented in "Una nueva filosofía" avoids interpellation's explicitly negative connotations, it still suggests a similar sense of force. The force in question comes from an unlikely and friendly source but is interpellation nonetheless, since, as Gearhart explains, for Althusser "the fundamental nature of hailing, the form of hailing that concerns the subject and constitutes the subject as subjugated, is always the same" (184).

**"Si te vas ahora no vuelvas a pedirme trabajo":
Unethical Demands and Everyday Degradation**

As the two poems we will explore next show, even those who have jobs face hardship and must live with the uncertainty associated with the stability of their job. These texts also articulate the costs in terms of lost dignity associated with certain work environments. The multiple voices, perspectives, and figures appearing in the poem entitled "Hostelería" are tied together by a cinematic structure that employs a combination of images and angles to create a picture of the complex interactions between employee, customer, and boss within the larger context of an established sector of the economy, in this case the hospitality industry:

Rosa está fregando la cocina. Su marido ha soportado toda la noche las bromas de los *socios*, dile a tu mujer que suba un momento, ¡que venga con los guantes de goma! *Que no les falte de nada*, nos dice el jefe muy serio mientras abre la caja registradora. Cuenta las monedas y los billetes, puedo escuchar cómo se doblan suavemente en su cartera. *Así no podemos seguir, voy a tener que cerrar un día de estos. La cosa está muy mal.* Con el miedo en el cuerpo seguimos barriendo bajo las mesas. (22)

The series of figures presented in this poem begins with "Rosa," whose persistent work in the present of narration echoes the continuous harassment received by her husband from the so-called *socios*. This first sentence describing Rosa's actions is followed by a cut to one depicting these *socios* speaking, which is itself framed by a flashback to the boss's instructions that these customers receive whatever they request. This next scene, framed by the presence of the boss and his words, also reveals that the speaker and source of our knowledge of the scene being represented belongs to an undetermined "we" forced to look on while the boss counts the money in the cash register and puts it in his wallet. While we know that the speaker is not Rosa, her husband, or the boss, we know little else about him or her, including to whom he or she is speaking and presenting the scene in question.

An especially important voice in this case, though, is that of the speaker's boss. By only italicizing his words and not those of the *socios*, the text ends up placing a sharper focus on the boss as the ultimate source of inequality in the poem,

highlighting the problems that result from the boss-employee dynamic, although the customer-employee dynamic and the difficulties associated with it also play a key role. The poem in fact begins with the customers and not the boss, although he is implicitly present through his establishment of a hostile work environment and his privileging of profit over his employees' dignity. The boss's statement regarding the economic hardships his business faces accompanies the image of him counting and putting the money from the cash register into his wallet. Placing his statement immediately after the removal of money from the register highlights the difficulties purportedly faced by a "we" that could lead to his obligation to close his business, creating a sense of fear in his employees.

The "we" in which the boss includes himself differs from the later one represented by the employees who close out the poem, though, exhibiting the darker side of first-person-plural interpellation posited by Gearhart. This bookending of the poem with the experience of workers represents a clear focus on their perspective, which includes the mistreatment presented within this frame. By the poem's end readers encounter a greater collectivization of workers in the form of an albeit somewhat ambiguous, if inclusive first-person plural perspective, as opposed to the more detached third-person perspective employed at the beginning of the poem before readers learned that the speaker was one of the workers. The poem's compelling final image of workers continuing to work, sweeping up with fear in their bodies leaves readers with a sense of the blend of uncertainty and fear faced by the figures in both "Hostelería" and other poems in García Casado's collection. It is not immediately clear, though, whether this fear comes from their boss, the *socios*, the possibility of being unemployed if their place of business closes, or a combination of these factors. While the mistreatment of employees taking place in "Hostelería" happens in a clearly-defined work setting, what happens in the poem that follows it in *Dinero* takes place after work.

The poem entitled "Construcciones Luque" opens with a reference to money and specifically the act of collecting it. Where this poem differs from many of the others in García Casado's collection, though, is that the ones collecting money in this case are the company's workers. The range of voices that make up this text are joined together by that of the poem's speaker, who initially presents himself as forming part of a "we," thus highlighting what is at stake in economic relationships. The poem employs an overarching filmic structure made up of different discursive and grammatical shots. Unlike the other poems discussed thus far in this study, this one is divided into two paragraphs. This division separates both time and space, using ellipsis to intentionally withhold certain information from readers and perhaps from the speaker's partner as well.

Although the poem's first two sentences focus on workers standing together and asserting their contractual rights, the rest of the first paragraph quickly becomes much more about the boss and the power he exerts over his workers:

Habíamos terminado la obra y hacíamos cola en la caseta. Íbamos cobrando según lo convenido, ni un céntimo más, tú esperabas noticias pegada al teléfono. Luque llamó para invitarnos a una copa, *hay que celebrarlo*, y entramos en una de las casas que habíamos construido. Champán, coca por todas partes, putas bailando en la escalera. Rubén hizo amago de marcharse, *me tengo que ir, me esperan en casa*, pero Luque dijo, si te vas ahora no vuelvas a pedirme trabajo. Todos conocíamos a Luque y sabíamos que iba en serio. (23)

The cut from the speaker and his fellow workers waiting in line to the “you” he apostrophizes introduces an absent addressee waiting anxiously by the phone, the same phone used as part of a match-cut to set up the call made by “Luque” in the next sentence. Just as the period separating these two sentences serves to both sever and connect these two shots, the second comma in the poem’s second sentence effects a cut from the worksite to the “tú” waiting beside the phone. Commas in the third sentence highlight Luque’s words and connect his call to an image of his workers doing his bidding and entering one of the homes they had built to “celebrate” their accomplishment. The sort of celebration Luque had prepared becomes apparent with the series of quick glances presented in the next sentence, leading to a confrontation between “Rubén” and “Luque.” This confrontation, framed in filmic terms by the offset dialogue and commas suggesting cuts from one to the other, is then summed up and given greater weight by the paragraph’s final sentence regarding prior knowledge of Luque and his personality.

What might perhaps get lost in the middle of this block of text beginning with workers merely waiting to get paid for their labor and the explicit intimidation by their boss through his control over their future employment opportunities is the situation of another group of workers presented in the poem. The prostitutes presented in the quick shots give readers a vivid visual sense of the sort of “celebration” about to take place and are framed in the context of both drugs and alcohol, as an element on an equal plane with the first two. A reward of sorts, these prostitutes also work, and work for a wage established before services are rendered. In the way they are used by Luque, though, they also come to symbolize the price he exacts from his employees in terms of their autonomy and dignity. In Rubén’s case there is a clear dilemma between the long-term financial well-being of his family (resulting from his potential future employment with *Construcciones Luque*) and his emotional and personal commitment to his family (now threatened by what Luque is demanding of him). Although the focus of this dilemma is squared securely on the highlighted image of Rubén, the reader cannot help but wonder about the feelings of the poem’s speaker, who, posited as one of the “we” who know how serious Luque’s threat is, might not be brave enough to attempt what Rubén did. As readers we already know that there is a female “tú” awaiting an update from the speaker, an absent potential interlocutor who has not yet received the anticipated phone call because the one made by Luque took precedence.

While the poem does not tell readers what decision Rubén made, it seems clear enough that the speaker opted for continued job security and stayed at the

“celebration,” since the blank space on the page separating the two parts of this poem represents an ellipsis of sorts, leaving off with Rubén’s dilemma regarding whether he should stay or return home and picking up with the speaker’s arrival at his own home. The grammatical solidarity exhibited by the abundance of first-person plural forms in the first paragraph has now given way to a situation faced by the speaker alone: “Cuando llegué a casa te encontré durmiendo en el sofá con la tele encendida, los tacones de aguja esperaban vacíos en el dormitorio. Guardé el dinero en el cajón y me fui a la ducha. Luego, ya en la cama, me susurraste al oído, *¿trajiste el dinero?*” (23). The division between these two parts of the poem parallels the one between the common concerns shared by all workers presented at the beginning of the poem and the individual repercussions of exploitation foreshadowed by Rubén’s actions and Luque’s reaction. The coming to fruition of this dialectic takes the form of a series of visual shots highlighting the absent “tú” introduced earlier, objects metonymically related to her, the money the couple needs, and the speaker’s efforts to wash away the remnants of whatever took place in the interim between the poem’s two sequences.

Commas, periods, and clauses are again used to separate and sequence these images connected through metonymy. The image of the woman sleeping on the couch intermittently illuminated by the television quickly jumps to a shot of the empty shoes belonging to her. Even if the poem’s final image holds the potential to return to or establish at least a semblance of familial order, it instead ends up highlighting what is most pressing when the woman only asks if the speaker has brought the money home. Perhaps she does not know what took place during the celebration staged by Luque, does not want to know, or does know but the overwhelming question of financial security overrides any other concern.¹ This poem, like the box presented in its second paragraph, thus opens and closes with money. What transpires between these two images, though, is a complex and nuanced account of the many ways money affects individuals and the real cost associated with earning it.

“No puedes hacerme esto”: Debt Collection and Glocal Economics

One factor that has contributed to speakers’ lack of control over their financial situations and professional futures in the poems discussed thus far is their status as employees who have to answer to a boss. As poems like “Kuwait” and “Trampas” will show, though, even those who have their own business are also ultimately subject to the control of others in the form of debt. Rather than employing the perspective of one of these business owners, these poems instead offer readers accounts of attempts by their creditors to collect money that present a series of ethical dilemmas. The

¹ Another potential explanation for the exclusive focus on money in her query is that she herself has a job that requires degradation and the loss of dignity, a possibility suggested by the stiletto heels that sit empty in the bedroom.

ultimate focus of these two poems, then, is less on how much money people owe and more on the ethical cost of collecting money in the first place.

The phone conversation presented in "Kuwait" is punctuated by a series of four appeals made by the speaker's interlocutor for additional time to pay back money he owes the speaker, and it is thanks to the third one that readers learn that the speaker is named "Alfonso." It is worth noting that even though everything the poem tells us is filtered through the perspective of its speaker, readers ultimately end up learning more about the man with whom he speaks than about "Alfonso" himself. This is particularly the case with regard to each person's financial situation. Even if the speaker's initial request for payment does not appear in the poem, it can be inferred from the appeal for more time to pay with which the poem opens: "*Dame una semana*" (20). This same appeal will appear again near the end of the poem. What readers encounter between the two instances of this request is a multilayered account of the phone conversation that employs flashbacks and reflections that contextualize both Alfonso's demands for payment and the factors that make it difficult for his interlocutor to pay the money he owes.

In contrast to what we might expect from a situation like this, readers end up getting a more detailed picture of the difficulties associated with repaying this money than they do of the factors motivating the need to collect on the debt. This picture is painted as much—if not more—by Alfonso's memories, experiences, and flashbacks as it is by the things his interlocutor says that are then reproduced in the account of the conversation that makes up "Kuwait." Both types of information appear immediately after the first request for more time to pay: "Yo lo he visto sudar en el garaje, ayudando con la carga, *uno más y nos vamos*. Seis camiones, 100.000 litros al mes, una gota en el mar de petróleo. Me dice que está esperando que paguen los suecos" (20). These three sentences present the speaker's interlocutor and his efforts as admirable given his relatively limited footprint within the larger context of the petroleum industry. The vivid image of him sweating as he works alongside his employees attests to his commitment and efforts to keep his business going while some factors—like others paying him—are beyond his control. The reference to having to wait for his Swedish partners to pay him is echoed by Alfonso's declaration that he cannot wait any longer: "Pero llega el martes, Suecia no paga, y yo, mira, no puedo esperar, voy a tener que cortarte el suministro" (20).

The relative value of the series of mitigating factors that have been articulated up to this point comes into stark relief when the deadline to pay what he owes arrives and he still has not received the money he would use to pay Alfonso. Despite occupying more space on the page than the speaker's allusion to the deadline, these circumstances do not carry as much weight as the overarching need to pay does, leading the speaker's interlocutor to declare that "*[n]o puedes hacerme esto*" (20), a statement with which the speaker agrees. This agreement appears in the form of an extended reflection and flashback that makes up approximately a third of the poem and is not directed to or shared with the speaker's interlocutor: "y lleva razón, es un

buen tipo, de los que ya no quedan, un tipo con las manos llenas de grasa. Uno de sus camiones cayó por un barranco hace tres meses, siniestro total, el chaval se ha quedado tetrapléjico. No tenía papeles. Aquí no ha pasado nada, dijo el hermano, pero quieren su dinero y eso es justo” (20). To a certain degree, this aside echoes the sequence that followed the appeal for more time with which the poem opened, beginning with a positive characterization of the man’s work ethic and character in terms that appeal to traditional qualities associated with working class masculinity, followed by a larger focus on his business using one of his trucks as an anchor.

Even if it is not clear whether the account of the accident offered by the poem’s speaker was told to him by his interlocutor during this phone conversation, for readers it ultimately ends up being linked to the appeal in the form of a question that follows this articulation of mitigating circumstances: “¿Puedes entenderlo, Alfonso?” (20). There are multiple things that could be understood in this situation, though, as well as multiple ways of understanding them. While one could glean from these factors an understanding of what makes paying “Alfonso” the money he is owed difficult, one could also come away with a desire to receive money that one is owed, which seems to be what the poem’s speaker ultimately takes from the situation: “Llevo dos meses esperando, te había dicho el martes, ¿verdad?, teníamos un trato, ¿no?” (20). The poem’s final three sentences employ a combination of language and verbal expression that is not quite language to flesh out and tie up the tensions that have underlied the poem up to this point: “Su respiración al otro lado, *dame una semana*. Lo siento, tío, no soy Dios. Y colgué” (20). Two instances of speech in this case—asking for an extension and its denial—are bookended by an act of breathing that communicates the desperation felt by the speaker’s interlocutor and the physical act of hanging up the phone and ending the call. On its face, this gesture represents the end of the conversation, but the poem’s mere existence signals the implicit presence of a subsequent internal conversation that “Alfonso” has with himself regarding what has just transpired, a conversation overheard by readers who are left to explore the ethical dilemmas—both explicit and implicit—at work in this poem.

If “Kuwait” highlighted global and macro-economic effects, “Trampas” (which belongs to the section in *Dinero* of the same title) presents the local effects and impact of collecting money, illustrating the scale of economic impact from top to bottom. This poem presents an interaction marked by a visual engagement with space, people, and interlocutors and inverts the dynamic used in “Kuwait” with respect to whose voice is highlighted by italicizing language attributed to the speaker. On the surface, the speaker’s task seems to be a relatively simple one: collecting money owed. As was also the case in “Kuwait,” though, this purportedly simple job becomes more difficult as the poem progresses and we encounter what could be defined as explicit “trampas” to avoid paying the money and distract the man collecting it alongside more subtle and implicit “trampas” that present this man with potential ethical dilemmas.

The poem’s first two sentences offer readers a clear picture of the situation described in the poem and what is at stake in this case: “Dice que no está, que se fue

de viaje. Está nerviosa, me ofrece un café, *no gracias*, deben mucho dinero y yo he venido a cobrarlo" (34). In the poem's next three sentences the speaker surveys the surrounding scene and finds implicit "trampas" that have the potential to make him feel conflicted with respect to his efforts to collect money: "La hija mayor está viendo dibujos animados, *El Rey León*, a mi hijo le encanta, se sabe todas las canciones. Los niños aprenden rápido. El pequeño me mira desde la trona con la boca llena de papilla, muy serio, con los ojos azules de su padre" (34). While the first sentence presents a common, nested gaze in which the speaker watches the woman's daughter watch *The Lion King*, the gaze joining the speaker and the woman's son is a mutual and reciprocal one, leading to a scenario in which the speaker's attempts to objectify his surroundings make him the object of the gazes of the little boy, the readers of García Casado's poem, and perhaps his own in the form of a reflection in the child's eyes. The brief yet powerful sentence joining these two acts of looking ends up offering a potentially ambiguous statement regarding children's ability to learn: "Los niños aprenden rápido." While one reading of this declaration would connect it to the speaker's son's ability to learn all of the songs in a classic Disney movie, one could speculate about other things children might learn quickly and how they learn them. Whether he likes it or not, it seems like the poem's speaker will play a key role in teaching these children about their family's financial hardships.

The speaker's internal commentary on the younger child's eyes and their similarity to those of his father leads to a match-cut of sorts to an exchange in which the child's mother explains that her husband manages the family's finances before the speaker presents her with a document bearing her signature: "Mi marido es quien lleva las cuentas, dice, yo no sé nada de papeles. Le entrego un documento firmado por los dos" (34). The introduction of this document inspires an extended contextualization by the woman of her family's financial situation, her husband's role in it, and the impact of his absence on the family: "sí ésta es mi firma, dice, él dijo que no me preocupara, que era bueno para los dos, bueno para los niños, que todo se arreglaría. Él y su negocio de *barcas de recreo*. Lleva dos meses fuera, le he dejado mensajes al móvil, pero no responde. Los niños preguntan por su padre, dónde está papá, dónde está papá, y no sé qué decirles" (34). These mitigating circumstances notwithstanding, the poem's speaker is ultimately not moved by the case presented to him and closes the poem by declaring that "[E]odo eso está muy bien, señora, pero ahora hablemos de dinero" (34).

While the worldwide economic crisis that began in 2008 certainly brought the issue of economic inequality to the forefront in Spain and sparked renewed discussion of the possibilities of political commitment in Spanish literature, it is important to acknowledge that these questions were already being addressed by both new and reissued studies of post-war and post-Franco poetry. New poetry collections like Pablo García Casado's *Dinero* have furthered these explorations of the potential of socially engaged poetry in the twenty first century. As its title signals, money permeates each and every poem included in the collection, leading Manuel Rico to argue that what its poems have in common is a view of "el dinero como necesidad y como condena"

(19). These poems focus on money and its complex interaction with the livelihood and daily lives of people, presenting the employee-customer-boss dynamic from multiple angles as well as the effect that money and its absence has on families. Even when they take on the voice or perspective of a boss or a person collecting money from others, these poems ultimately focus on the challenges faced by those who owe money and those who have to sacrifice their dignity to make ends meet. The range of voices and perspectives featured in these poems are filtered through a cinematic lens that avoids a monolithic and direct tone and recognizes how social and economic systems and conditions have changed in the current century. The texts that make up Pablo García Casado's *Dinero* present an intriguing model of how poetic texts can explore polyphonic forms and audiovisual conventions to trace, examine, and interrogate the forms of economic exchange and interaction in twenty-first century Spain and encourage their readers to do the same.

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The Three Magi Ladies and the Wise King: Diana, Circe, and Medea in Alfonso X's *General estoria*¹

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Abstract: Alfonso X's *General estoria* includes a small treatise on magic which claims that historically, the most important practitioners of magic were three mythological female characters: Diana, Circe, and Medea, who excelled in the art more than any other male figures. This article explores why the treatise specifically chose to emphasize these three women from among the many practitioners of magic that appear in the *General estoria*, how their portrayal significantly differs from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and previous interpreters, and the influence of other classical, Christian, and Arabic sources on magic.

Keywords: Alfonso X, *General estoria*, Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, *Picatrix*, Arabic magic, Hecate

Introduction

Ring Alfonso X of Castile, also known as “the Wise” or “the Learned” (r. 1252–84), oversaw and supported an unprecedented production of translations, original treatises, and literary works that reflected his many interests: history, poetry, gaming, hunting, moral advice, laws, politics, sciences, astronomy, astrology, and more. One of the most notable features in the wise king's works is his intellectual curiosity about magic. The king initially sponsored translations of Arabic treatises of magic—such as the famous *Picatrix* (1256–58)—and later even commissioned original compilations—such as *Astromagia* (ca. 1277).² His interest in this topic is prevalent throughout his entire oeuvre. We find evidence of this in the *General estoria* (General history, from now on *GE*), a comprehensive chronicle of the world sponsored by the king in the latter part of his reign (after

¹ I would like to thank Sarah Iles Johnston for her helpful suggestions when I discussed the content of this article with her, as well as Samantha Kolesnik for her insightful reading and comments, which greatly helped me improve it. I also deeply appreciate the useful notes from the anonymous reviewers of this paper.

² On the *Picatrix*, see Attrell and Porreca; on *Astromagia*, see Agostino's edition.

1272),³ in which many notable figures throughout history are described as practicing magic. The *GE* sometimes interrupts the historical narrative to delve into specific topics or motifs, including magic, to which the wise king devotes a small treatise found in the second volume of the second part (*GE2 I*). This treatise claims that historically, the most important practitioners of magic were three mythological female characters: Diana, Circe, and Medea, who excelled in the art more than any of the well-known male figures associated with it.

In this article, I will explore why in the treatise, Alfonso specifically chose to emphasize these three women from among the many practitioners of magic that appear in the *GE* and how their portrayal significantly differs from both his most direct source, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and previous ancient and medieval interpreters. I argue that Alfonso's nuanced portrayals of Diana, Circe, and Medea are a result of his unique approach, which incorporates Roman and Christian traditions, the translations of Arabic books of magic that he sponsored, and his own elaborations on these topics in original works.⁴ Due to this, Alfonso offers a distinct perspective on the connection between magic and gender. According to his interpretation, women are not only better magi than men, but the magical abilities of these specific women are separate from their sexual relationships with men and the associated potential risks—a prejudice that had been widely assumed since Ovid and continued down to contemporary medieval commentators. Instead, in Alfonso's treatise Diana, Circe, and Medea are depicted as dedicated scholars and practitioners of magic, which aligns them more closely with the king and his learned courtiers and collaborators—and, paradoxically, with some non-Ovidian classical sources. The nuanced portrayals of the three female magi throughout the *GE*, along with the different traditions regarding the interpretation of magic that the wise king summarizes, are what lead him to characterize the three women as the most paradigmatic magi in history.

A Treatise of Magic Containing Ovidian Personalities

Even though the *GE* uses a significantly larger quantity of pagan sources, and even introduces Arabic ones, it also adheres to the tradition of previous Christian chronicles—starting with Eusebius's *Chronicle*, translated by Jerome (fourth/fifth centuries)—and follows the biblical narrative as a structural reference. This framework leads us to the famous episode where the Witch of Endor assists King Saul in conjuring the spirit of the prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 28). This episode, which presents a tangible

³ Although Alfonso was not the sole author of the *GE*—he oversaw and made amendments to the work created by a team of writers—I will adhere to the customary practice of previous researchers and credit him as the author. For further details about Alfonso, the *GE*, and its creation, see the introduction in the initial volume of his comprehensive edition by Sánchez-Prieto Borja.

⁴ Once again, I want to highlight that to further facilitate the argumentation of this article, I will attribute solely to Alfonso the aims of the team of scholars that created the works he sponsored and supervised.

display of sorcery, has captivated Jewish and Christian scholars for a long time (Schmidt). It comes as no surprise that it offers Alfonso a perfect chance to delve into the topic of magic, which has been referenced multiple times earlier in the *GE*. The treatise that follows is divided into thirteen chapters.

The initial and final chapters inquire into the witch of Endor and Christian authorities' interpretations of this subject. Conversely, the middle chapters offer a different viewpoint on magic, drawing from Arabic scholarly theories (*GE* II, 624–36).⁵ It appears that in this context, biblical and Christian scholarship may be excusing the utilization of questionable sources—that is, questionable from the Church's perspective. These middle chapters ascribe the earliest and most highly regarded works on magic to legendary Hermetic sages, including Hermes Trismegistus and *Toz/Thoth*,⁶ as well as Arabic scientific authorities, such as *Alfarabia/al-Fārābī* (ca. 870–950) and notably *Mesealla/Māshā' allāh* (ca. 740–815 CE). These Eastern theoreticians, who revealed the secrets of magic, are introduced in the second chapter of the treatise, at the end of which Alfonso underscores that “many [of the secrets] remained concealed; they are in these gentiles' stories that we place here for you, in which the express wording says one thing and the science and thinking on them another.”⁷ This is a hint that Alfonso is going to address Ovidian characters next. Thus, the next chapter (the treatise's third), is “On those who first used charms (*encantamientos*) following the knowledge of magic,” whom Alfonso introduces in the following way: “*Mesealla* says in his book—according to his own criteria and that of other wise men whom he adduces as evidence—that three ladies, Diana, Circe, and Medea, gained the esteem of the gentiles during their times, and even later, on account of their knowledge and practice of the magical art; therefore, the gentiles distinguished them from among other sages and called them goddesses.”⁸ While some scholars have speculated which of *Mesealla/Māshā' allāh*'s books were used for this treatise (Rubio 496), there is no mention of any Greco-Roman mythological

⁵ The treatise was examined by Rubio in a primarily descriptive article. Salvo García has cited it in a recent publication as well as in a collaborative piece with Possamaï-Pérez. Ekman briefly discusses this treatise in a paper focusing on two magical terms in the *GE* (“Ovid Historicized”). In two studies on the textual tradition of the second part of the *GE*, both Inés Fernández-Ordóñez and Francisco Bautista have noted that one of the manuscripts contains an additional chapter about magic in this section.

⁶ On Hermes Trismegistus in the *GE*, see my book about Hermes in medieval Iberia and Alfonso X (Udaondo Alegre, *The Spanish Hermes*).

⁷ “E però fñcavan aún munchas d'ellas encubiertas, como están en estas razones que vos aquí ponemos de los gentiles, que la letra dize uno e la ciencia e el seso d'ello muestra ál al que lo entiende.” *GE* II, 627. To make the *GE* more accessible to non-specialist audiences, I have translated some of its passages into English. Because of the complex grammar of old Castilian, I have aimed to make my versions both readable and faithful to the original.

⁸ “De los que usaron primeramente de los encantamientos segunt el saber de la mágica. Cuenta Mesealla en su libro por sí e por otros sabios a quien aduze por pruebas de lo que él dize que estas tres dueñas Diana e Circe e Medea que fueron las que en sus tiempos e aun después mayor prez ovieron de saber las cosas e obrar d'ellas por el arte mágica entre todos los gentiles a quien ellos llamavan dioses e deesas entre los otros sus sabios.” *GE* II, 627.

characters in the indexes of his works. This is not surprising, as Gutas points out that “high Greek literature was not translated into Arabic” (194). Therefore, it is unlikely that Māshā’ allāh or any other Arabic source would have included references to figures such as Diana, Medea, and Circe. However, *Mesealla*/Māshā’ allāh is the most frequently cited authority on these characters in the treatise, and these three ladies are associated with three categories of magic related to Arabic traditions: talismans or stones (*imagenes o piedras*), confections or herbs (*confaciones o hierbas*), and sorting lots or words (*suertes o palabras*), respectively (*GE2* II, 633). Therefore, it can be argued that Alfonso developed his own treatise on magic and his own classification of the magical sciences by drawing on various traditions and citing respected authorities to support his claims. I have delved into the complex issues related to the Arabic authorities and the kinds of magic in the treatise in other works (Udaondo Alegre, “*Translatio Magiae*” and “Enchanted Origins”). Here I will focus on the three ladies and the traditions that inspired Alfonso’s elaborations on his Ovidian models.

The *GE* contains long passages with translations and interpretations of the *Metamorphoses* and various classical works by Ovid and other authors. In the treatise on magic within the *GE*, Alfonso references characters and “wisdom” from some of those earlier Ovidian passages translated and included in the *GE*. As Martínez explains (382), Alfonso regarded the translation of Roman classics such as Ovid as a means rather than an end; unlike Italian humanists, who tried to recreate classical culture, his aim was to create a new and all-encompassing vernacular culture incorporating components from many different traditions and languages, all of which would be properly translated into Castilian. The mythological stories of the gentiles, and the wisdom enclosed in them, could be interpreted and integrated with Arabic science to educate the *GE*’s readers on history and all topics that Alfonso considered important, including magic.⁹

Based on these translations and interpretations, we can ascertain that Alfonso explores the concept of magic in a unique way, combining euhemeristic and allegorical interpretations of Greco-Roman classics with Arabic sources. In line with Christian medieval interpreters, he believes that works like Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* actually narrate the deeds of historical figures who, due to their importance, were considered gods, while also carrying hidden meanings that can be revealed through allegory.¹⁰ Alfonso views Arabic magic as essential for explaining many of the supernatural actions of Ovidian characters, which is why they were considered gods or semi-gods (Udaondo Alegre, *The Spanish Hermes*, 93-130; Ekman, “Ovid Historicized” 24–25).

We also find elaborations related to magic in an earlier short passage in *GE2*, which I reference here because in many aspects, it serves as a precursor to our treatise and clarifies Alfonsine conceptions of magic. The passage discusses the lineage of

⁹ On Alfonso’s educational goals for his kingdom, see Martínez (184-192).

¹⁰ On the versions of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* in the *GE*, see for instance Salvo García (“El mito y la escritura”) and on their allegorical interpretations see Cuesta Torre; these two scholars have written numerous insightful works on these subjects.

the rulers of Troy, tracing it back to Jupiter. Jupiter is described as a lustful king and a powerful mage, capable of transforming his appearance at will through his charms and wisdom (*GE2* I, 116–17). The passage affirms that “all those kings and the other men, and queens and the other women, whom the gentiles called gods, had this magical knowledge, for there were many great sages among the gentiles at that time.”¹¹ I want to emphasize how the *GE* equates the magical wisdom of men and women, of kings and queens, as this is relevant to the treatise. Of course, Alfonso also wants to clarify the specific knowledge that makes a person a mage. Thus, he affirms that Jupiter “was a mage, and a mage is one who knows the magical art, and magical science is that knowledge through which those who know it act [on things] through [the influence of] the movement of the celestial bodies on the terrestrial things and all those inside the circle of the Moon.”¹² Here Alfonso provides a terse and precise explanation of how Arabic theories of astral influences, developed by authorities such as Abū Ma’shar (787–886) and al-Kindī (801–73), worked within the magic presented in the *Picatrix* and other works that he translated or compiled, which teach the apprentice how to channel the power of astrological bodies through specific rituals, talismans, and other devices.¹³ The excerpt emphasizes that “with this knowledge the magi charm other men.”¹⁴

These ideas directly relate to our treatise, which also defines magic and elucidates that “according to the writings, magical art means ‘art or knowledge on incantations.’”¹⁵ The Castilian word for incantation (charm) used here, *encantamiento*, derives from the Latin *cantare* (to sing). In Latin, both *cantus* (participle of *cantare*) and *carmen* (song) could be used to refer to a charm, because Romans understood that most charms were songs. Possamai-Pérez and Salvo García suggest that the word Alfonso uses in the *GE*, *encantamiento*, derives from the term *incantationem* found in the medieval Latin glossae to Ovid (49–50). After this explanation, *GE2* provides a specious etymology of magic, according to which the word *magus* in Latin and *mago* in Castilian (Eng. mage or magician) derive from the Greek *mantos*—which means divination. Therefore, in the treatise, a *mago* is someone who makes incantations and divinations, and as an example Alfonso mentions the three magi kings who visited baby Jesus in the Bible.¹⁶ In truth, the term magi originally indicated a priestly caste in ancient Persia (Hegedus 10). As Hegedus points out, the three μάγοι of Matthew

¹¹ “[. . .] todos aquellos reyes e los otros omnes e las reínas e las otras mugieres a quien los gentiles llamaron dioses, ca de varones e mugieres ovo muy grandes sabios aquella sazón en los gentiles, que todos ouieron este saber mágico [. . .]” *GE2* I, 117.

¹² “[. . .] fue mago, e es mago el qui sabe el arte mágica, e la ciencia mágica es aquel saber con que los quel saben obran por los movimientos de los cuerpos celestiales sobre las cosas terrenales e sobre todas aquellas que son dedentro del cerco de la luna.” *GE2* I, 116.

¹³ For a good explanation of these theories, see Saif (“From *Gāyat al-ḥakīm*” 297–98 and 344–45).

¹⁴ “[. . .] encantan con este saber a los otros hombres.” *GE2* I, 116.

¹⁵ “E el arte mágica [. . .] quiere dezir tanto como arte o saber de encantamientos.” *GE2* II, 627.

¹⁶ *GE2* II, 627–28.

2:1–12 offered early Christians “some sort of Scriptural warrant for the validity of astrology” (201). Alfonso seems to be offering similar biblical validation here, because he immediately adds that “those three ladies used this knowledge of magic.”¹⁷ Thus, the art practiced by the three magi is identified with that used by the three mythological ladies, and this offers us another possible clue as to why there were three of them.

The choice of three women as the best illustrations of magic seems to require some justification. As we saw above, Alfonso claims that among gentiles magical knowledge was equally accessible to men and women, but here he recognizes that “many marvel at the evidence that the three ladies went further in the magical art than men” and explains that “since women were always lighter [in their disposition] to belief than men, spirits came in a lighter way to their conjurations and summons.”¹⁸ It is difficult to understand what the wise king means by *ligero* (“lighter”) in this context. In their *Diccionario de la prosa castellana del Rey Alfonso X*, Kasten and Nitti indicate that *ligero* can mean “easy” and “with easiness.” Thus, perhaps this passage implies that women are more closely intertwined with the spiritual world, or more easily influenced and used as vessels. In any case, being “lighter” seems to make women more proficient magi. Even though the treatise is going to focus on these three female characters, Alfonso preserves the *GE*’s consistency by pointing out that “we also find men who performed deeds through their magical knowledge, such as those three Hermeses, King Jupiter, King Solomon, Virgil, Ovid, and others, but they did not achieve as much.”¹⁹ As mentioned earlier, in the *GE* Jupiter is characterized as a great mage. The three Hermeses were referenced not only at the start of this treatise (*GE2* II, 624–25) but also in an earlier passage with distinct Arabic Hermetic influences (*GE2* I, 48–55).²⁰ This short inventory of male magicians also includes three historical characters who were known as experts in magic according to some medieval traditions: Solomon, Virgil, and Ovid. Solomon is connected to Jewish magic lore, which Alfonso knew through his translation of the *Liber Razielis* (García Avilés); however, when *GE3* renders the biblical history of Solomon—which occurs soon after this treatise—it talks about his legendary wisdom, but not about magic (*GE3* I, 327–59). Alfonso might not want to connect the biblical narrative of Solomon with magic. During the Middle Ages both Virgil and Ovid were considered magicians—due to the magic and wonders Ovid described in the *Metamorphoses*, this comes as no surprise (Rand; Pavia; and Segal).

¹⁷ “E d’este saber de la mágica usaron aquellas tres dueñas.” *GE2* II, 628.

¹⁸ “[. . .] se maravillan algunos cómo podrié ser de alcançar las mujeres más en el saber que los varones [. . .]. E porque las mugeres fueron siempre más ligeras para creer quequier que non los varones, veniénles por ende los espíritus más ligeriamiente a sus conjuraciones e a sus llamamientos que les fazien.” *GE2* II, 628.

¹⁹ “E fallamos otrosí varones que se metieron a los fechos d’este saber, como aquellos tres Hermes, el rey Júpiter, el rey Salamón, e Virgilio, e Ovidio, e otros, mas pero non obraron ende tanto.” *GE2* II, 628.

²⁰ On the legend of the three Hermeses in the *GE* and its sources see the chapter I dedicate to it in my book (Udaondo Alegre, *The Spanish Hermes* 131–172); see also Fraker (197–205) and Burnett (“Legend of the Three Hermes” 231).

Despite referencing these illustrious male magi, Alfonso still insists that Diana, Circe, and Medea were the most accomplished practitioners of the art that the world had known. To sustain his claim, he dedicates the next chapter to an elaboration “On the lineages of those magi ladies,” which includes discussing specific chapters from the *Metamorphoses* where they are found (*GE2* II, 628–29), and in this way he once more recognizes the authority of Ovid in this treatise. Like many other wise and important characters in the *GE*, Diana, Circe, and Medea are defined as being from noble lineages. Thus, we find out that “Ovid says in the fourteenth chapter of his major book that Circe was the daughter of the Sun.”²¹ Immediately, *GE2* provides an euhemeristic clarification that of course the Sun does not conceive daughters, and Ovid is actually referring to the wise philosopher Apollo, who “knew about all knowledges and all the natures governed by the Sun’s power.”²² This terminology is reminiscent of Arabic astrological magic, where it was essential to know about the nature (*tabi’a*) of things, and where the Sun was one of the seven “planets” that influenced terrestrial matters.²³

The treatise also closely follows the *Metamorphoses* when he states that “Ovid says in the seventh book of his major book that she [Medea] was daughter of Lord Aeëtes, king of the Island of Colchis.”²⁴ But Alfonso also uses other sources, as he mentions that “The gentile authors and the book of their generations say that Diana was the daughter of Jupiter and Lady Ceres, whom gentiles called goddess of the earth and the harvest.”²⁵ The book Alfonso is referring to appears multiple times throughout the *GE* under different names, all variants similar to *Libro de las generaciones de los dioses gentiles* (Book of the generations of the gods of the gentiles). As Saquero and González suggest (98–99), this is probably a manual by an unidentified Latin mythographer entitled *Liber de genealogiis deorum gentilium*, related to Fulgentius (sixth century), the Digby mythographer (twelfth century), and Theodontius (twelfth century?). These authors made use of the three anonymous Vatican Mythographers (Saquero and González 98), widely diffused sources of mythology during the Middle Ages. The first preserved manuscripts of the Vatican Mythographers are from the twelfth century, although it is likely that the first one was written much earlier (Pepin 5–10).

Most of the mythological material in the *GE* comes from the *Metamorphoses*, which lacks a strict chronological structure. Alfonso follows the *Chronicle* of Eusebius/Jerome, which inserted mythological episodes into the biblical chronology. However, as Saquero and González state (99), Alfonso could have also used the *Libro de las*

²¹ “E de Circe dize así el Ovidio en el catorzeno capítulo de su libro mayor que fue hija del Sol.” *GE2* II, 628. Indeed, it appears in *Met.*14.9–10.

²² “[. . .] que todos los saberes sopo e todas las naturas que por el poder del Sol se gobiernan.” *GE2* II, 628.

²³ On these ideas in the *Picatrix*, see Attrell and Porreca (12-14 and 18).

²⁴ “Dize Ovidio en el seteno libro de su Libro mayor que fue fija de don Oeta rey de la Isla de Colcos.” *GE2* II, 628. We find this information in *Met.*7.7–10.

²⁵ “Cuentan los abtores de los gentiles e el libro de las sus generaciones que Diana fue fija del rey Júpiter e de doña Ceres, a quien sus gentiles llamavan deesa de la tierra e de las mieses.” *GE2* II, 628.

generaciones—and likely other medieval works—to provide internal organization for the myths and additional data and interpretations he incorporated. This is made clear in the quote from the treatise mentioned above, because in the *Metamorphoses* Diana is not the daughter of Ceres, that role is held by Proserpine. In fact, alternative ancient traditions associated Diana with Proserpine, a Chthonic deity related to the underworld and magic, and this tradition was transmitted through some medieval sources, as we will see later. Since the *Metamorphoses* only provides the noble lineages of Circe and Medea, Alfonso turns to the *Libro de las generaciones* for information on Diana. He also mentions that “we have already talked about Diana earlier, but we have not yet discussed Circe and Medea. We will come back to them in their appropriate places.”²⁶ Therefore, he emphasizes that significant episodes featuring the three ladies in leading roles are included in the *GE*. Let us turn to examine these episodes to determine the extent to which their narratives influenced the wise king’s selection of Diana, Circe, and Medea as history’s three most exceptional magi.

Three Ovidian Episodes Featuring Female Magic in the *GE*

Earlier in *GE2*, Alfonso presented a version of the myth of Acteon, a hunter, who appears by the river and takes Diana and her nymphs by surprise while they are naked and bathing.²⁷ Angered, and separated from her weapons, Diana sprinkles water from the river—accompanied by a curse—on Acteon, who is transformed into a stag and then torn apart by his own dogs.²⁸ Alfonso explains that, to execute this transformation, Diana “proceeded to use her knowledge of magic” and “turned to the waters as she would have done to the weapons, charmed them, and took them in her hands, and then she hurt and charmed Acteon.”²⁹ Therefore, Diana is considered knowledgeable in magic, and in line with a widespread interpretation of its effects in the *GE* (i.e., creating an illusion; Udaondo Alegre, *The Spanish Hermes*, 107-108; Ekman, “Ovid Historicized” 26–28), we notice she “made it that whoever saw Acteon would think that he was a stag, and she also clouded his judgement in such a way that he himself thought it.”³⁰ This is the only relevant passage related to Diana and magic in the *GE*.

Regarding Circe, in *GE3*, we find a section about Ulysses’s return to Ithaca, including references to the hero’s famous encounter with the goddess from the *Odyssey*,

²⁶ “E de Diana e de sus fechos avemos ya fablado antes d’esto, mas de Circe e de Medea aún non, e diremos d’ellas adelante en sus lugares.” *GE2* II, 628.

²⁷ On the ancient traditions of this myth, see Schlam.

²⁸ *Met.* III.138–252; and *GE2* I, 205–12. On Alfonso’s treatment of this episode, see Ekman (“Acteón”), and on the ancient traditions of this myth, see Schlam.

²⁹ “[. . .] que obró d’allí adelant Diana del so saber de la mágica [. . .] tornós a las aguas cuemo se tornarié a las armas e encantólas, e tomó dellas con sos manos, e firió a Acteón, e encantó y luego a él mismo.” *GE2* I, 210.

³⁰ “E fizo que quantas cosas le viesen que todos coidassen que era ciervo; e a él turvió otrossí el sentido de guisa que él mismo lo cuidaba.” *GE2* I, 210.

which Ovid retells in the *Metamorphoses*. Even though Alfonso follows and quotes Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and *Heroides*, the main source for the passage is the French poem *Roman de Troie* by Benoît de Sainte-Maure (ca.1155–70), combined with other medieval sources in Latin.³¹ Therefore, Alfonso's Circe clearly shows a medieval influence that we must take into consideration when looking at the interpretation of magic and other components. In this regard, the *Roman de Troie* introduces the figure of Telegonus, son of Ulysses and Circe, not mentioned by Homer or by Ovid (Gómez 33–34), and *GE3* also includes him. The *Roman de Troie* asserts that Telegonus's mother, "Circe [. . .] knew so much/that she transfigured men/and transformed them into many appearances/through the strange art of nigromancy."³² Alfonso closely follows this source here and greatly elaborates on the reference to magic:

the goddess Circe was so wise in the knowledge of the magic of nigromancy, which is the knowledge of charming and conjuring things related to it, that—like Ovid tells, and about which we have already said something in this history—she knew so much about conjuring and charming that she altered the judgement and eyesight in such a way that, like the story tells, she transfigured men and other things in a manner that made some appear to be lions, others wolves, and others pigs.³³

These additional details also include a clarification that identifies nigromancy with magic in general, something that also occurs in the *Picatrix*.³⁴

We also appreciate the reference to not only Ovid but also to an earlier passage in the *GE*—it is most certainly a reference to our treatise, where Circe is profusely mentioned. This allusion to the treatise not only clarifies the terminology related to charming (*encantar*) and conjuring (*conjurar*) but also clearly articulates the reference to how she transformed the appearances of things as they appear to the eyes, which was already suggested in the *Roman de Troie*. The truly interesting thing about this passage is that it does not look into Circe's other deeds, especially the most dangerous and terrifying ones that intrigued ancient and medieval commentators.³⁵ Thus, Alfonso does not mention the famous lust and fast paced love affair of Circe and Ulysses

³¹ *GE3* I, 250–82; *Met.*XIV.223–319. On the other sources for Circe in *GE3*, see Gómez (33–34). On the entire cycle of Troy in the *GE*, see Casas Rigall (113–207 and 262–64)

³² "Circès, icele que tant sot / Que les homes transfigurot / E muõt en mainte semblance / Par estrange art the nigromance." *Roman de Troie* 29.975–78. My translation.

³³ "Y fue aquella deesa Circe dueña tan sabia en el saber de la mágica nigromancia, que son los saberes de encantar y conjurar sobre las cosas que a ello pertenecen, ca, así como cuenta Ovidio y avemos ya dicho en esta historia alguna cosa, ella sabié tano de conjurar y de encantar que trasmudava los entendimientos de los ombres y las vistas de guisa que, así como cuenta la historia, trasfigurava los ombres y a las otras cosas, de guisa que a los unos fazié parecer en semejança de leones, a los otros de lobos, a los otros de puercos." *GE3* I, 270.

³⁴ For instance, in *Picatrix* L.ii.1. On the medieval concept of nigromancy and the *Picatrix*, see Attrell and Porreca (10–12).

³⁵ This is also observed by Gómez (36).

or the dreadful episodes with Glaucus and Picus. Instead, it focuses on the conjugal relationship between Circe and Ulysses, which seems to be peaceful, as well as her role as an advisor to their son Telegonus. Alfonso is simply interested in emphasizing that Ulysses, in addition to Telemachus, whom he had with Penelope, “had another son from Circe, who was known to the pagans as the daughter of the Sun because of her wisdom, and he was called Telegonus.”³⁶ This benevolent and respectful view of Circe can be related to Alfonso’s portrait of Medea.

The most famous passage in the *Metamorphoses* that contains magic—Medea and her encounter with Jason—is chronicled in a lengthy section of *GE2*.³⁷ At the beginning of the translation of this passage, Alfonso explains that “this princess, Medea, was among the wisest ladies the world had at that time, especially in the arts of magic and the stars.”³⁸ Therefore, even though Ovid does not mention it when she first appears, the main attribute that Alfonso highlights is Medea’s wisdom, as exemplified in her superiority in the disciplines of magic and astronomy/astrology. Moreover, Ovid immediately emphasizes how Medea “conceived an overpowering passion. Long she fought against it, and when by reason she could not rid her of her madness she cried: [. . .] ‘Come, thrust from your maiden breast these flames that you feel, if you can, unhappy girl. Ah, if I could, I should be more myself. But some strange power draws me on against my will. Desire persuades me one way, reason another’” (*Met.*VII.9–11,17–20).³⁹ In the *GE*’s rendering of this passage, Medea also “liked Jason very much when she saw him because he was tall, handsome, and young” but her feelings were more rational, as she “thought about marrying him,” and “apart from those qualities already mentioned, she found him to be well-reasoned and a man of good understanding, which made her like him very much.”⁴⁰ In this way, the internal conflict between desire and reason described by Ovid is elaborated on and interpreted by Alfonso as Medea “having an argument with herself in the way scholars and teachers in the schools have when they make what they call in the language of Castile *disputatio* (*disputar*).”⁴¹ Therefore, far from being an impulsive woman driven by passion, Medea is actually more akin to an educated scholar specializing in magic who, understandably, is attracted to a handsome

³⁶ “Y el otro hijo ovo de Circe, aquella de que vos avemos dicho que la llamaron sus gentiles fija del Sol por razón de que era muy sabia, y a éste llamaron Telegion.” *GE3* I, 260.

³⁷ *GE2* II, 144–87. For the sources of the passage of Medea in the *GE* and particularly its allegorical interpretation sections, see Cuesta Torre (190-192). As Salvo García also explains (351-53), the main sources are Ovid’s *Met.*VII.1–424 and *Heroides* VI (Hypsipyle to Jason) and XII (Medea to Jason).

³⁸ “E esta infante Medea era de las más sabias dueñas que en el mundo avié a aquella sazón, e sobre todo en el saber de la arte mágica e en el de las estrellas.” *GE2* II, 144.

³⁹ I am using the translations of Ovid’s works from the Loeb Classical Library, with slight modifications.

⁴⁰ “[. . .] desde lo vio como era él grande e feroso e mancebo pagóse mucho d’él, e pensó en casamiento con él” [. . .] “pues que vio en Jasón las noblezas que son dichas e cómo era bien razonado e le sintió por varón de buen entendimiento pagóse mucho d’él.” *GE2* II, 144.

⁴¹ “Se metió ella a aver contienda consigo misma en las razones a la manera que la an los escolares e los maestros en las escuelas en aquello que llaman disputar en el lenguaje de Castilla.” *GE2* II, 144.

man, appreciates his intelligence, and approaches the situation with a rational mind. In fact, the *disputatio* and *lectio* were Scholasticism's innovative ways of teaching, learning, and reasoning that were diffused during Alfonso's time—this mention would be proof of the early arrival of Scholastic teaching methods in the Iberian Peninsula.⁴² And he wants Medea associated with them.

GE2 faithfully renders Medea's displays of magic in the *Metamorphoses*, such as the aid she provides Jason during his battles with monsters to achieve the golden fleece, Aeson's rejuvenation, the killing of Pelias, and the flight on dragons or snakes. As Salvo García has observed (358–59), there is a correspondence between the explanations of how Medea's magic works in this section and the treatise that I am examining, which leads Salvo García to conclude that the treatise had been composed prior to the *GE* and then inserted in a place that Alfonso deemed convenient. Moreover, in one place the treatise mentions that Medea has already appeared in the *GE*, and in another place that she will appear;⁴³ this contradiction reveals that it was written at a stage when different components of the historical work were still being assembled.

As I mentioned earlier, the treatise assigns one specific category of magic to each of three ladies.⁴⁴ The category of herbs/confections (*yerbas/confaciones*) corresponds to Medea. This category is extensively mentioned in this section, confirming that the compilers had the treatise in mind when they composed it. *Yerbas/confaciones* are remarked on, for instance, when Jason asks Medea to rejuvenate his aging father Aeson. As in Ovid, Medea recites a long and famous invocation to Hecate for help with this task. Hecate, as we will see below, was considered the goddess of magic. Alfonso reproduces this invocation, and it is remarkable how he acknowledges Hecate as the “lady of charms” (*señora de los encantamientos*) and interprets her classical epithet, “threefold,” as being related to the three kinds of magic that he later defines in the treatise—something that of course is not found in Ovid (*Met.*VII.179–219; and *GE2* II, 154–560). Thus, Medea affirms that Hecate is powerful “of words, of herbs, and of stones, and [of their respective] conjurations, works, and virtues, due to which in Latin gentiles call her *tri formis*, which in Castilian means three forms, and this means three powers.”⁴⁵ As I will explain later, in antiquity, Hecate and her magic were not only related to Medea but also to Circe and Diana.

Furthermore, Alfonso could find evidence in the *Metamorphoses* for attributing the magic of confections or herbs to Medea. Ovid describes how, after her invocation, Medea travels to different regions of the world in a chariot drawn by dragons to collect the herbs she needs for the spell, something also mentioned in *GE2* (*Met.*VII. 220–35;

⁴² On the *disputatio* in medieval universities and philosophy, see Bazán, Wippel, Franssen, and Jacquart.

⁴³ *GE2* II, 628; and *GE2* II, 634.

⁴⁴ See also my article (Udaondo Alegre, “Enchanted Origins”).

⁴⁵ “[. . .] deesa doña Ecate, que es poderosa [. . .] de palabras e de yerbas e de piedras e de sus conjuraciones e sus obras e de sus virtudes, donde le llaman los gentiles en su latín *tri formis*, que es tanto en el lenguaje de Castilla como de tres formas, e esto es de tres poderes.” *GE2* II, 154.

and *GE2* II, 156–67). Then Alfonso elaborates on the section where Medea uses these herbs and other components in the spell to rejuvenate Aeson, and Alfonso associates some of the details given by Ovid with Arabic magic; for instance, Medea purifies the altar where she will place Aeson during the ritual with fire, water, and sulfur—three times with each. Alfonso interprets this to mean that the *sulphur* was used to make suffumigations⁴⁶—a procedure commonly mentioned in the *Picatrix*.⁴⁷ Finally, *GE2* describes the entire procedure as a *confación*, a Castilian word that corresponds to the Latin *confection*—its etymological origin mentioned profusely as a specific charm in the *Picatrix*:⁴⁸ “Once Medea saw that she had cooked these herbs and virtues in her confection (*confación*), [she] approached Aeson and slit his throat; as his blood poured, she took the cauldron with her confectioned (*confacionadas*) herbs from the fire [. . .] and poured them in his mouth and wound.”⁴⁹

Later in the *Metamorphoses* Medea repeats the same procedure for crueler purposes. Pelias, the king of Iolcus, refuses to give Jason the kingdom when he comes back with the golden fleece—as he had promised—so Medea conspires to kill him. The princess meets with the king’s daughters and tells them that she has the power to rejuvenate him. To demonstrate this, Medea mentions that she will transform an old ram into a young lamb with her medicine. Ovid uses the Latin word *medicamine* (healing substance) (*Met.*VII.310), which Alfonso once again translates as *confación*. Medea cuts the ram’s throat and tears it to pieces. Then Ovid specifies that the *venefica* (poison giver, sorceress) submerged the pieces in a boiling cauldron containing powerful potions (*validos sucos*) (*Met.*VII.316–17). As a result, a young lamb emerges. After a few days, Medea boils another cauldron—this time with herbs without powers (*sine viribus herbas*)—puts Pelias and his palace guards to sleep with the power of her magical song and her tongue (*cantus magicaeque potentia linguae*) (*Met.*VII.327 and 330), and finally, accompanied by his daughters, kills Pelias, who is not rejuvenated. When Alfonso presents this episode, he explains that once the cauldron is boiling, Medea “put there her herbs, stirred them, and made her *confación*, then she cut the lamb’s throat [. . .] and put [the lamb] in the cauldron with the *confación* of herbs.”⁵⁰ Later in the story Alfonso translates the description of the herbs for Pelias’s charm as having “no strength” and that Medea put Pelias and his guards to sleep “by utilizing magic, and made her charm

⁴⁶ “[. . .] e tres vezes con piedra sofre faziéndole con ella sus safumerios.” *GE2* II, 158. *Met.*VII. 261.

⁴⁷ Attrell and Porreca have opened an interesting avenue of research by pointing out the psychoactive ingredients in the *Picatrix*’s suffumigations and confections and their potential mind-altering effects, and their conclusions are applicable to the material in this section and the treatise (26–30)

⁴⁸ See, for instance, *Picatrix*.III.xi, 1–12. I delve into this variety of magic in Udaondo Alegre, “Enchanted Origins.”

⁴⁹ “Medea pues que estas yerbas e estas virtudes vio en su confación que havié guisado llegó a Eson e degollólo e fizo salir toda la sangre vieja, e mientras la sangre salió tomó ella el calderón de sobre el fuego con sus yerbas confacionadas [. . .] e metióle d’ello en la boca e d’ello le echó en la llaga.” *GE2* II, 159–60.

⁵⁰ “[. . .] e echó y sus yervas e bolviólas e fizo su confación, e degolló luego el carnero [. . .] e dio con él en la caldera en aquella confación de las yerbas.” *GE2* II, 171.

[. . .] by reciting the words of her charm.”⁵¹ Therefore, when Alfonso translates Ovid he also interprets him, here according to the theories of Arabic magic he had already interpreted and classified in the treatise.

Despite her well-known fame as an impulsive murderous sorceress, quite justified by the atrocities and displays of magic that this section describes, Alfonso strives to present a positive portrayal of Medea. She is initially a learned scholar of magic who rationally decided to help her future husband in his endeavors, but then she is driven to act out of anger due to his wrongdoings. Before Medea kills Pelias, Alfonso inserts the letter from *Heroides* VI by Hypsipyle, the abandoned first wife of Jason, in which she curses Jason and Medea, into the narrative (*GE2* II, 162–70). Alfonso apocryphally states that Medea was aware of this letter, and as a result, she began to distance herself from Jason due to her disappointment. Ashamed, she ultimately decided to move to the palace of her husband’s uncle, whom she eventually kills (*GE2* II, 170). In a similar exculpatory way, Alfonso includes Medea’s letter to Jason from *Heroides* XII that she writes before her most infamous and horrific act, the murder of their sons, and in this way we can at least partially understand the princess’s point of view after Jason abandons her for Creusa. Moreover, as Salvo García points out (361–62), Alfonso quickly summarizes the horrendous acts of Medea, and even omits some of them, such as the assassination of Creusa. Additionally, Alfonso makes up a “happy ending” for Medea: she returns to Colchis and reconciles with her subjects (*GE2* II, 187).

From Lustful Sorceresses to Wise Magi

Alfonso’s lenient portraits of Circe and Medea are a stark contrast to the disparaging way Ovid characterized them and their use of magic, as many scholars have noted. Magic plays a significant role in the repertoire of narrative devices in the *Metamorphoses*, yet particularly, “it helps depict the irrational and the demonic force of the passions” (Segal 6). Female lust is often associated with magic in the poem, particularly in the cases of Medea and Circe, which contain the most sustained accounts of magic and are closely associated with love (Segal 9–11). In the case of Medea, the shift from helpful to destructive magic “follows the evolution of a young girl from helpful enchantress to murderous witch,” whereas with Circe, “her magic is an extension of her susceptibility to desire, her power over men, and her dangerous sexual jealousy and anger” (Segal 11). In the Scylla and Picus episodes, Circe is “a highly eroticized figure, susceptible to love at first sight” (Segal 22). In a similar way, Boyd points out that in the *Metamorphoses*, Circe is “a voracious lover” and “a vindictive wielder of powerful magic” (115), whereas Pairet highlights “the predatory sexuality of the goddess” (“Shades of Circe” 394).

⁵¹ “[. . .] yervas que non avién ninguna fuerça [. . .] obró ella entonces de la mágica e fizo su encantamiento [. . .] diciendo Medea sus palabras de sus encantamientos.” *GE2* II, 172.

The challenge that women possessing magical powers poses to masculine authority not only runs throughout ancient Greek and Roman literature (Segal 2) but also extends to the Middle Ages, which offers “a vast repertoire of exempla targeting learned women”; and this fear of female knowledge is encapsulated by Circe’s magic (Pairet, “Shades of Circe” 394), a story “whose misogynistic features the mythographers of late antiquity and medieval commentators had amplified” (Pairet, “Shades of Circe” 401). This portrait of Circe is quite distinct from Alfonso’s version. He portrays her as an accomplished second wife and mother of Ulysses’s son, as well as a very wise woman skilled in magic. When it comes to Medea, Alfonso makes an effort to depict Jason as the cause of her misfortunes and then cruelties.

Furthermore, in the treatise on magic, the learned magic of Medea, Circe, and Diana is depicted as being completely separate from men, and neither Jason nor Acteon are mentioned. Alfonso limits himself to pointing out how Mesealla allegedly says that Circe “transformed things through [sorting] lots and operated very effectively using herbs, milk, and other substances, as we will later narrate in the story of her and Ulysses the Greek.”⁵² Therefore, Alfonso’s portrayal of female magic occurs in a universe that is very different from the androcentric world of Ovid. Although Alfonso’s interpretation of these female characters as diligent sages differs from his Ovidian source, it actually echoes alternative ancient versions of them, which can also reveal some of the particularities of the Castilian rendering. The selection of Medea as one of the most powerful magi in history may not seem surprising, given her prominent role in both the *Metamorphoses* and the *GE*. Despite her brief appearance in another section, the inclusion of Circe also appears fitting due to her widespread fame. However, questions arise about the choice of Diana over other figures from the *Metamorphoses* who exhibit more significant displays of magic in the *GE*, such as Juno, (i.e., *GE1* I, 307; *GE2* I, 214, 228, 313, and 326). In order to address Alfonso’s choices, we must consider parallel traditions that also might have influenced him.

Johnston has integrated ancient references to Medea’s diligent pursuit of knowledge into a portrayal of Medea as a dedicated scholar of magic in her recent work, *Gods and Mortals*. Johnston evokes Medea’s “years of studiousness” and how she “had spent her childhood studying the arcane properties of plants and how to put them to use” (*Gods and Mortals* 251 and 253). To support this portrait, Johnston uses sources such as Diodorus Siculus (first century CE), in whom traces of the close ancient relationship between Medea, Circe, and Diana can also be found. Diodorus even provides an alternative lineage that further connects the three women. According to him, King Helios (a euhemerized Sun) had two sons, Aeëtes, king of Colchis, and Perses, king of Tauric Chersonese. Diodorus says that strangers who visited Tauric were sacrificed to Artemis—that is, Diana—and that Perses had a daughter called

⁵² “[. . .] mudaba ella las cosas por fechos de suertes, e obrava como lo adelante contaremos en las razones d’ella e de Hulixes de Grecia.” *GE2* II, 629

Hecate, who founded a temple for the goddess and, like her, was “fond of hunting” (*Library* IV.45).⁵³

Hecate, who was “ingenious in the mixing of deadly poisons” and discovered aconite, among other drugs, married her uncle Aeëtes and bore two daughters, Circe and Medea. Moreover, Circe and Medea inherited their scientific curiosity from their mother Hecate/Diana. Circe devoted herself “to the devising of all kinds of drugs and discovered roots of all manner of natures and potencies such as are difficult to credit, yet, notwithstanding that she was taught by her mother Hecate about not a few drugs, she discovered by her own study a far greater number” (*Library* IV.45). In a similar way, Diodorus affirms that “from her mother and sister she [Medea] learned all the powers which drugs possess” (*Library* IV.45). I want to highlight the two Greek words related to magic, “natures” (φύσεις) and “potencies” (δυνάμεις) used by Diodorus here; the Abbasid Arabic translators would elaborate on these terms in their Hellenistic sources, and they would be rendered in posterior treatises of magic as *ṭabi’a* and *qumwa*.⁵⁴ “The *GE* renders in Castilian those concepts from Arabic magic as *natura* and *potencia* (Udaondo Alegre, *The Spanish Hermes* 101-102).”

Diana/Hecate: The Threefold Moon Goddess of Magic

The connection that Diodorus makes between Diana, Circe, and Medea provides us with insight into why Alfonso chose them. This bond has deep ancestral roots, harkening back to the ancient symbolism of the Moon and its phases that were associated with three female deities, Diana being the most important of them. As Pairet explains, in the preclassic period Diana was worshipped as a triple goddess (Diana *triformis*), in a triad that associated her with the Moon and death’s world, represented by Selene/Moon and Hecate (who would later be known as *triformis* as well, as we saw in Ovid). In this way, the three goddesses represent the phases of the Moon and the stages of life: Diana/Artemis (crescent Moon) was the growth, Selene (full Moon), maturity, and Hecate (new Moon), death (Pairet, “Dame des trois formes” 429–30). According to Green, “these were neither different goddesses nor an amalgamation of different goddesses. They were Diana [. . .] Diana as huntress, Diana as the moon, Diana of the underworld” (134–35). This is why Virgil invokes Diana in this way “Hecate, treble-formed, the three faces of Diana the virgin” (*ter geminamque Hecaten, tria virginis ora Dianae*) at Dido’s funeral pyre (*Aeneid* IV.511; cited in Green 133). Thus, Hecate or Proserpina (the Latin form of Persephone) “are used as names for Diana in the underworld” (Green 134–35). And here we have a very important clue, because, as I explained above, Alfonso says that Diana is the daughter of Ceres (*GE2* II, 628), which means that he is identifying her with Proserpina and also, as I will develop below, with Hecate.

⁵³ In Ovid, Perses is father of Hecate as well, whom he calls *Hecates Perseidos* (*Met.* VII.74), but Circe, like Aeëtes, has Helios/Sun as father, which makes her the aunt of Medea.

⁵⁴ See, for instance *Ghāyat al-Ḥakīm* II.6, 86 (the *Picatrix*’s Arabic original). On Arabic theories of magic with Greek roots, see Saif, *Arabic Influences* 27–45.

Starting in the fifth century BCE, the underworld deity Hecate became increasingly associated with the magical arts. During the Hellenistic period, many texts referred to her as “the terrible Hecate” in magical incantations and sacrificial rituals (Martin, *Sorcières et magiciennes* 76–77). This magical dimension of Hecate is still remembered in her role in the rituals described in the *Chaldean Oracles* in the second century CE (Johnston, *Hekate Soteira* 76–110). This image was passed down to Latin authors, such as Ovid and Virgil. As Pairet explains, these bonds between Hecate and magic are reinforced by her association with Medea and Circe (“Dame de trois formes” 433). This is why Ovid has Medea invoke Hecate twice; the second time in a ritual that calls her “triple” and involves the crescent Moon, which is associated with Diana (*Met.*VII.74 and 179–95). Significantly, later in the *Metamorphoses*, Circe invokes Hecate twice as well (*Met.*XIV.42–44 and 405). Therefore, the ancient triad of goddesses associated with the Moon might have been implicitly substituted by another one: Diana/Hecate, Circe, and Medea, which finds echoes in Diodorus and Ovid and is closely related to magic. The question is, through which channels could this triad have influenced Alfonso’s choice of three lady magi and to what extent was he aware of the identification of Diana/Hecate?

We can find a trace in the Vatican Mythographers, who, as I said earlier, were extremely influential during the Middle Ages and were specifically related to a source Alfonso used in this treatise, the *Libro de las generaciones de los dioses gentiles*. In a section *On Proserpina, or Diana*, the First Vatican Mythographer greatly elaborates on everything I have just explained.

They say that Proserpina, the daughter of Ceres, is Pluto’s bride [. . .] The same goddess is named Diana, (duana, as it were), since the moon (luna) appears both in the day and at night [. . .] The same goddess is Trivia, because she is observed in three forms. On her Virgil says, ‘the three faces of maiden Diana,’ since the same goddess is called Luna, Diana, and Proserpina [. . .] In Greek, she is named Hecate. (Pepin 54)

Similarly, the Second Mythographer explains: “They say that Diana, namely Luna [. . .] is called Trivia because she is thought of in three forms. Thus Virgil writes ‘the three faces of virgin Diana,’ because the same goddess is called Luna, Diana, and Proserpina [. . .] Men say that this same Luna is Proserpina among the dead” (Pepin 114–15). Here we have clear evidence as to why Alfonso could refer to Diana as the “daughter of Ceres” in the treatise, and also a clue about her identification with Hecate, the goddess of magic. However, there is a clearer indication that Alfonso was assimilating Diana with Hecate in the treatise.

As I mentioned above, in the section on Medea in *GE2* Alfonso was following the narrative in the *Metamorphoses* but decided to insert Medea’s letter to Jason from the *Heroides* XII in which the princess justifies her crimes. In this letter, Medea also mentions the magical rituals that she performed for the benefit of Jason. Medea explains how she came to a dark grove, and “There is in it—there was, at least—a shrine to Diana, wherein

stands the goddess, a golden image fashioned by barbaric hand” (*Heroides* XII, 68–70). And Ovid mentioned in the *Metamorphoses* (VII.74) that “Medea then made her way to the ancient altars of Hecate, daughter of Perses.” When the *Heroides* reproduces the invocation of Medea, she says “I pray, by thy line, and by the godhead of thy all-seeing grandsire the sun, by the three-fold face and holy mysteries of Diana” (*Heroides* XII, 68–70). Since Ovid knew that Hecate was the granddaughter of the Sun, her identification with Diana here is absolute: he equally refers to the altars of Hecate in the *Metamorphoses* and Diana in the *Heroides*. Alfonso closely translates how Medea prays to Diana in the *Heroides* “by the lineage of your grandfather the Sun, who sees everything, and by the three faces of Diana, and for the sanctuaries of her secrets.”⁵⁵ Since Alfonso is translating the two works of Ovid, it is natural to assume that he took on the same identification. Moreover, the second invocation to Hecate in the *Metamorphoses* frequently mentions the Moon (VII.179–81, 193, 207–8), which reinforces the connection to Diana. Alfonso faithfully renders this section (*GE2* II, 154–55).

At the end of her letter in the *Heroides*, Medea complains that she has lost her family, her vassals, her country, and even her magical powers: “My very incantations, herbs, and arts abandon me; naught does my goddess aid me, naught the sacrifice I make to potent Hecate” (*Heroides* XII, 167–69). Alfonso translates this as: “My incantations, herbs, and arts abandoned me, and the sacrifices to the powerful goddess Diana do not assist me at all with all these things.”⁵⁶ Therefore in Alfonso’s very literal rendering of this passage, he translates Hecate as Diana. This is because, for him, as for Ovid, and most likely for some medieval sources used by the *GE*, the two were seen as the same goddess who, since Hellenistic times, presided over sorcery and was closely related to Medea and Circe. It is also revealing that in the translation of the first of Medea’s invocations to Hecate—from the *Metamorphoses*—Alfonso interprets it as saying that she was called *tri formis* because of the three kind of charms (words, herbs, and talismans), which he later describes in the treatise as being associated with Circe, Medea, and Diana. This makes Diana/Hecate the most significant classical figure associated with magic, and it becomes perfectly understandable why she is included in Alfonso’s triad.

Conclusion

At the end of the treatise Alfonso once more insists that, in addition to Diana, Circe, and Medea, there have existed many other philosophers and wise male and female practitioners of the magical art. Among the men, he now lists King Jupiter, Apollo, Mercury, Asclepius, King Solomon, Virgil, and Ovid, and among the women Queen Juno, Pallas, Ceres, Latona, and Erichtho (*Erato*) (*GE2* II, 635)—the witch who

⁵⁵ “Por el linage de tu abuelo el Sol, que vee todas las cosas, e por las tres caras de Diana, e por los santuarios de las poridades de ella.” *GE2* II, 182.

⁵⁶ “Desamparáronme los mios encantamientos e las yerbas e las artes, en non me fazen ya nada los sacrificios de la poderosa deesa Diana de todas estas cosas.” *GE2* II, 185.

appears in book VI of Lucan's *Farsalia*, which Alfonso includes later in the *GE* (on the version of *Farsalia* in the *GE*, see especially Almeida). But Alfonso ends this chapter—the last of those I am discussing here—by mentioning King Saul's "pythoness" (the Witch of Endor); this reference reminds readers that another sorceress was in fact the reason why this treatise of magic is included in this exact place in *GE2*. Moreover, the next chapter is "On what Master Petrus, Augustine, Jerome, and others say about Samuel's resurrection,"⁵⁷ and in it he only cites Christian authorities' explanations of the necromantic episodes.

Since the Bible acknowledges the existence of magic in this section, Alfonso decides to insert a treatise on this art here. There were opportunities to place it earlier in the *GE*; for instance, when the pagan gods display magical powers in Ovidian episodes. In fact, Alfonso included brief explanations on how magic works before the appearance of this treatise. However, Alfonso decided that the eleven chapters of the treatise's body fit better within the biblical episode and, more precisely, between two additional chapters where Christian authorities comment on divination and magic. These precautions were completely justified, because in 1279—while the *GE* was still being written—bishops and prelates in Castile sent a private memorandum to the pope in which they complained, among other things, about Alfonso's wrong doings—including divination—and departures from Christian doctrine. The bishops were backed by the rebellious son of Alfonso, the future king, Sancho IV the Brave (see Linehan 147).

Cautiously arranged in this way, the intellectual explanations in the eleven central chapters refer to authorities related to Arabic magic and the Hermetic traditions, such as Hermes, Toz, and Mesealla. According to the treatise, they affirmed that three Greco-Roman mythological women, Diana, Medea, and Circe, represented magic and its different kinds better than any other practitioners in history—including those luminaries in the lists that open and close the treatise. However, Greek writings on mythology had not been translated into Arabic, making it difficult to believe Alfonso's justification for his sources. The treatise, however, offers a coherent description of Circe, Diana, and Medea according to the episodes in the *Metamorphoses* that are rendered in the *GE* and expresses ideas about how magic works that are consistent with the Arabic translations and original treatises produced in Alfonso's *scriptorium*.

Circe, Diana, and Medea in particular are presented as exemplary princesses who come from select lineages and practiced the magic that they diligently learned, and this made them worthy of a place not only in the books of magic but also in history. Alfonso wants to establish a connection between the three ladies in the treatise and the episodes from the *Metamorphoses* that he translated as genuine historical facts in other sections of the *GE*. Thus, we can draw on the story of Medea and Jason for examples of the "practical" application of the kind of magic described in the treatise. Alfonso usually interprets supernatural powers in the *Metamorphoses* according to Arabic categories,

⁵⁷ "De lo que maestre Pedro e Agostín e Gerónimo e otros dizen del reçitamiento de Samuel." *GE2* II, 636.

and this is even more remarkable in this story. The choice of Medea, therefore, seems fully justified. However, the space allocated for Circe, and especially Diana, in their respective sections of the *GE* is much more limited, even though their magical wisdom is emphasized. However, their choice can also be substantiated.

A close reading of the sections about Medea from the *Metamorphoses* and the *GE* enabled us to uncover the close connection between Diana, Circe, and Medea and three powerful female figures associated with the three phases of the moon in late antiquity. To understand this threefold manifestation, it is also necessary to understand the close identification of Diana with the underworld deity Hecate, who came to be considered the goddess of magic. As we saw, both Ovid and Alfonso give us clues that Diana and Hecate are the same goddess, and in fact, as *tri formis*, she encapsulates the three kinds of magic embodied by the three ladies in the treatise. Moreover, the medieval sources available to Alfonso undoubtedly stated that Diana was Hecate. However, both Ovid and his medieval interpreters presented a misogynistic interpretation of learned sorceresses like Medea and Circe, associating their powers with irrationality and a lust for men. Alfonso completely avoids Ovid's disdainful conception of the three women magi. As we have seen in the translations of their most famous episodes, the *GE* presents a sympathetic portrait of the sorceresses, even admiring their dedication to knowledge. The treatise does not give any importance to their male partners. Alfonso foresees the revisionist and flattering interpretation of female knowledge—of magic in particular—that Christine de Pizan (1364–1431) would make a century later in *The Book of the City of Ladies* (Pairet, “Shades of Circe” 394). In my opinion, just as important historical male characters are presented as examples for his (male) subjects throughout the *GE*, these three ladies in the treatise are presented as exemplars for his (female) subjects. According to Alfonso, the gods and goddesses of the gentiles were actually wise men and women who did not rely on each other to develop their standing and talent in ancient times. In this sense, he also offers a model for his female subjects, who could be the equals of those men who collaborated with him in his scientific, astrological, and magical endeavors.⁵⁸ The wise king was able not only to elaborate a unique theoretical treatise on magic but also to develop a paradigmatic illustration of ambitious intellectual goals by uniquely receiving and jointly interpreting classical, Christian, and Arabic sources.

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⁵⁸ For a reconstruction of this ideal of learned subjects in Alfonso, see Montero.

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The Vertigo of Relativity and Molière's Comedy of the Modernizing Self: Dominance, Narcissism, Masterful Discourse, and Repression from *Arnolphe* to *Argan*

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Abstract: This article argues that, in constantly reminding us of the relational, the contingent, and the physical in human experience, Molière anticipates more recent analyses of the modern “possessive individualist” self. His comedies undermine both the supposedly—ideally—“autonomous” individual and the epistemology of mastery. Taking place in the real, organic, vertiginously dramatic space and time of comedic performance--not in the virtual, homogeneous, fixed space and time of abstract representations--and literally subverting hegemonic discourse by bringing it to life, the comedies remind us that the body, social entanglements, and the physical world are the grounds of the mind.

Keywords: vertigo, narcissism, mastery, individualism, cognition

I am committed to making connections between seventeenth-century French studies and interdisciplinary theories of modernity. This approach seems promising, not only for interpreting Molière and other early modern literary figures, but also for the Humanities in general. Mainstream modern epistemology and individualism, and the cognitive style associated with them, were being established during the seventeenth century. In this article, I will explore some ways in which Molière's major comedies anticipate social critiques of modernity developed by Ulrich Beck, Nikolai Genov, Bruno Latour, Peter Berger, Zygmunt Bauman, Ernest Becker, Alasdair McIntyre, and others. Molière critically examines tendencies of his time, elucidating negative aspects of modern ideologies and mentalities, and anticipating later figures who are routinely regarded as critical observers of the modern (Riggs Modernity).

Molière's critiques of narcissistic, would-be masterful, “self-fashioning” (Greenblatt) individualists can be read productively in the light of Beck's analysis of modernity's individualizing tendencies and of their consequences. Stephen Greenblatt's elaboration of the concept self-fashioning illuminates a crucial problem at the heart of individualist “liberation,” which I see as central to Molière's comedic dramatizations: the self-fashioner “produces” a self through what amounts to theatrical display—the creation of “prestige,” in the etymological sense. This not only places others—as audience—at the

core of supposedly emancipated “individuality,” it also denounces would-be autonomous selfhood as an imposture. As McIntyre puts it, not only our self, but our knowledge of that self, depend on the responses of others—on what we “learn” from them about ourselves (94). Michael Call, too, gives productive attention to the modern myth of the autonomous, self-seeking individual who denies dependence on others and obligations to them. Call also shows clearly that Molière intended to be taken seriously as a writer, and not to be dismissed as a “mere” *homme de théâtre*. The plays are clearly to be taken seriously as literature with important themes. This paradox at the heart of the modernizing self is, as I will attempt to show, especially salient in *Le Misanthrope*, but it is central to Molière’s dramaturgy in general.

In his superb study of paradox in Molière’s plays, James F. Gaines says that dramatizing the lack of a criterion of truth is fundamental to Molière’s comic technique. The plays undermine every dogmatic pretense of certainty and every effort to achieve absolute control. The ambition to know and control, shared by molièresque *ridicules* and a number of early modern philosophers, as well as by would-be absolutist rulers, leads to the conclusion that might makes right, that successful manipulation is a sign of epistemological and moral correctness. Molière’s relentless comic deconstruction of dogmatic speech and of efforts toward absolute control—of self and other—directly challenges the belief that Truth—with a capital “T”—can be found, and therefore that it can justify any kind of authoritarianism. The plays lampoon by implication what Gaines calls, in one of his many felicitous formulations, “an age of Absolutism that was trying to free itself from the contingencies of ordinary life.” Indeed, paradox is a crucial element in the plays, since efforts to achieve definitive knowledge and secure control are shown to be self-defeating, to lead, often literally, to vertiginous pirouettes.

The unity of the Subject is always already compromised by the fact that domination over the Other also requires domination over the otherness within the Subject (Benhabib). This “domination” is, actually, repression, which is always precarious and ultimately self-undermining. Subjects tend to be blinded by their narcissistic quest for ontological certainty, and that quest requires rejection—repression—of vulnerability and fallibility. The quest for unity thus requires *division* as a first condition. Combined with growing individualism, and with the reinforcement of patriarchal authority under absolutist monarchy (Hardwick), commitment to this binary worldview produced the misogyny, the hostility to nature and the body, and the narcissistic hypertrophy of the individual self that are demolished in Molière’s plays, and that still haunt us, today. The allegedly transcendent, knowing Subject of mainstream modern epistemology, and the inflated, narcissistic, would-be autonomous individualist, converge in Molière’s *grands ridicules*.

Berger writes that the comic has a cognitive function: it enables perception and criticism of dimensions of ourselves and of the world to which we are ordinarily inattentive (Redeeming, 6). He adds that one of the functions of humor is to encourage cognitive flexibility, by deliberately outraging conventional moral sentiments, by subverting orthodox claims of “Truth” (Redeeming, 19). Gérard Defaux also argues

for taking Molière seriously, attributing a didactic function to the plays. Of course, in the critical enterprise of taking Molière seriously, and certainly in my own beginnings as a Molière scholar, Judd Hubert's *Molière and the Comedy of Intellect* is a seminal work.

Timothy Murray provides yet more support here, saying that laughter is a violation of interpretive authority (114). Murray adds that the narcissistic Subject is blinded by the quest for security and permanence (31), and that dramatic performance is a traditional means of reminding us that vicissitude or relativity is inescapable (7). Molière directs attention to what mainstream modernizing culture has been inclined to ignore: the ineluctable intermittence—what Montaigne called the *branloire pérenne* (“Du repentir”)—of the world, and of the self who claims to know and control it. Jean Duvignaud, I believe, supplies support for my linkage of modernizing selfhood and epistemology by showing that comedy deconstructs systems and codes, and that incongruence is central to comic drama. The epistemology of mastery and control, along with its psychological motives and problematic consequences, have been given unusually systematic consideration in Benjamin Fong's *Death and Mastery: Psychoanalytic Drive Theory and the Subject of Late Capitalism*. Fong's bold analysis was actually anticipated, I believe, by the work of Ernest Becker (Denial 181).

Like Becker, Fong finds the roots of the impulse to achieve mastery in the fear of death, and in the delusional ambition to escape it. Along with that fear and ambition, go rejection of the body and the emotions, and misogynist distrust of and hostility to women. What is connected with the body, the emotions, and physical nature—typically conceptualized as female—is feared and repressed; it becomes the object of active hostility. The repression, predictably, perpetuates and intensifies the fear. Since a human being is a bodily and emotional entity, the hostility becomes hostility to the real self, since it is that bodily self that will die.

I would add that substitution of a represented “world” for the intractably resistant real one is also inherent in the epistemology, and the concomitant style of cognition, that became dominant during the seventeenth century in Europe. This cognitive style involves heavy investment in hierarchical binaries: masculine/feminine, human/nature, reason/emotion, mind/body. The “upper” halves of these dichotomies were, and to a significant degree remain, identified with knowledge, culture, control, and progress. The “lower” halves are conflated, denigrated, and dominated in the interest of knowledge, control, and progress (Benhabib). They are perceived as threats to the fulfillment of the modern epistemological promise: parlaying certain knowledge into successful manipulation of nature and masterful autonomy for the Subject. These hierarchical binaries are constructs, or representations, fabricated for the purpose of acquiring material and social power. Investment of the sense of individual identity in this ideological construction of world and self is a cognitive style that disables true critical thinking. Max Vernet points out that this substitution of an abstract, controllable world for the unpredictable, real one is a defining foible of the molièresque *ridicules* (263).

Molière's pathologically narcissistic solipsists strive to establish what Bauman and Stanislaw Obirek have termed “vertical societies”: rigid hierarchies dominated by

a single authority, and buttressed by a unitary, hegemonic “Truth.” (13-14). Molière’s ridiculous tyrants are the dupes of what seems to both hide and serve their lust for power and security. Beck usefully suggests that adherence to and attempts to impose rigid moral codes articulated in authoritative normative discourses are actually illusory remedies for the anguish of individualization (Beck, *God* 35). It would be instructive to imagine that narcissism and other symptoms of extreme individualism are reactions to the vertigo and insecurity that accompanied the atrophy of once both confining and comforting collective entities. Self-fashioning is a chronically precarious, ultimately self-defeating enterprise. Individualization requires recognition by others, so the modern self, while lacking some of the traditional supports and dimensions of identity, remains a social construct. The self is thus always existentially situated; sociality, empathy, and reciprocity are more fundamental than individuality in human behavior (Riggs, “Paradoxes” 443).

In the “Préface de *Tartuffe*,” Molière says, “. . . on doit discourir des choses, et non pas des mots. . .” This injunction declares Molière’s intention to deconstruct the represented “world” of repressive normative discourses, where mastery and ontological security are believed, mistakenly, to reside. The *choses* about which we are advised to speak and think presumably include the body; emotions; social interdependence; and the given, natural world.

A new book by Anne-Laure de Meyer evokes brilliantly the deep sense of crisis that haunted the period during which Francis Bacon and René Descartes elaborated the new epistemology. Molière’s great comic types aspire to establish and dominate what Bauman and Stanislaw Obirek call a “vertical society”: one in which everything and everyone is organized around an authority figure legitimated by a single universal Truth (13-14). Bauman and Rein Raud have called modernity the era of certainty and argued that certainty is always rooted in some form of coercive power (13). As de Meyer demonstrates, the launch of an epistemology intended to produce knowledge in the interest of establishing and legitimating social and material power took place in an era of perceived disorder, of cognitive panic.

Attempting to control the vicissitudes of ordinary life is the hallmark of Molière’s *grands ridicules*. Attempting to escape the “vertigo of relativity” (Berger and Luckmann 13) by asserting the existence of a universal Truth has actually been the dominant tradition in Western thought, at least since Plato. It is well to remember that Plato banished both laughter and drama from his Republic. Linda Martín Alcoff denounces the Western philosophical canon’s quest for conclusions about “universal” human experience. This Western epistemological universalism requires ignoring the specifics of context and embodiment. Plato’s *Timaeus* endorses the ultimate rationalist fantasy: that the passions and the body can be made subservient to reason. Plato contends that a man dominated by his passions will be *reincarnated as a woman*. There we have it: in the Western philosophical canon, emotions and the body are identified with the feminine or female, and all are denigrated by the association.

Arnolphe’s systematic repression of Agnès, in *L’Ecole des femmes*, is an attempt to parlay his supposed expertise in matters of cuckoldry into dominance of a vertically

structured domesticity. As the play develops, we learn that it is Agnès's body and sexuality that Arnolphe is enclosing and repressing. His desire to deprive Agnès of independent subjectivity is demonstrated by his selection of her when she was a malleable four-year-old child: "Un air doux et posé, parmi d'autres enfants,/M'inspira de l'amour pour elle dès quatre ans" (ll 129-30). Arnolphe's *méthode*--to infantilize Agnès permanently--will be legitimated by a moralistic discourse of misogyny and repression—*Les Maximes du mariage*. (III, ii). The fact that the *maximes* are copied from an actual Church-sponsored manual of "proper" female behavior widens the significance of Molière's critique. The *maximes* represent perfectly the transformation of particular motives and interests, of a desire to seize and exercise power, into a "universally" valid normative discourse. Arnolphe intends to go beyond, to short-circuit, the usual patriarchal practice of using female sexuality to consummate a deal between men. He comes close to committing incest: having reared Agnès as a perfectly "innocent" and obedient daughter, he plans *to give her in marriage to himself*.

In the play's opening debate, Chrysalde points out the futility of trying to eliminate completely the risk of cuckoldry. However, he also suggests that a generous, respectful demeanor toward one's wife significantly reduces that risk. Moreover, stultifying and stupefying one's prospective wife, as Arnolphe proudly proclaims that he has done to Agnès, will eliminate one's own pleasure in being married.

The upshot of Arnolphe's *méthode* (l. 123)), is that he transforms Agnès into precisely what he fears most: a *femme habile* (l. 84). The naiveté he has imposed on her, with the help of a convent "education," has made her vulnerable to her first experience of gallant compliments, and his obstruction of her desire turns her into a clever actress and a strategic communicator—a *femme habile*. In Act III, scene 4, Arnolphe learns that, directly under his nose, and while appearing to obey his command to drive the seductive Horace away by throwing a rock at him, Agnès has attached an inviting note to the stone. Not only has Agnès become a *femme habile*, but she has also joined Molière as a writer who can subvert authority, even while performing prescribed gestures.

The method by which Arnolphe has sought control is, therefore, the means by which his attempt is foiled. This point is emphasized by the fact that Arnolphe gives money to Horace, thinking that he is thereby financing another man's marital disgrace (I, iv). In fact, he is bankrolling the comedy in which he will be reduced to ridicule. Arnolphe wants to believe that he can be a spectator, observing safely and knowingly from outside the action (l.44). Chrysalde tries to warn him that he is *in the play* (ll. 45-46). Abusive power exercised in service to an inflated, fragile ego, and underwritten by religious "Truth," is demolished.

In *Tartuffe*, Orgon's repression of his own natural emotions, and those of his family, seems to provide the keystone of dominance. In fact, though, that repression creates a void that is more than filled by the gigantic lusts of the false *dévo*t, Tartuffe. Analogous to divine right monarchy, Orgon's household is a vertically organized microcosm ruled by what he takes as the ultimate, unitary Truth: that of the Church,

as supposedly represented by Tartuffe. Orgon seems, already in the seventeenth century, to illustrate Beck's point that, in modernizing societies, many individuals have invented a "God" to serve their own private purposes (God 22). Both Orgon and Tartuffe look like excellent examples of this phenomenon.

Orgon's desire for control makes him easy to manipulate. He ignores real, bodily desires and motives, especially his own and those of his *dévo*t seducer. Despite describing Tartuffe as "un homme" (l.270), Orgon does not consider that having motives, or desires, is part of the definition of a man.¹ Orgon must ignore or deny motives, for the usual Molièresque reason: he wants his own motives, disguised as adherence to absolute Truth, to be the environment in which others must live. He wants to be *their world*, even as he pretends to have no desires, at all.

This brings us again to the nemesis-effect, to what Chrysalde called a *revers de satire* (l. 55) in *L'École des femmes*: the desire to absorb all into the narcissistic self does not eliminate vulnerability; it greatly increases it. It is a fundamental cognitive error to believe that the desire to know Truth and thereby achieve control somehow transcends the contingencies in which all desires actually arise and entangle us. Molière's great comedies work to correct this error.

Orgon disguises his desire for control, perhaps even from himself, by imposing a false asceticism. *Dévo*tion seems to provide cover for the pursuit of dominance. Molière shows that *dévo*tion can be exploited to "alchemize" desire, disguising it as adherence to Truth. Paradoxically, it also allows Tartuffe's quite earthly desire for sex and wealth to replace Orgon's repressed emotion, just as Tartuffe literally takes possession of his dupe's house. Orgon's pseudo-ascetic rejection of love for his family does not make him powerful; it makes him susceptible to the substitution of Tartuffe's desire for his own.

The material manifestation of Orgon's narcissism, the key to his seduction by Tartuffe, is made clear in Acte I, scène v. In explaining to his brother-in-law, Cléante, his deep regard for Tartuffe, Orgon, as if savoring a beatific vision, describes how Tartuffe took up a position in church facing Orgon--"Tout vis-à-vis de moi" (l. 284)—and attracted all eyes by praying with spectacular ardor. Then, the impostor, whom Cléante denounces as one of the "fanfarons de vertu" (l. 388), who "Font de dévotion métier et merchandise" (l. 366), hurried to flatter Orgon as they left the church. This image shows Tartuffe worshipping Orgon, making him, like the King, the manifestation of God on earth. Michael Hawcroft is among the Molière critics who agree with my reading of this scene (95). Tartuffe recognizes that Orgon can be seduced by flattery of his grandiose self-conception, of his ambition to be, in his household, a microcosmic absolute monarch, even a domestic god.

Orgon goes on to join Arnolphe in Molière's gallery of fools obsessed with control over women. First, he proudly cites Tartuffe's zeal in spying on Orgon's wife, Elmire (ll. 3-1-3-4). Then, he announces his intention to marry his daughter, Mariane,

¹ Molière implicitly reminds us, here, that all versions of truth are embodied, and can therefore never be absolute or universal.

to the impostor (II, i). Fear of women, and treatment of their sexuality as both a threat and a commodity to be traded between men are shown here to be central to Orgon's sense of power and security. Orgon intends to use his daughter's body to enhance his own power and status by cementing his connection with Truth. In convincing Orgon that true piety requires withdrawing emotion from his family, Tartuffe has created "space" into which to project his own desire.

Only when Orgon is literally *brought down to earth*—he is hidden under a table (IV, iv)—does he see and hear the truth about Tartuffe. Until this point, with Orgon's eyes directed "heavenward," or, rather, with Orgon effectively blinded by the glorious *vision* of himself composed by Tartuffe, the latter was free to indulge his very earthy desires for Orgon's wife and property. From his humiliating, and no doubt physically uncomfortable, position, now, Orgon's perception of Tartuffe is corrected, as the hypocrite tries to talk Elmire into having sex with him. Orgon receives a comic corrective of his cognition, and the lesson depends on his being forced to occupy a humble position.

Psychologist Joshua Greene agrees with Berger's idea that comedy makes for better cognition, saying that it increases our ability to make sound judgments (126). Orgon exemplifies Greene's point that emotional input is required for realistic, pragmatic judgments (137). It is, I think, worthwhile to refer again, here, to Beck's point about modern religion: it amounts to individualized theology to serve and legitimate an individual's selfish interests: God of one's own to make oneself, in effect, a god. Molière's mockery of the *maximes du mariage* and of Tartuffe's showy *dévotion* denounces conventional moralistic discourses as serving male desire for dominance and control, first of all over women.

In *Le Misanthrope*, Alceste's demand that Célimène be "sincere" reflects the modern conception of knowledge as clarity, power, and control. It is a demand that a woman be transparent, subservient, and fully knowable. It is another instance of attempted self-fashioning through distrust, condemnation, and domination of a woman.² Alceste's conception of sincerity is an assertion of power. To be perfectly sincere would amount to being transparent and static; to being without independent desire or motive; to being subservient to the desires and motives of another; to being, in effect, perpetually dissected, with one's interior fully revealed to a knowing, commanding gaze.

Alceste exemplifies perfectly the contradiction at the heart of individualized self-fashioning: his effort to be unique, to be distinguished from the rest of his society, requires *their recognition*. Hawcroft points out the contradiction inherent in the fact that Alceste wants his departure from society to be spectacular (170). His egotism must have an audience. Moreover, Alceste's demand that others be perfectly sincere is a

² Mieke Bal, in "His Master's Eye," says that the Ideal Object of the modernist appropriating subject is a literally or metaphorically nude woman, immobilized and unconditionally available to the dominant and possessive male gaze (390).

futile absolutist attempt to escape the realities of ordinary life. Alceste is surrounded by atomized individuals, like himself, who are competing for distinction. The “world” of Célimène’s household is a microcosmic dramatization of the one implied by the modern myth of individualism. Like Arnolphe, despite his effort to be a detached spectator/judge, Alceste is inescapably in the play. Alceste’s own performance is strategic, rather than perfectly sincere—it is *performative*. His misanthropy is a role, an effort at self-fashioning that cannot be independent of others’ reception. The egomaniac is always dependent on approval. Alceste’s obsession with being distinguished—“Je veux qu’on me distingue” (l. 63)—enmeshes him tightly in the social circle he professes to abhor. As McIntyre puts it, language has no meaning apart from its social use (31).

Alceste’s attempt to dominate and control a woman is even more hopeless than Arnolphe’s, since Célimène is already a *femme habile*. He wrongly assumes that sincerity is a virtue that transcends the specific contexts and relationships, the environment of motives, within which people actually communicate. When he compares Célimène’s alleged perfidy to “le déchaînement de toute la nature” (l. 221), Alceste echoes the association of woman with the threatening elements of nature, which modern epistemology promises to penetrate and control. Alceste aims to domesticate Célimène by reducing her to a fully visible display. She will speak and act only in order to open herself to Alceste, and to affirm his superiority. Knowing her, mastering her, will, he believes, confirm his status as a transcendent Subject.

Sincerity is clearly linked by Alceste to subjugation (Horowitz). In fact, the intensity of Alceste’s attack on Célimène, featuring references to flames and purification, evokes the Inquisition, a synthesis of confession and dissection if ever there was one: “... et sans doute ma flamme/De ces vices du temps pourra purger son âme” (ll. 233-234). Alceste sees himself, not merely as a severe judge of social mores, but as a full-fledged Grand Inquisitor. His misanthropic pose is obviously intended to place him outside and above his social milieu, while making him admired and feared within it, and while also compelling Célimène’s obedience and “love.” His use of the gallant cliché *flamme* to refer to the morally cleansing power of his love is one of the many examples in Molière’s plays of psychological truth breaking through the “surface” of a hackneyed metaphor.

Alceste’s desire for and fear of a female causes him to think of Célimène as a kind of witch. She allegedly makes him love her, against his will, through what amounts to a spell—“En dépit qu’on ait, elle se fait aimer” (l. 232). He ascribes his love for her to her fearsome, diabolical power. His quest for dominance over Célimène requires knowledge of her that is both penetrating and comprehensive. This is precisely the “pleine lumière” (l.1126) promised by Arsinoé when she offers to prove Célimène’s perfidy by showing Alceste a letter written by Célimène. That this putative revelation is both a betrayal and an effort to seduce Alceste, by a rival of Célimène, ought to make the former skeptical about it. However, as he will proclaim, he wanted and needed a pretext to play the Grand Inquisitor: “Je cherchais le malheur qu’ont rencontré mes yeux” (l. 1292).

The letter, supposedly conclusive evidence of Célimène's perfidy, is read by Alceste as if it were a combination of confession and dissection. Linda Williams, in her study of visual pornography, speaks of modernist knowledge as relying on the staging of involuntary confessions. It seems that the knowledge of Célimène sought by Alceste is akin to that of a pornographer, or a voyeur. Are we not here well on the way to the Marquis de Sade's fantasies?

Using language strategically, or performatively, as one always does in social communication, cannot be perfectly "sincere" as Alceste defines it. This is why Alceste's reading of the letter as if it were a revelation of Célimène's inner, shameful truth reveals his own pathological desire for power over her. Only if the truth about her is shameful can he purport to judge her definitively. Paradoxically, Alceste must regard the letter as perfectly "sincere," rather than as just another instance of the same socially contingent, "insincere" communication he has been fulminating against.³ Like Arnolphe and Orgon, Alceste tries to attach his ego to what he posits as a universal, moral imperative: sincerity. However, in another Molièresque *revers de satire*, his desire for distinction merely underlines his resemblance to the other competitive individualists in Célimène's circle. (Riggs Convergence).

Alceste undermines the legitimate social criticism for which he has so often been given credit. His reduction of others to the status of unambiguous representations, analogous to definitive and reproducible texts, would make them essentially interchangeable. It is thus difficult to see him as a hero of resistance against the leveling effects of absolutist power. He is clearly a would-be *imitator* of that power. The critique of absolutism resides in Molière's creation of the character of Alceste, not in the actually quite absolutist desire and rhetoric Alceste deploys.⁴

Alceste assumes that knowledge confers manipulative dominance, making the potentially dangerous object subservient to his will. The success of the manipulation would be taken as validation of the knowledge. Such knowledge seems all the more powerful because it is acquired despite resistance. Thus, another masculine, patriarchal fantasy, motivated by the desire for control, and by abhorrence of the feminine within and without, requires abolition of independent female subjectivity. Alceste's rhetoric makes it clear that he aspires to be an Inquisitor discovering shameful truths against the will of the dissected object. In this play, too, then, the motive for seeking power is control of a female's desire as a means to achieve dominant, transcendent subjectivity. Again, we are not far from Williams's pornographic gaze, nor from de Sade's erotica of torture.⁵

³ The fact that much of Alceste's role is borrowed from Molière's *Dom Garçie de Navarre* can add delightfully to our interpretation of *Le Misanthrope*. Alceste is doubly a theatrical production, and therefore a doubly deluded individualist. He cribs his performance from a play that failed. Furthermore, not only does he fail, or refuse, to acknowledge that he is in the play, but he does not realize what *kind* of play he is in.

⁴ Louise Horowitz's reading supports my contention that there are, in fact, no significant differences between Alceste and the other characters.

⁵ Pierre Force emphasizes that vision, itself, is a matter of exchange, undermining the idea of a unilateral, dominant, all-knowing gaze.

Harpagon, in *L'Avare*, imposes a regime of scarcity on his household. He is the embodiment of nascent capitalism, with its competitive materialism, its encouragement of insatiable desire, and its use of usury to colonize and profit from the future; at the same time, the miser indulges his own grotesquely excessive desire for profit. Like Orgon, he substitutes a “higher” value—money, in Harpagon’s case—for his family. Harpagon’s house is even more like a prison than Arnolphe’s, and the miser is every bit as obsessed with control. Also like Arnolphe, he is determined to use relentless vigilance to prevent surprise attacks on the property—his *cassette*—in which he has invested his entire sense of self.

For the miser, property has replaced family as the object of his emotion. Possessions best perform their psychological function when they are thought to excite envy. Property is often valued because its possessor perceives it as something everyone else is trying to get. As Arnolphe feared cuckoldry, and as Alceste feared female perfidy, Harpagon fears theft. The value to the “owner” thus depends on the threat of theft, or of infidelity, and therefore on fear. The would-be master is alienated from his own desire, and welded to his fear, by the will to mastery, which requires the idea of triumph, not only over the object, but over rivals for possession of it/her.

In *L'Avare*, Molière dramatizes modern, “self-maximizing” economic individualism that has become truly rapacious. Harpagon seeks to extend his ownership and control into the future; he wants to dominate both space and time. The miser profits from the same desire that he fears. As MacIntyre puts it, the vice of acquisitiveness makes the vice of intemperance in others desirable (88), but it also makes it fearsome. The supposed threat to his sacred *cassette* is, of course, Harpagon’s excuse for exerting rigid control. The effects of his system are revealed by both his daughter’s curious lassitude and his son’s desperate effort to obtain money.

L'Avare’s version of the Molièresque nemesis effect has Harpagon forcing usurious lending rates on a desperate borrower who turns out to be his own son (II, ii), and threatening to arrest himself for stealing the *cassette* (IV, vii). When he understands loving speech about his daughter to be about the *cassette* (V, iii), we understand how completely property has been substituted for other values, becoming another transcendental Truth. Harpagon tries to achieve control and autonomy by substituting methodical financial calculation for bodies and emotions—his own and others’. His regime of scarcity has the effect of greatly intensifying the desires he is trying to repress, and from which he wants to profit. Also, of course, he intends to dispose of his daughter’s body in a marriage advantageous to his own financial interests.

Being a woman, Philaminte, in *Les Femmes savantes*, has always been a controversial figure among Molière’s *ridicules*. Because this play mocks female characters, and because those characters superficially resemble real women who were fighting for cultural influence in the France of Molière’s time, some commentators have seen the play as misogynistic (Beasley). When we read the play in the context of Molière’s work as a whole, however, we can see that it is not misogynistic. Molière does not criticize narcissistic pretensions only in women. In fact, *Les Femmes savantes*,

like the other plays we have looked at here, affirms again that it is *women* who are most harmed by the combination of patriarchy and the ethos of mastery. Philaminte's effort to achieve dominance by imitating "masculine virtues" represses nature and the feminine as surely as does any other oppressive, self-aggrandizing method in the plays. She intends to dispose of her daughter's body as unilaterally and selfishly as any of Molière's male would-be patriarchs.

In this play, as in the others, the repressed always returns and subverts grandiose pretensions. The learned ladies disguise their particular, personal motives—perhaps even from themselves—by speaking an abstract language of purported universal validity. They speak like books, laundering their social ambition by pretending that it is an ascetic devotion to "higher" ideas, which are to be spoken of only in "refined" language. Philaminte cites Plato, and the seventeenth-century grammarian, Vaugelas (l. 462), as incontrovertible sources of Truth to buttress her pretensions.⁶

We have noted Plato's hostility to femaleness and his definition of reason as exclusively masculine. Moreover, grammatical rules are abstracted from usage, but never completely. Usage is primary (Ong 7). However, the *savantes* make of grammar another universalistic normative discourse intended to legitimate dominance, to buttress a vertical society. Grammar cannot be a value in itself, however; it must serve communication, not be a pretext for exclusion or condemnation of "unorthodox" language-users. However, the *savantes* deploy grammar as a means to high status and power, and as a pretense of being above communicating with certain others, who do not speak grammatically or sufficiently respect "philosophy." Like Alceste's sincerity, the ladies' devotion to grammar invalidates, and would silence, others' speech and guarantee their own hegemony.

The learned ladies want to become prestigious and to dominate the cultural process within which others must live and communicate. Grammar; mind; poetry; ostensible transcendence of sex and the body; and an aggressively therapeutic, repressive pedagogy are tightly connected by the *savantes*' tendentious rhetoric with law, sovereignty, and high social status. In fact, as Armande makes clear in her debate with her sister, Henriette (I, i), she sees the hierarchical distinction of mind and body as a key instrument of her social ambition: "Et, traitant de mépris les sens et la matière/A l'esprit, comme nous, donnez-vous toute entière" (ll. 35-36) she admonishes her sister, Henriette. *Titre, vulgaire, étage bas, petit personnage, nobles plaisirs, mépris, encens, and pauvretés* are among the words and phrases used by Armande in this scene to distinguish what she regards as a new aristocracy from what is low and common. A more systematic statement of the ambition lying behind the hierarchical mind/body binary is hard to imagine. Armande, like her mother, Philaminte, sees the hierarchical distinction of mind and body as a key instrument of her social ambition. This dichotomy, of course, is itself what creates the possibility of hierarchization, and thus serves as

⁶ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson argue persuasively that there is really no such thing as entirely abstract, "disembodied" thought or speech.

an instrument of patriarchal denigration and exploitation of women. The work of a number of feminist theorists is relevant here and has been foundational in the development of my own approach to early modernity. Carolyn Merchant, Karen Warren, Alison Jagger, and Evelyn Fox Keller have been formative for me, especially as regards the tyranny of dichotomization.

The ladies' enterprise reflects the *précieux* practice of erasing the body and its desires from "refined" speech, of replacing the world of concrete experiences with abstractions. Such idealization of abstractionist discourse, which is also a self-idealization by the user of the discourse, is a fantasy of definitive meaning (Cottom 34). Arnolphe's effort to imprint on Agnès the injunctions in the *Maximes du mariage* prepared us to understand Molière's critique of the learned ladies' normative discourse, and of their repression of female desire. Moreover, the metaphors on which abstractionist discourse is inevitably based constantly reiterate, even as they try to hide, the physical basis of all meaning (Lakoff and Johnson). *Les Femmes savantes* shows that personal motives and physical desires are disguised, disfigured, and, ultimately, intensified by hiding them in abstract, normative language intended to create and confirm status and power. Armande's denunciation as *vulgaire* (l. 4) of the coupling of bodies in marriage—which obviously preoccupies her—shows that she understands denigration of the body to be a precondition for belonging to the "elite."

Armande's particular predicament, and a problem at the heart of *préciosité*, are also revealed in the play's first scene. Armande's expression of revulsion at the "sale vue" (l.12) of the physical aspect of marriage turns out to be motivated by jealousy: Henriette is planning to marry Clitandre, who had once been Armande's admirer. Armande claims to be nauseated by the mere mention of marriage—"Et sans un mal de coeur peut-on l'écouter?" (l. 6)—but she wants to be wanted: "Et l'on peut pour époux refuser un mérite/Que pour adorateur on veut bien à sa suite" (ll. 103-104). It seems, then, that Armande's sense of her value depends on both attracting and resisting a man's desire. Paradoxically, her feeling of having a virtuous, powerful subjectivity is entirely based on being an object, and on repressing her own bodily desire. The loss imposed by that repression obviously haunts her.

The *précieuse* must, then, substitute a *male's* desire for her own, by identifying her ideal self with unsatisfied, but somehow still persistent, male desire. Armande is motivated, then, by the loss of what her mother's "philosophy" denigrates: her own desire. There is a double repression here, since it is, in fact, *male* desire with which Armande actually identifies, and which she has internalized. By affecting a lack of interest in physical pleasure, Armande cooperates in the denial to the female of the right to be a subject of desire and satisfaction. She actually identifies with her own oppression. As Armande's sister, Henriette, seems intuitively to recognize, self-abnegation it is another deluded strategy of self-aggrandizement.

Of course, the most spectacularly self-defeating aspect of the *savantes's* ambition is their worshipful relationship with the hack poet, Trissotin. It is clear that Molière's learned ladies, like Orgon, are the dupes of their revered authority figure.

It is Trissotin through whom they lust after unquestioned authority for themselves. They are seduced by Trissotin's mastery of *précieux* rhetoric, as Orgon was duped and blinded by Tartuffe's discourse of *dévoition*. Like the other comic types, they disguise their particular, personal motives by a familiar expedient: they identify themselves with, and insist on speaking in, a language of supposed normative power. Trissotin, however, makes clear his intention to use the ladies as cultural breeding-stock, saying that his poem is an "enfant tout nouveau né" (l. 720) and that their approval "lui peut servir de mère" (l. 724). In reality, what Trissotin actually intends is to take financial possession of a share of the family wealth, and sexual possession of Henriette, by marrying her. Philaminte's ambition makes her an instrument of a male's desire.

"Ne faites point languir de si pressants désirs" (l. 717), says Philaminte, and Bélise echoes her: "Faites tôt et hâtez nos plaisirs" (l. 718). The sexual subtext that has haunted the ladies' discourse from the beginning bursts through the surface, here. Moreover, what is going on is *literally* sexual, since Philaminte intends to marry Henriette to Trissotin, in order to cement her membership in the new, bookish "aristocracy." Like her male patriarchal counterparts, Philaminte wants to dispose of a young woman's body in order to fulfill her own ambitions. Her contempt for the body is clear: in one passage, she reproaches her husband's love of bodily pleasures by referring to the body as a *guenille* (l. 539). Like Orgon, she will find that the authority who seems to guarantee her power is a hypocritical seducer. Another normative discourse turns out to be the vehicle for male dominance.

Argan, in *Le Malade imaginaire*, is yet another Faustian narcissist. He expresses his desire for control and transcendence of his body through endless counting, medical jargon, and ritualized purging. The entire opening scene is an incantation, in which Argan, mesmerized by numbers and medical jargon, speaks reverently of himself in yet another "prestige dialect" (Easthope 35). At the same time, Argan's obsessive recourse to enemas keeps him close to his "lowest" bodily functions. His fear of death actually has him mired in his "earthiest" bodily manifestations.

Argan is a large, old baby, whose invariable ritual amounts to playing in his own excrement. His Mephistophelean doctors and pharmacists convince him that they hold the key to power, and, even, perhaps, to escape from death. Argan's endless calculations, and the medical discourse which seems to him to protect his inflated ego, are actually about nothing other than his body and its functions. Meanwhile, his obsession has converted his body into a natural resource for doctors and pharmacists. The latter are Argan's Tartuffe and Trissotin, the Mephistophelean seducers who flatter and exploit his self-inflation. The servant, Toinette, makes this clear: "Ce monsieur Fleurant-là et ce monsieur Purgon s'égayent bien sur votre corps; ils ont en vous une bonne vache à lait" (I, ii). From his exploiters' point of view, Argan resembles the donkey in Charles Perreault's "Peau d'âne": he excretes gold.

Argan's obsession with control over his daughter's body, as well as his own, is expressed by his constant enumerating, his love of doctors and pharmacists, and his determination to use Angélique's sexuality to his own advantage. Like the other

Molière types that we have studied here, he is linked to the bookishness, calculation, and abstractionism of modernizing culture; his numeromania is complemented by the Latinizing jargon of his medical exploiters. He finds it flattering to be the subject of both endless calculations and diagnoses and prescriptions delivered pompously in a prestige dialect.

The hypochondriac intends to use his daughter's body as a resource for perpetuating his excremental transcendence by marrying her to Thomas Diafoirus, the son of the doctor who is exploiting Argan's body. It seems particularly egregious that Argan actually recognizes Angélique's sexual desire: "Ah! nature, nature! A ce que je puis voir, ma fille, je n'ai que faire de vous demander si vous voulez bien vous marier" (I, v). Argan, like Molière's other tyrannical patriarchs, including the "phallic mother," Philaminte, intends to use Angélique's sexuality by marrying her to a man whom she does not desire, and thus guaranteeing that Argan will continue to enjoy the ministrations of his exploiters. As usual, the daughter's body is a commodity to be disposed of profitably by trading it to a man, and her own desire does not matter. Also as usual, the attempt to oppress actually requires repression of the would-be master's own emotions.

Argan's narcissistic infantilism is emphasized by his substitution of Béline for his mother, as well as for his first wife--"Qu'est-ce donc qu'il y a, mon petit fils," she asks him, and he replies by calling her "Mamie" (I, vi)-- and by his jealousy at the prospect that his children will inherit his wealth: "Comment puis-je faire, s'il vous plaît, pour lui (to Béline) donner mon bien et en frustrer mes enfants?" (I, vii). Like Harpagon, he opposes the succession of generations and rejects the inevitability of his death. The overtones of incest that we found in *L'Ecole des femmes* are echoed in *Le Malade imaginaire*. Arnolphe wanted to marry the woman whom he fell in "love" with when she was a child, and whom he reared as a daughter, and Argan has married a substitute for his own mother. We are reminded of the weakness of masculine separation from the mother, and of the consequent narcissism, misogyny, and paranoia of masculine identity (Badinter).

As in the case of Harpagon, the children's legitimate inheritance is threatened by the father's obsession, and here it is a false mother who stands to benefit. Like Arnolphe, Argan threatens to "bury" a disobedient young woman, in this case his real daughter, in a convent.⁷ Blind to the motives of those who manipulate him, Argan must be made to *hear* the voice of his second wife's real desire. Hidden within his "dead" body, (III, xii) as Orgon was hidden under the table, Argan hears the truth.

This ultimate, though feigned, acknowledgement of his body, and of his death, reveals, through an act of theatre within the play, the futility of Argan's Faustian bargain with medical discourse. Acknowledging death, though only by pretending to be dead, releases the truth about Béline's self-serving manipulation. Argan himself does not escape the world of words, however; he finally evaporates in the burlesque

⁷ Here, again, Molière refers clearly to the mutually reinforcing power alliance of religion and patriarchy.

ceremony that closes him definitively into his solipsism by making him both imaginary doctor and make-believe patient. Self-fashioning is thus equated with pure fantasy, with deluded hallucination. Argan's effort to transcend his body by controlling it medically condemns him to bury his nose in bodily effluvia, and to learn the truth about his domestic impotence only by playing dead.

The subject of burlesque ceremonies refers us to another play which, I believe, could be profitably analyzed along the lines developed here: *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*. In fact, I can envision a future study pairing that play with Molière's *Dom Juan* as a way of developing further the examination of narcissistic individualization begun here.

Monsieur Jourdain epitomizes the ambition for higher social status that motivates most of Molière's ridiculous characters. In fact, Jourdain is very much a farcical Faust, and his *maîtres* play a Mephistophelian role: he seeks knowledge that will give him social and sexual gratification, and they pretend that their expertise can provide it. Jourdain wants to oblige others to recognize and confirm his self-*refashioning*. The *maîtres* purport to supply what he needs to transcend his condition, to escape the identity with which he is dissatisfied. Jourdain is thus another excellent example of would-be self-fashioning individualism, as manifested in social ambition and exploited by caterers to delusion. Jourdain's relationship with his *maîtres* lampoons the relationship between professionalized knowledge, or expertise, and modern dreams of self-improvement and power. Like Argan, Monsieur Jourdain is finally seduced into permanent residence in a world of words. His carnivalesque apotheosis as a *mamamouchi* ("Quatrième intermède") makes him the hopeless creature of his delusions as they are exploited by others. The play suggests that high social status, even when it is real, is a matter of display, of trappings. That point leads us to *Dom Juan*.

Molière's *Dom Juan* is yet another fascinating study of narcissistic individualism, particularly interesting because Dom Juan is, superficially, so different from the other *ridicules*. The present comments on this play build on my "Dom Juan: The Subject of Modernity." As a nobleman, Dom Juan has what Monsieur Jourdain and the others want so desperately. He seemingly has no need of transformed social status. The maniacal seducer makes effective use of the trappings of his status to manipulate others, to stifle any opposition to his words and actions, and to overcome any resistance in the women he targets. As his servant, Sganarelle, puts it, Dom Juan speaks "tout comme un livre" (I, ii). He is the master of authoritative discourse and imposing display; there is no arguing with him. His clothes, themselves, are irresistibly attractive to common women.

Dom Juan treats Woman as an abstraction and sees every particular woman as an opportunity to exploit the power of his noble status, and to exercise his discursive virtuosity. He is the master of a prestige dialect, including the language of romantic seduction. Moreover, his noble status, displayed in clothing, words, and gestures, is an element in a powerful *semiotic* system, in a kind of discourse. Dom Juan's promiscuous deployment of his "lendings," as King Lear called them (III, iv), actually works to reveal their ultimate detachment from substance. As Jean Baudrillard contends, the rapid, unfettered circulation of signs empties them of meaning (11-12).

Dom Juan would seem to have no need to fashion a potent self. He was born with one; and yet, he treats every encounter, especially encounters with women, as an opportunity for self-assertion which he must not fail to exploit. It is interesting that this character is both a Subject and an Object of modernizing desire: he claims unfettered freedom for himself, and every interaction with him—especially marriage!—is a self-fashioning occasion for the other. Dom Juan’s particular narcissism seems symptomatic of an excessive emancipation from defining constraint; he is lost in his freedom. His obsessive reenactment of this freedom links him to both Monsieur Jourdain and Argan; his life is a ritualized repetition of ultimately meaningless language. As he says, himself, of his mastery of women, “Mais lorsqu’on en est maître une fois, il n’y a plus rien à dire, ni rien à souhaiter” (I, ii). In the end, Dom Juan is another user of a self-defeating method. He is alienated from his “conquests” by the fact that they are achieved through the manipulation of spectacle, not by virtue of any inherent qualities of a stable self.

This underlines two major points: first, that his conquests are matters of language and theatrics; and, secondly, that each one is unsatisfying. So, our interpretation of the character must include the recognition that Dom Juan is alienated by his privileges, that his desire for women is insatiable because their response to his *display* of status prevents him from receiving their recognition as an individual person. His ability to exploit his status as socio/cultural capital implies his alienation from it, and makes each success a failure. In the end, Molière appears to dramatize the final futility of all the major types’ ambition: whatever the pretenses and strategies, and even despite apparent success, the inflated self is inescapably empty and insecure. Narcissism is a symptom of a malady that is worsened by narcissistic methods themselves. Dom Juan’s treatment of women as interchangeable objects makes *him* an object. The display of semiotic qualities as a method of seducing or coercing admiring recognition can produce only endless dissatisfaction, futile repetition, and more of the narcissism born of loss.

For now, I finish where I began: Molière’s comedy constantly reminds us of the social, the contingent, the physical/natural, and the relational. In doing so, it functions at the expense of both the autonomous individual and the epistemology of mastery. Taking place in the real, organic, vertiginously dramatic space and time of bodily performance—not in the virtual, homogeneous, fixed space and time of abstract representations—and literally subverting hegemonic discourse by *bringing it to life*, the comedies remind us that the body, society, and the physical world are the indispensable grounds of the mind. As Edward O. Wilson puts it, our “highest” impulses, on examination, turn out to be biological activities (21). Mind is a bodily function! As incisively as any more recent social theorist, cognitive scientist, post-modernist, or post-structuralist, and, I think, more eloquently and persuasively, Molière puts modern individualism and the epistemology of mastery back in the *branloire pérenne*.

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José Saramago: “Auschwitz não está fechado, está aberto”

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Resumo: Neste artigo, discuto o alcance da palavra “Auschwitz” e das expressões “campos de concentração” e “campos de morte” na escrita e nos depoimentos do escritor português José Saramago (Prémio Nobel de Literatura 1998), que desde o seu primeiro livro (*Terra do pecado*, de 1947) procurou explicações para a natureza do mal extremo, não apenas uma representação (e uma apresentação) dos seus efeitos.

Palavras-chave: José Saramago – Auschwitz – campos de concentração – campos de morte – mal.

1. O fenómeno Auschwitz na mundividência saramaguiana

Desconheço se José Saramago (1922-2010) leu palavras como estas de Susan Neiman, no livro *O mal no pensamento moderno*: “Auschwitz foi conceptualmente devastador porque desvendou uma possibilidade na natureza humana que tínhamos a esperança de não ver” (Neiman 284. O original, em língua inglesa, é de 2002). O autor de *Ensaio sobre a cegueira* acompanhou, com certeza, a discussão internacional sobre as origens e os significados do fenómeno Auschwitz, e sobre a culpa coletiva, ou não, do povo alemão (e sobre a culpa coletiva de outros povos noutros holocaustos, como os crimes portugueses em África, tratados na crónica “O fator Deus” e numa passagem do romance *Manual de pintura e caligrafia*). Saramago esteve atento a esta questão e nela participou com intervenções que são avisos bem mais valiosos do que muitas das controvérsias filosóficas e outras mais banais a que assistimos de tempos a tempos. A palavra “Auschwitz” e a expressão “campos de concentração” não são raras nas declarações e na escrita diarística de José Saramago, que não tinha uma opinião propriamente ingénuo e otimista sobre o ser humano (como grupo e como indivíduo), como sabemos. O termo pode ser usado por Saramago num sentido literal e metafórico, como nesta declaração de 2002: “Auschwitz não está fechado, está aberto, e suas chaminés continuam soltando a fumaça do crime que se comete a cada dia contra os mais frágeis. E [...] eu não quero ser cúmplice, com a comodidade do meu silêncio, de nenhuma fogueira” (Gómez Aguilera 372). O vocábulo também surge no pensamento saramaguiano numa aceção

propriamente literal, a remeter para lugares concretos. No volume II dos *Cadernos de Lanzarote* (1995), a propósito de uma visita do escritor à República Checa, lê-se, na entrada de 14 de maio de 1994:

Fomos a Terezín, a cidade que os alemães transformaram em gueto, a fortaleza de que fizeram campo de concentração. Cerca de 32 000 homens e mulheres passaram pelas celas do forte. Morreram aí mais de 2500 pessoas, milhares de outros presos tiveram o mesmo destino nos campos para onde foram transferidos. A própria cidade-gueto foi campo de concentração, de judeus checos principalmente. Entre 1941 e 1945, perto de 140 000 pessoas foram deportadas para Terezín. Morreram aqui 34 000. Dos restantes, 83 000 vidas, incluindo milhares de crianças, foram acabar em Auschwitz, Maidanek, Treblinka... Visitámos o cemitério judeu, construído ao lado do crematório. De 1942 a 1945, estes fornos reduziram a cinzas 30 000 vítimas do gueto de Terezín, da fortaleza e de um campo de concentração próximo, o de Litomerice.

Os pássaros cantam nas árvores, não sai fumo da chaminé, há flores pelo meio das campas: o pesadelo terminou há cinquenta anos. Mas eu não posso impedir-me de perguntar: “Voltará? Não voltará? Virão máquinas algum dia a levantar e revolver os míseros restos aqui enterrados? Apagou-se para sempre o fogo onde se quis queimar, não apenas os corpos mortos, mas a própria memória dos seus espíritos?” (*Cadernos* 116).

Sobre o dia 16 de maio, ainda com as imagens de Terezín bem presentes, José Saramago escreveria: “No avião para Madrid, um jornal diz-me que no Ruanda foram atiradas pessoas para dentro de poços com pneumáticos a arder. Pessoas vivas, entenda-se. O catálogo de horrores deste campo de concentração chamado Mundo é inesgotável” (*Cadernos* 117). Esta máxima, mais uma a acrescentar às muitas outras de Saramago, é, em si mesma, uma resposta à questão que o escritor colocou a si próprio em Terezín. Retenho este pensamento e também a pergunta de José Saramago sobre se o Holocausto se repetirá ou não e aproximo-os destas palavras de David Rousset, filósofo francês que escreveu, em 1945, quatro meses depois de ser libertado de Buchenwald (cito a sequência final do livro *L’Univers Concentrationnaire*, publicado ainda em 1945):

L’existence des camps est un avertissement. La société allemande, en raison à la fois de la puissance de sa structure économique et de l’âpreté de la crise qui l’a défaits, a connu une décomposition encore exceptionnelle dans la conjoncture actuelle du monde. Mais il serait facile de montrer que les traits les plus caractéristiques et de la mentalité S.S. et de soubassements sociaux se retrouvent dans bien d’autres secteurs de la société mondiale. Toutefois, moins accusés et, certes, sans commune mesure avec les développements

connus dans le grand Reich. Mais ce n'est qu'une question de circonstances. Ce serait une duperie, et criminelle, que de prétendre qu'il est impossible aux autres peuples de faire une expérience analogue pour des raisons d'opposition de nature. L'Allemagne a interprété avec l'originalité propre à son histoire la crise qui l'a conduite à l'univers concentrationnaire. Mais l'existence et le mécanisme de cette crise tiennent aux fondements économiques et sociaux du capitalisme et de l'impérialisme. Sous une figuration nouvelle, des effets analogues peuvent demain encore apparaître. Il s'agit, en conséquence, d'une bataille très précise à mener. Le bilan concentrationnaire est à cet égard un merveilleux arsenal de guerre. (Rousset 186-187)

2. O fenómeno Auschwitz na prosa e na poesia saramaguianas

A participação de Saramago no debate interminável sobre o Holocausto – o genocídio cometido pelos nazis contra os judeus e outros grupos étnicos, políticos e sociais, e todos os outros holocaustos, antigos, modernos e contemporâneos, literais e metafóricos – está plasmada em toda a sua obra. Sabemos já, desde *Levantado do Chão* (1980), que a palavra do narrador múltiplo saramaguiano é irreverente, caudalosa, sagaz, e não teme acusar com recurso ao palavrão, à linguagem dita obscena (e fora da cena literária, regra geral). Esta poética, que nada tem de condescendente nem de moralismo hipócrita, revela as mentiras e as contradições do poder, a força da propaganda e a facilidade com que as massas se podem deixar manipular. Nesta escrita não há lugar para a ininteligibilidade do mal, que é o que de mais visível existe. Saramago não impõe fórmulas sobre o mal, que pode chegar muito longe e saldarse na violência mais brutal; mas não abdica de o identificar e de o compreender até certo ponto, de o mostrar nos seus pormenores mais invisíveis e, se vistos a alguma distância ideológica e cronológica, grotescos. Condenar os agentes do mal não é dar uma definição maniqueísta da humanidade, nem significa cair no erro comum de associar homens como Hitler e Salazar a qualquer ideia demoníaca (isso seria, em parte, considerá-los inocentes); é responsabilizar as instituições e a espécie humana tanto pela construção e pela perpetuação do mal como pelo seu esquecimento e pela inércia individual e coletiva perante os sinais que anunciam catástrofes mais ou menos semelhantes às ocorridas no passado. Mostrar, em linguagem literária, a barbárie, as suas origens e as suas formas é preencher os vazios, os silêncios e os silenciamentos do discurso historiográfico canónico e da desmemória coletiva. Revelar o risível e o obsceno que se escondem por detrás de absurdas perspetivas heroicas e imperialistas: é esta uma das técnicas que Saramago trabalha com uma mestria ímpar. Salazar (e também Mussolini e Hitler) é o rei-impostor que *O ano da morte de Ricardo Reis* (1984), como uma praça pública carnavalesca (Bakhtin 146-147), desmascara e ridiculariza diante de todo o mundo, como na sátira menipeia:

Mas há entre os nossos portugueses muita sede de martírio, muito apetite de sacrifício, muita fome de abnegação, ainda no outro dia foi dito por um destes senhores que mandam em nós, Nunca mãe alguma, ao dar à luz um filho, pode atirá-lo para um mais alto e nobre destino do que o de morrer pela sua terra, em defesa da pátria, filho duma puta, estamos a vê-lo a visitar as maternidades, a apalpar o ventre às grávidas, a perguntar quando desovam, que já vão faltando soldados nas trincheiras, quais, ele o saberá, também podem ser projetos para o futuro. (*O ano da morte* 305-306)

Imediatamente a seguir à Segunda Grande Guerra, muitos sobreviventes dos campos de concentração e de morte e comentadores disseram e escreveram que não nos tornámos mais mais sábios nem sequer mais sensatos com Auschwitz. Por muito olhar para o mundo, onde se morria (e morre) em todo o lado, José Saramago elegeu como lema de vida e de escrita a oposição a todos os poderes exercidos sem regulação e extremadamente. Apesar das críticas, diretas ou veladas, que o “leitor confiante e otimista” (*Deste mundo* 180) lhe endereçava, Saramago assumiu falar e escrever sobre os assassinados no passado, no presente e nos mortos do futuro, sobre “os gritos dos torturados” (Fonseca 18) pela PIDE, que atuava “às ocultas” (Fonseca 18), sobre os gritos que nos chegam da História mais e menos recente, como os dos incontáveis corpos crucificados pelos romanos, gritos que nos avisam de novos e inimagináveis males, reais hoje e possíveis amanhã. Como Primo Levi, que em vários depoimentos lembrou que não faltava quem o censurasse por continuar “a falar-nos de horrores” (*Auschwitz* 91), Saramago, antes de construir grandes romances sobre o mal, escrevia alguns autênticos e memoráveis tratados sobre o mal. “O planeta dos horrores”, a que também se ajusta perfeitamente o termo manifesto, é um desses textos (entre outros, não menos incisivos e criativos, como “Os animais doidos de cólera”, que analisarei num outro capítulo). A quem o acusava (e acusa) de ser pessimista e, até, “masoquista” (*Deste mundo* 180), José Saramago respondia com factos que eram, em plena Guerra Fria, do conhecimento geral e comum:

Gosto da luz do dia, da claridade, do aperto de mão de um amigo, de uma boa palavra reconfortante, gosto da esperança, amo o amor, amo a beleza das coisas e das pessoas (que todas são belas) — mas tudo isto me pode ser tirado de um momento para o outro. Em todo o mundo há mísseis apontados para todo o mundo, por cima do mundo cruzam-se aviões com bombas nucleares capazes de derreter o mundo, em certos sítios do mundo estão guardadas bactérias suficientes para exterminar a vida em todo o mundo. O planeta dos horrores de mr. Hyde é este, amigo leitor, confiante leitor, talvez ingénuo leitor. (*Deste mundo* 180-181)

Tanto “mundo”, palavra que o autor usa propositadamente seis vezes na mesma frase, para tão pouco mundo, como hoje é por demais evidente (não, ao

menos ainda, pelo efeito de bombas atômicas à escala global, mas pela ação de um inimigo literalmente viral e pandémico que nós criámos; e pelo efeito de guerras um pouco por todo o mundo, sobretudo no Sul, tanto propriamente militares como as de organizações criminosas: narcotráfico, exploração ilegal de matérias-primas, caça ilegal, etc.). No final da crónica, Saramago acrescentava à sua resposta uma síntese da história de crimes da humanidade e um aviso: o de que nos mantemos teimosamente distraídos. Por mais que a banalização do horror nos diga que se trata apenas da morte e do sofrimento longínquos do Outro, de 1971 até aos nossos dias este aviso tem-se confirmado em não poucos cantos do planeta (até a “guerra nuclear”, não propriamente dita, mas como ameaça séria, da Coreia do Norte e da Rússia ao Irão e aos Estados Unidos da América):

Guerra nuclear, guerra bacteriológica, guerra química, guerra biológica. Destes quatro cavalos do Apocalipse, cavalgue o Diabo o que quiser. O corpo do homem é uma excelente cobaia. O espírito, também. Já passou por todas as torturas antigas, medievais e modernas, já uivou em campos de concentração, já se volatilizou no clarão cegante de uma modesta bomba atômica, já deu a pele para quebra-luzes melhores que pergaminho. Está treinado e preparado para mais altas aventuras.

O planeta dos horrores... Se eu tivesse ambições de escritor de ficção científica, ia ali à Propriedade Intelectual e Artística e registava este excelente título... Ou este, mais para livro policial, que não é pior: *A Morte Paga a Pronto*. Como se vê, imaginação não me falta. Como não falta também àqueles que querem que a morte pague a pronto — e por atacado. Ah, leitor, leitor, como nós andamos distraídos. (*Deste mundo* 181-182)

Esta crónica está em perfeita sintonia com algumas composições de *Os poemas possíveis*, sobretudo com “Os inquiridores”, “Demissão” e “Fala do Velho do Restelo ao astronauta”, incluídas na segunda parte do livro, “Poema a boca fechada”. São poemas políticos, de matriz materialista histórica, suficientemente argutos para iludirem ou confundirem a Censura (e para serem percebidos pelos destinatários privilegiados). Como na crónica “O planeta dos horrores”, também nestes poemas é o “mundo” que o poeta visa, o mundo globalmente considerado, sem dúvida, mas não menos o mundo português. Ainda assim, apesar deste jogo de ambiguidades, é fácil de perceber que José Saramago e a Portugália Editora se arriscavam, pelo menos, a ver o livro apreendido e proibido:

Demissão

Este mundo não presta, venha outro.
Já por tempo de mais aqui andamos
A fingir de razões suficientes.

Sejamos cães do cão: sabemos tudo
 De morder os mais fracos, se mandamos,
 E de lamber as mãos, se dependentes. (*Os poemas* 74)

“Os inquiridores” é um poema de proclamação ostensivamente acusatória, uma sátira que reduz o outro à mais abjeta condição: a do parasitismo, metáfora e imagem do prazer perverso do mal, da cedência às pulsões de cobiça, riqueza e poder. Mais uma vez, a palavra “mundo”, apresentada também no primeiro verso, protege Saramago dos ímpetos de perseguição da Censura e da PIDE, que procuraram reduzir o jornalismo, a cultura, a literatura e todas as formas de arte a “jogos de almanaque de passar o tempo ao serão” (Fonseca 18), como escreveu Manuel da Fonseca no “Prefácio” da edição de 1982 do romance *Cerromaior* (1943):

Está o mundo coberto de piolhos:
 Não há palmo de terra onde não suguem,
 Não há segredo de alma que não espreitem
 Nem sonho que não mordam e pervertam.

Nos seus lombos peludos se divertem
 Todas as cores que, neles, são ameaças:
 Há-os castanhos, verdes, amarelos,
 Há-os negros, vermelhos e cinzentos.

E todos se encarniçam, comem todos,
 Concertados, vorazes, no seu tento
 De deixar, como restos de banquete,
 No deserto da terra ossos esburgados. (*Os poemas* 70)

Os dois primeiros versos de “Fala do Velho do Restelo ao astronauta” anunciam igualmente um poema de realismo exacerbado, um ato de revolta contra o “mundo” (termo que aparece de novo, embora mais no final), contra a realidade desigual e injusta, contra o imenso campo de concentração e de morte que o planeta é: “Aqui, na Terra, a fome continua. A miséria, o luto, e outra vez a fome” (*Os poemas* 70). Entre 1961 e 1966, mais de três dezenas de astronautas puderam ver a Terra desde uma nave espacial. Saramago, cujo esforço especulativo sempre se orientou por questões práticas de igualdade e dignidade para todos, nota, em versos desesperados de denúncia, o radical contraste entre a aspiração ao mais alto e a mais baixa condição humana: a da pobreza, da morte, da violência, num tempo em que conflitos militares como a Guerra do Vietname e a Guerra Colonial portuguesa não permitiam que o homem e escritor em formação se reconciliasse com a realidade. Daí o sujeito do poema se chamar “Velho do Restelo”, ou Saramago, que se dirige ao “astronauta”, destinatário que também compreende, como na crónica “O Planeta dos Horrores”,

o leitor desatento e otimista, esquecido das ideologias totalitárias de direita e de esquerda, das duas guerras mundiais e de outros conflitos bélicos mais localizados mas não menos destrutivos, da ameaça nuclear, do Terceiro Mundo sempre e cada vez mais empobrecido, dos danos ambientais:

Aqui, na Terra, a fome continua.
A miséria, o luto, outra vez a fome.

Acendemos cigarros em fogos de napalme
E dizemos amor sem saber o que seja.
Mas fizemos de ti a prova da riqueza,
E também da pobreza, e da fome outra vez,
E pusemos em ti sei lá bem que desejo
De mais alto que nós, e melhor e mais puro

No jornal, de olhos tensos, soletramos
As vertigens do espaço e maravilhas:
Oceanos salgados que circundam
Ilhas mortas de sede, onde não chove.

Mas o mundo, astronauta, é boa mesa
Onde come, brincando, só a fome,
Só a fome, astronauta, só a fome,
E são brinquedos as bombas de napalme. (*Os poemas* 76)

2.1. “Auschwitz” n’O *Ano de 1993*

Livro que “refletia um país onde o fascismo ainda não desaparecera” (Gómez Aguilera 2010: 289), segundo palavras do autor, *O ano de 1993*, publicado em 1975, contém já, porventura ainda de modo não totalmente consciente e assumido por José Saramago, toda a sua descrença em relação ao humano. Como George Orwell em *1984*, Saramago apropria-se de um ano do calendário e nele situa a figuração de um mundo apocalíptico. Na parte do poema 19 que cito a seguir, destaca-se o termo “Auschwitz” e a numeração dos prisioneiros, essa violência “gratuita em si mesma, uma pura ofensa” (*Os que sucumbem* 137), segundo Primo Levi, que pergunta: “não bastavam os três números de pano cosidos nas calças, no casaco e no capote invernal?” (*Os que sucumbem* 137). A resposta do autor de *Os que sucumbem e os que se salvam* (1986), um dos mais importantes ensaios sobre o Holocausto e a natureza do ser humano e do mal, é inequívoca: “Não, não bastavam: era preciso mais um, uma mensagem não verbal, para que o inocente sentisse escrita na carne a sua condenação” (*Os que sucumbem* 137). No mundo concentracionário desta narrativa em prosa poética,

a numeração a que são sujeitos os habitantes da cidade ocupada é inscrita na testa: na carne, como nos campos de concentração e de extermínio nazis, mas também numa parte visível da cabeça. Este é apenas um aspeto entre outros que confirmam a arrebatadora originalidade temática, verbal, imagética e simbólica desta alegoria de Saramago. O autor dialoga com o mundo empírico e com o mundo ficcional, e constrói um universo que tem tanto de pavoroso como de real e verosímil, sem deixar de ser alegórico:

Quando os habitantes da cidade se tinham já habituado ao domínio do ocupante

Determinou o ordenador que todos fossem numerados na testa como no braço se fizera cinquenta anos antes em Auschwitz e outros lugares

[...]

O próprio vocabulário sofrera transformações e haviam sido esquecidas as palavras que exprimiam a indignação e a cólera

Deste modo os habitantes da cidade se acharam numerados de 1 a 57 229 porque a cidade era pequena e fora escolhida para experimentação entre todas as cidades ocupadas

Dois meses depois o ordenador registava valores de comportamento e diferentes estados de espírito consoante o número que havia cabido a cada habitante

[...]

Ninguém reconhecia autoridade a quem tivesse número superior ao seu o que explica que o 57 229 comesse com os cães e tivesse de masturbar-se porque nenhuma mulher queria dormir com ele

Os habitantes de 1 a 9 consideravam-se chefes da cidade e vestiam segundo as modas do ocupante

Mas o primeiro deles mandou fazer um aro de ouro que suspendia sobre a testa como sinal de poder e autoridade e hoje basta este sinal para que todas as cabeças se curvem a partir de 2 (*O ano de 1993* 45-46)

No poema que estou a comentar (o 19), há, no grupo de oprimidos, uma inversão contínua na ordem do domínio de uns sobre os outros. Os nove primeiros são os chefes da cidade, como se lê na citação anterior, e o primeiro é o líder absoluto (semelhanças com o tempo da escrita de *O Ano de 1993* e com o nosso tempo não são simples coincidência). Em vez de se revoltarem, lutam uns contra os outros, sem se aperceberem da estratégia ditada pelo computador dos ocupantes, e impedem ou atrasam o processo de aprendizagem coletiva da revolta. Este procedimento é típico de qualquer sistema mais ou menos autocrático, do salazarismo aos totalitarismos nazi e comunista:

Porém só o ordenador sabe que estes números são provisórios e que dentro de vinte e quatro horas todos se apagarão para reaparecerem por ordem inversa

Processo tão bom como animais mecânicos para prosseguir o extermínio da população ocupada

Pois todas as humilhações serão retribuídas cem por um até à morte

Enquanto os ocupantes se distraem nos espetáculos que para seu uso ainda funcionam (*O ano de 1993* 46)

Não me é difícil evocar as primeiras impressões que a primeira leitura deste poema me suscitou: Kapos em ação, vítimas contra vítimas, imprudência e desistência perante a ofensa e a ocupação, como aconteceu a milhões de judeus, humilhados e dizimados porque muitos se recusaram a aceitar os avisos que outros souberam perceber. Esta receção, por sua vez, tem subjacente as muitas leituras que fiz (e faço) sobre o Holocausto. Neste caso, há um livro em particular: *Auschwitz, A Doctor's Witness Account* (1960), de Miklos Nyiszli, médico judeu que se manteve vivo por ter sido nomeado pelo infame Josef Mengele patologista de investigação e médico-chefe dos crematórios de Auschwitz. Bruno Bettelheim – que foi deportado com outros judeus austríacos para os campos de concentração de Dachau e Buchenwald, nas vésperas da Segunda Grande Guerra, e que emigrou para os Estados Unidos, em 1939, logo após ter sido libertado graças a uma amnistia – escreveu o prefácio que acompanha este que é um dos livros mais conhecidos sobre o Holocausto. É sobretudo este texto, cuja tese tem sido aplaudida por uns e rejeitada por muitos, que retenho e me interpela. Bettelheim vê na inércia da maioria dos judeus, tanto antes como depois dos campos de concentração, a origem da tragédia. Para se explicar em termos mais científicos, Bruno Bettelheim refere-se a essa atitude como princípio da inércia: “It was inertia that made hundreds of thousands of Jews sit home, waiting for their executioners, when they were restricted to their homes” (Bettelheim 12). Não subjaz a esta afirmação um julgamento sumário, mas antes uma vontade de compreender por que motivo tantos judeus não fizeram o que a outros se impôs como uma evidência e uma urgência: emigrar, fugir, viver com documentos falsos, atuar em grupos de resistência. As leis discriminatórias destinavam-se a fazê-los sair da Alemanha (e a deixar os seus bens), e só quando este método falhou é que se instituiu a política de exterminação, entretanto facilitada pela resignação das próprias vítimas:

But one wonders whether the notion that millions of Jews (and later foreign nationals) would submit to their extermination did not also result from seeing what degradation they were willing to accept without fighting back. The persecution of the Jews was aggravated, slow step by slow step, when no violent fighting back occurred. It may have been Jewish acceptance, without retaliatory fight, of ever harsher discrimination and degradation that first gave the SS the idea that they could be gotten to the point where they would walk to the gas chambers on their own. (Bettelheim 14-15)

O poema 19 do livro de Saramago começa por nos dizer que a numeração dos habitantes se verificou quando eles estavam já acostumados ao “domínio do ocupante” (*O ano de 1993* 45), quando, portanto, já haviam desistido de lutar. A consequência direta da submissão aos invasores, inimigos da liberdade e da autodeterminação, consubstancia-se em vários *topoi* (que a crítica literária e interartística de *O Ano de 1993* tem vindo cada vez mais a assinalar e a compreender): a “cidade ocupada”, a “peste”, a “natureza devastada”, os animais-ciborgue, a caça de humanos, a falta de nascimentos e o nascimento, por fim, de uma criança, etc. (numa palavra: o colapso da civilização e o retorno à barbárie, tema por excelência de muita ficção científica e de obras mais ou menos do cânone Ocidental, como *A praga escarlata*, de Jack London, publicado em 1912 e que situa a ação, em cujo centro está uma pandemia, em 2013. Perante este ano, o comentário óbvio é que o escritor americano errou por muito pouco na datação da sua profecia). A estes elementos juntam-se outros que associamos imediatamente a George Orwell, a começar pelo “olho de vigilância o olho que não dorme nunca” (*O ano de 1993* 28), o equivalente do aparelho (uma “teletela”) que em 1984 existe em cada casa, aberta vinte e quatro horas por dia ao *Grande Irmão*. Há ainda a perda total ou parcial da linguagem (a novílingua orwelliana, neste último caso) e da capacidade de ler, o estado de sítio, a tortura, as violações, o uso perverso da tecnologia e da ciência (o “ordenador” central e outros “ordenadores”, que funcionam com carne humana).

Se pensarmos numa grande parte do mundo não-livre dos nossos dias, onde se morre das formas mais dolorosas e humilhantes, [*O Ano de*] 1993 é hoje. O final do livro, relativamente otimista, com a organização da resistência por parte do povo ocupado, a partir do poema 24, e a libertação, no penúltimo poema, não nos deve desviar da essência do argumento. O ato premonitório de Saramago não se resume a uma mensagem de esperança ingénuo e voluntarista; o que nele prevalece vem da observação da errância da história da humanidade e da volubilidade das condutas humanas, da facilidade com que o ser humano cede à ambição de poder, a impulsos e a sentimentos que se tornam insaciáveis (prazer, vingança, destruição, morte, etc.). Num evidente contraste com o telurismo do poema 29, o poema 30 recupera, nas quatro sequências finais, o motivo e a simbologia da sombra com que se conclui o poema 1. O cenário de ecotopia e de luminosidade exaltante e surreal que se desenha no penúltimo andamento (o 29) – “O dia amanheceu numa terra livre por onde corriam soltos e claros os rios e onde as montanhas azuis mal repousavam sobre as planícies// A mulher e o homem voltaram à cidade deixando pelo chão um rasto de sete cores lentamente diluídas até se fundirem no verde absoluto dos prados// [...]// Entretanto o arco-íris tem voltado todas as noites e isso é um bom sinal” (*O ano de 1993* 68-69) – opõe-se à síntese distópica do poema final, que resume o conteúdo (opressão / libertação) da narrativa do livro e toda a história da humanidade (acumulação de catástrofes e de trevas com alguma luz e benignidade pelo meio):

Uma vez mais os lugares desconhecidos os lugares de solidão e de morte os centímetros quadrados de tortura as cores do sangue até à sua final cor de terra

Uma vez mais o infinito combate as batalhas aquelas que se ganharam e essas outras humildes perdidas e de que não se quer falar [...]

Uma vez mais a ida e o regresso e agora a esperada fadiga entre duas altas montanhas num chão de pedra onde a sombra de repente fica enquanto o corpo se dissolve no ar [...]

E uma criança objetiva se aproxima e estende as mãos para a sombra que fragilmente retém o contorno ainda mas não já o cheiro do corpo sumido

Uma vez mais o impossível ficar ou a simples memória de ter sido [...]

Consoante se conclui de nada haver debaixo da sombra que a criança levanta como uma pedra esfolada (*O ano de 1993* 71-72)

Recupero e continuo a reflexão que iniciei antes do comentário ao poema 19: ceticismo saramaguiano desesperado no que tem a ver não apenas com a sociedade humana, mas também com a chamada “natureza humana”. Nenhuma ciência, nenhuma filosofia, nenhuma teologia propôs ainda uma definição convincente para esta expressão, que encerra uma das questões mais insolúveis do humano. Não necessitamos de estar muito atentos para vermos Saramago, em crise permanente, a querer compreender o ser humano e a sua tendência para o mal. É esta uma crise pessoal e íntima que a obra não só reflete mas também amplia e coloca no plano da intervenção social, política e cultural. Estas palavras de 2001 são sintomáticas do enfrentamento contínuo de Saramago consigo próprio e com as sociedades, as culturas e o ser humano: “Sou bastante cético em relação à natureza humana, tão cético que nem acredito que haja uma natureza humana. Mas seja isso o que for, acredito que se podem criar situações, estados de espírito, determinações que podem converter as mesmas pessoas pouco generosas ou nada generosas em solidárias em certas circunstâncias” (Gómez Aguilera 158). Do mesmo ano, este apontamento situa-nos bem no âmbito da lucidez de José Saramago, que desconstrói a tese rousseauiana do bom selvagem e ao mesmo tempo o maniqueísmo judaico-cristão: “Eu não creio na bondade da natureza humana. Para que um pobre bom se transforme em um rico mau não se necessita mais do que muito dinheiro. Não santifico o pobre” (Gómez Aguilera 325). De considerações como esta podemos extrair o entendimento saramaguiano de natureza humana: as capacidades básicas, disposições e desejos que nos individualizam como espécie e que formam um todo indissolúvel com os ambientes sociais e culturais que vamos criando e alterando. A máxima “Às negruras da mente humana tudo é possível” (*O caderno* 195), escrita quase a fechar um texto sobre “o mau trato conjugal ou paraconjugal” (*O caderno* 195), ilustra bem esta relação intrincada entre o coletivo e o individual, o público e o privado, a cultura e a biologia (os sentimentos negativos).

Embora sem ter alguma vez vivido os horrores que Primo Levi experimentou em Auschwitz, onde esteve como prisioneiro um ano, José Saramago dedicou grande parte da sua vida a pensar sobre o mal, a representá-lo literariamente e a refletir sobre o que o desencadeia e como podemos diminuir a sua força. Tal como intelectuais como Tzvetan Todorov, Saramago sabe que “recordar el pasado puede ser saludable

contra la propagación del mal” (Todorov 269). Não se trata de uma afetação ou de uma mania de quem se fez escritor contra o que a infância, a juventude e a primeira vida adulta lhe pareciam destinar (uma vida sem livros e sem letras), mas de uma convicção que a História não desmente: a guerra expõe e alarga a tendência do ser humano para a violência, que é, por sua vez, desencadeada pela atração individual e coletiva pelo poder absoluto. Os sentimentos negativos e as paixões desmedidas acompanham as condutas humanas, e o mal que daí tem nascido (e continuará a nascer) tem em Auschwitz um dos seus cumes. Primo Levi, Todorov e Saramago não olham com indiferença ou desatenção para este estado de coisas e, por isso, elegeram o poder, a violência e o mal como os principais vértices da sua escrita, pensamento e ação pública. Estes cidadãos e escritores sabem que “el simple recuerdo del mal no basta para prevenir su regreso” (Todorov 271); importa que “el recuerdo vaya acompañado de una interpretación y de unas instrucciones de uso” (Todorov 271), que é precisamente o que os três (e outros/as) fazem, vendo e experienciando, cada um à sua maneira, os mais fundos abismos da miséria humana, sem que a maldade do mundo tenha sido capaz de os fazer renunciar à razão.

2.3. “Levantado do Chão”: o lacaio-escravo do bidão. A morte e a escravatura no latifúndio alentejano e no “Lager” alemão

No romance *Levantado do chão*, a palavra “escravatura” surge, por duas vezes, num diálogo entre duas vozes não identificadas, provavelmente o narrador, feito personagem que deambula pelo latifúndio, e uma personagem criada para com ele conversar. O narrador-personagem vê um homem ao longe, sozinho e sem qualquer instrumento de trabalho, “sem enxada nem enxada, sem machado nem podão” (*Levantado* 286), e resolve saber o que faz ele ali e quem é. O interlocutor diz-lhe que se trata de um destes “lacaio que vestem como qualquer de nós, não como o senhor, que é da cidade, a gente aqui só os distingue pelos atos” (*Levantado* 287). Neste diálogo (de síntese sobre as origens da propriedade privada, no fundo) entra a história do latifúndio, o endividamento dos pequenos proprietários, a apropriação progressiva da terra por quem a podia comprar, os desmandos destes e a submissão de quem para eles trabalhava. Os dois “passeantes” (*Levantado* 289) fixam-se num episódio que tem tanto de caricato (ou de piedoso, dependendo da perspetiva que assumirmos) como de trágico. O “lacaio”, com grande custo, sujeito a matar-se pela encosta abaixo, como já quase aconteceu (diz o interlocutor do campo), transporta às costas um bidão:

É um bidão, o bidão é o alvo de que se servem os donos disto e do lacaio, Mas a escravatura já acabou, Isso é o que o senhor julga, Mas como é que uma pessoa se sujeita, Pergunte-lhe, E é que pergunto mesmo, olhe lá, homem, que leva você aí às costas, É um bidão, Mas ele está todo esburacado, não serve para água ou outros líquidos, será para o encher de pedras, É o alvo dos meus patrões Alberto e Angilberto, eles disparam, eu vou buscar o bidão para se

contar o que acertaram e erraram, e depois torno a ir pô-lo no mesmo sítio, e quando o bidão já está feito num crivo, levo outro, é assim, E você sujeita-se. (*Levantado* 287-288)

A pergunta fica sem a resposta de quem a poderia dar com plena autoridade, mas não sem um comentário do narrador que equivale à surda voz interior do “lacaio”. Entenda-se por “voz”, neste contexto, sobretudo o sentimento de humilhação e de perda infinita de quem, para prover às suas necessidades, é obrigado a deixar que o reduzam à escravidão; sentimento, que se desprende destas palavras, radicado no mais fundo (a pedra) do espírito daquele homem:

O mundo está de maneira que nem se pode conversar, põem-se do outro lado Alberto e Angilberto aos gritos, impacientes pela demora exagerada, daqui a pouco faz-se tarde e ainda aí temos duas caixas de balas, vão ralhar com o lacaio, e o pobre sujeitado atravessa o vale a trote curto, passa a ponte, o bidão é uma enorme corcova cor de ferrugem, e agora subindo a encosta do outro lado o que se vê daqui não é um homem, é um escaravelho. Então, continua a pensar que a escravatura já acabou, Parece impossível, E a dar-lhe, que sabe o senhor de impossibilidades, Ando a ver se aprendo. (*Levantado* 288)

Não se trata, em *Levantado do chão*, de escravatura *stricto sensu*, embora haja mais semelhanças do que diferenças entre o latifúndio e essa prática social de posse total de um ser humano por outro. Distingo, aqui, escravatura, no sentido de domínio sem restrições, de escravidão (palavra que empreguei acima), enquanto dependência, servidão sem posse legal sobre o corpo. O escravo é impedido de ter qualquer propriedade mobiliária e fundiária, e não dispõe minimamente da sua pessoa nem de praticar as suas tradições, os seus usos e costumes; o camponês do latifúndio possui não mais do que alguns utensílios básicos e uns poucos trastes que cabem numa carroça, mas é senhor de si, posto que apenas num plano jurídico muito abstrato, e não se vê privado dos seus rituais sociais, comunitários, festivos. Une-os, também, a inferioridade natural que lhes é atribuída por quem detém o poder e que vem do fundo dos tempos (recordemos: Aristóteles, em *Política*, diz que os senhores têm necessidade de escravos, e que estes nasceram para serem comandados, tal como os primeiros para comandar, e que isso, obra da natureza, é bom e justo, tal como defendia Platão. Mais: Aristóteles discordava abertamente daqueles que consideravam tal diferença, imposta pela violência, injusta e contra a natureza).

O latifúndio alentejano constituiu um problema para o pensamento progressivo português (e não só) e uma questão cristalizada para a ortodoxia fascista e afim. Em *Levantado do chão*, a palavra “latifúndio”, repetida dezenas de vezes ao longo do romance, é, acauteladas as diferenças, sinónimo de “escravatura”. Este vocábulo e o seu conceito nem sempre foram, como hoje, escandalosos. A escravatura era uma prática e uma visão do mundo comum e, mesmo quando alguém a reprovava,

não estava necessariamente a pensar na sua abolição (que foi, como é sabido, um processo lento). Saramago é exímio a descrever literariamente as competências do ser humano para uma crueldade que se reinventa sem cessar. O episódio do laçao do bidão é paradigmático desta capacidade saramaguiana de dizer repetidamente o seu repúdio moral perante o mal extremo, como se fosse sempre a primeira vez e sem cair na banalidade e no lugar-comum. Tal como um escravo e como um inseto (um escaravelho, um escaravelho-homem), o laçao é usurpado da possibilidade de se transformar em outro, de ser radicalmente livre em si, como é (ou deveria ser) próprio de cada ser humano. O escravo, enfatiza Elias Canetti, é “*animal e propriedade*” (Canetti 464. Sublinhados no original); propriedade não enquanto objeto inanimado, antes enquanto animal que obedece a ordens. O agrado dos senhores de escravos é tanto maior quanto mais bem definidas, duras e monótonas forem as tarefas que eles atribuírem, acrescenta Canetti, que também escreve: “Desde o início deverá ter havido dois tipos de escravos: um tipo solitário como um cão doméstico que está ligado ao seu dono, e um em que eles estariam juntos como rebanhos nos campos. Estes mesmos rebanhos devem ser considerados obviamente como os escravos mais antigos” (Canetti 465).

O laçao do bidão é este escravo solitário, tão animal quanto os outros que trabalham no latifúndio como animais num rebanho. Aquele e estes, que a mestria de Saramago torna inesquecíveis, são uma confirmação destas palavras de Canetti, por sua vez demonstradas por séculos de inúmeras modalidades de escravatura: “O desejo de converter homens em animais é o mais forte impulso para a expansão da escravatura (para Aristóteles, o escravo era, tal como um animal doméstico, útil; aliás, era mais indispensável do que o animal, por ser melhor do que este). Não se deve subestimar a energia deste desejo, nem a do seu oposto: o de transformar animais em homens” (Canetti 465). O que a seguir afirma Canetti tem igualmente expressão na obra e nas ideias de Saramago: “Estes últimos agradecem a sua existência a grandiosas construções intelectuais, como as dos teóricos da metempsicose e do darwinismo, mas também a divertimentos populares, como a exibição de animais adestrados” (Canetti 465). Implícito neste apontamento está o conceito de especismo, esse tão antigo quanto persistente “preconceito ou atitude de discriminação em favor dos interesses dos membros da sua própria espécie e contra os membros de outras espécies» (Singer 6). A questão da crueldade do humano sobre o não-humano é central em José Saramago, que se lhe dedica com todos os seus recursos de escritor e de militante ativo pelos direitos quer do ser humano, quer da vida não-humana e do ambiente em geral (ao contrário do que pensam aqueles que, sem o lerem, o acusam de ser estalinista). Como ligação às palavras de Canetti, veja-se esta passagem de *A viagem do elefante* (2008):

As pessoas estão muito enganadas a respeito dos elefantes. Imaginam que eles se divertem quando são obrigados a equilibrar-se sobre uma pesada esfera metálica, numa reduzida superfície curva em que as patas mal conseguem encontrar apoio. O que nos vale é o bom feitio dos elefantes, especialmente

dos oriundos da Índia. Pensam eles que é preciso ter muita paciência para aturar os seres humanos, inclusive quando nós os perseguimos e matamos para lhes serrarmos ou arrancarmos os dentes por causa do marfim. Entre os elefantes recordam-se com frequência as famosas palavras pronunciadas por um dos seus profetas, aquelas que dizem, Perdoai-lhes, senhor, porque eles sabem o que fazem. Eles somos todos nós, e em particular estes que aqui vieram só pela casualidade de o verem morrer e que neste momento iniciaram o caminho de regresso a Valladolid, frustrados como aquele espectador que seguia uma companhia de circo para onde quer que ela fosse só para estar presente no dia em que o acrobata caísse fora da rede. (*A viagem* 142)

No mesmo romance, algumas páginas à frente, o tópico da conversão do animal naquilo que ele não é volta a ser motivo de *debate* (é o termo correto), com a posição do cornaca (e de Saramago) a não deixar dúvidas quanto ao seu repúdio pela perspectiva geral (a do jugo animal em nome da diversão humana): “Venho fazer-te um pedido, mas antes quero que me digas se o teu elefante é dos ensinados, Ensinado, o que se chama ensinado, no sentido de saber umas quantas habilidades de circo, não o é, mas costuma comportar-se com a dignidade de um elefante que se respeita” (Saramago 2014a). Esta resposta inteligente e cautelosa do cuidador de Salomão contradiz milénios de comportamentos tirânicos exercidos pelo homem sobre o não-humano. Kant afirmou categoricamente que não temos deveres diretos em relação aos animais, porque estes não têm autoconsciência e são apenas meios para alcançar um fim, que é o homem (Kant 239-240). Estas palavras do filósofo alemão, nas suas lições de ética, em 1780, mereceram nesse mesmo ano uma contundente crítica de Jeremy Bentham, que então concluía o livro *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1780). A questão não estava em saber se os animais podem *raciocinar* ou *falar* (note-se a ironia), mas antes se podem sofrer, considerava Bentham, que comparava a sorte dos animais à dos escravos negros e desejava o que ainda hoje está, quase completamente, por cumprir:

The day has been, I grieve to say in many places it is not yet past, in which the greater part of the species, under the denomination of slaves, have been treated by the law exactly upon the same footing as, in England for example, the inferior races of animals are still. The day may come, when the rest of the animal creation may acquire those rights which never could have been withholden from them but by the hand of tyranny. The French have already discovered that the blackness of the skin is no reason why a human being should be abandoned without redress to the caprice of a tormentor. (Bentham 353)

Peter Singer escreveu que «Bentham foi talvez o primeiro a denunciar “o domínio do homem” como tirania, não o considerando governo legítimo» (Singer 2008: 190). Saramago, herdeiro autêntico de Bentham, é *primus inter pares* na denúncia

ativa da crueldade gratuita que os homens levam a todos os seres vivos, humanos e não-humanos. A ideia de privação dos direitos naturais dos camponeses alentejanos tem no episódio do laçao-escravo de *Levantado do Chão* um dos seus muitos momentos, cujas imediatas correspondências na realidade são infinitas. O desejo de transformar homens em animais une os Gilbertos, Adalbertos, Norbertos e outros Lambertos do primeiro romance de projeção internacional de José Saramago. Este impulso intervém na expansão da escravatura histórica, tal como a defini atrás, e Saramago, neste romance de histórias de vida e de história político-social, nesta ficção signo de vida e de ação, dá-lhe o merecido relevo enquanto fator humano que tem participado na História enquanto *continuum* de catástrofes e sofrimentos indescritíveis. Em *Levantado do chão*, depois de noutros géneros ter já afrontado a questão do mal (político, social, religioso, humano), Saramago não está a procurar escalas para o padecimento humano. O que o escritor pretende determinar não é o grau, porque todo o suplício humano extremo e desnecessário é *inenarrável*, segundo um termo que Saramago usou para, por exemplo, como vimos, classificar os males praticados em nome de Deus. Interessa-lhe provar que querer possuir tantos escravos como os que há num dócil e numeroso rebanho é, como escreveu Canetti, uma força a não subestimar. Este desejo de domínio é, no essencial, o mesmo que desencadeia a criação dos campos de trabalho e de extermínio, sobre os quais a obra-prima incontestável continua a ser *Se isto é um homem* (1947), de Primo Levi. A expressão “campos de morte”, no início da segunda frase desta passagem de *Levantado do chão*, que cito já extensamente para me ser mais fácil avançar a seguir para outros pontos fulcrais da minha argumentação, será suficiente para fazer reverberar na mente de alguns leitores a mensagem de Levi e de outros sobreviventes do Holocausto e dos *gulags* (como Aleksandr Soljenítsin), bem como o magistral testemunho de Dostoievski, em 1860-61, sobre os campos de trabalhos forçados russos, no livro *Recordações da casa dos mortos*:

Pela noite fora, nos aposentos, ouve-se o suspirar e o gemer destes aflitos, a cocceira ansiosa das unhas pretas e duras na pele que já sangra, enquanto outros batem o queixo com tremuras e levantam para o telhado os olhos vidrados de febre. Não há muita diferença entre isto e campos de morte, apenas se rebenta menos, provavelmente por causa da caridade cristã e correlativo interesse que fazem com que os patrões, quase todos os dias, carreguem de miséria sarnosa e febril as camionetas e a transportem para o hospital de Elvas, hoje uns, amanhã outros, é um corrupio de ir e vir, e os pobres vão como mortos, o que vale a todos é a milagrosa medicina que em três ou quatro dias os põe como novos, fraquíssimos e trémulos de pernas, mas quem se preocupa com essas insignificâncias, tu tens alta, tu também, e tu, e tu, é assim que os médicos nos tratam, e torna a camioneta a despejar no monte a carga com a saúde a meio pau, é uma empreitada, não se pode perder tempo, Está melhor, meu pai, perguntou Amélia, e ele respondeu, Estou, sim, filha, como se vê não há nada mais simples. (*Levantado* 282)

Com o episódio do lacaio do bidão, escravo “dos donos disto e do lacaio” (*Levantado* 288), e com a descrição da espécie de campo de morte que o latifúndio é, Saramago não pretende, como é óbvio, reivindicar a novidade absoluta do mal no latifúndio alentejano, o que equivaleria a discordar destas bem conhecidas palavras de Hannah Arendt: “Não há paralelos à vida nos campos de concentração. O seu horror não pode ser inteiramente alcançado pela imaginação justamente por situar-se fora da vida e da morte” (Arendt 589). O latifúndio é lugar de sofrimentos e injustiças inenarráveis, mas, ainda assim, o direito não está dele totalmente ausente. Apesar de tudo, a ditadura salazarista não é o totalitarismo nazi. Já “Na estrutura político-jurídica do campo” (*Meios* 41), nota Giorgio Agamber, o estado de exceção deixa de ser uma suspensão temporal do estado de direito. O *lager* é dotado de uma configuração espacial permanente que se afasta em tudo da condição normal da lei e da política minimamente pluralista.

José Saramago visa termos de comparação entre a matéria narrada no romance e a realidade mais ampla, portuguesa e universal. A escravatura é um tema português e lusófono, colonial e pós-colonial, mas também, tal como o campo de concentração nacional-socialista, assunto universal. A escravatura e esses campos, assim como o horror de Hiroxima e Nagasáqui e qualquer sistema concentracionário, maior ou menor, são património da humanidade, memória do que não se deve(ria) repetir. No excerto anterior vibra o tom único do discurso literário que Saramago descobriu em *Levantado do chão*, que é, como a narrativa-testemunho *Se isto é um homem*, um romance sobre a facilidade com que o mal se instala e permanece. A linguagem e a atitude dos narradores são radicalmente diferentes, e distintos são os contextos histórico-políticos. Primo Levi é um narrador que testemunha, comenta e constrói uma narrativa que se lê como um romance autobiográfico e, ao mesmo tempo, como um trabalho de sociologia dos campos de concentração nazis e um tratado de antropologia do mal. Veja-se o seguinte, sensivelmente a meio do livro, para se perceber estas minhas palavras e também para anunciar já um diálogo, alguns parágrafos adiante, com personagens e momentos capitais de *Levantado do chão*:

Eles são o produto típico da estrutura do *Lager* alemão: oferece-se a alguns indivíduos em estado de escravidão uma posição privilegiada, um certo bem-estar e uma boa probabilidade de sobreviver, exigindo em troca a traição da solidariedade natural para com os seus companheiros, e certamente haverá quem aceite. Este será subtraído à lei comum, e tornar-se-á intangível; será por isso tanto mais odioso e odiado, quanto mais poder lhe for atribuído. Se lhe confiarem o comando de um manípulo de desgraçados, com direito de vida ou de morte sobre eles, será cruel e tirânico, porque perceberá que, se não o for suficientemente, outro, considerado mais apto, tomará o seu lugar. Para além disso, acontecerá que a sua capacidade de odiar, que ficou insatisfeita em relação aos opressores, cairá, injustificadamente, sobre os oprimidos; e sentir-se-á satisfeito ao descarregar sobre os seus subalternos a ofensa que recebeu dos que estão acima dele. (*Se isto é um homem* 101)

Primo Levi escreve à maneira clássica, com correção e beleza (diga-se de passagem), e com uma inteligência que o excerto anterior, só por si, ilustra. José Saramago é um narrador intrépido, irrequieto e não menos lúcido do que Levi. Saramago, sarcástica e carnavalescamente, traduz e afronta o poder arbitrário numa linguagem plurivocal, em que entram as palavras do narrador, as das personagens e as do poder, cujo ponto de vista ele finge, por momentos, subscrever. Primo Levi adota uma perspectiva de quase observador externo, de testemunha que se despoja, tanto quanto possível, do lugar de vítima cuja raiva seria mais do que aceitável. Mas há grandes semelhanças entre o que os dois narram, apesar de um ser sobretudo memorialista (Levi), o outro principalmente ficcionista (se bem que Saramago escreva a partir de extensos apontamentos que ele próprio recolheu no Lavre). O trabalho e o dia a dia no latifúndio, com as correspondentes doenças e mortes, lembra os suplícios dos campos de concentração. Os camponeses alentejanos, ressalvadas (insisto) as devidas diferenças, são como que o povo real escravizado, torturado e aniquilado (os judeus, mas não só) de *Se isto é um homem*. A morte, no latifúndio e no *Lager*, é o perigo supremo e o poder derradeiro daqueles que detêm o poder político (e a força militar e policial): o poder daqueles que, dito em linguagem conhecida da biopolítica, dispõe do direito de vida e de morte sobre os outros. “Isto é o inferno” (*Se isto é um homem* 19), escreve Primo Levi, que continua de um modo em que se nos revela, como noutros momentos ao longo do livro, com os seus recursos de romancista sensível aos matizes do espírito humano:

Hoje, nos nossos dias, o Inferno dever ser assim, um local grande e vazio, e nós, cansados de estar de pé, com uma torneira a pingar água que não se pode beber, esperamos algo sem dúvida terrível e nada acontece e continua a não acontecer nada. Como pensar? Já não se pode pensar, é como estar já morto. Alguns sentam-se no chão. O tempo passa gota após gota (*Se isto é um homem* 19).

Selecionei esta passagem pela convergência que nela existe com uma outra de Saramago, visível tanto na referência ao “inferno” como na descrição dos prisioneiros e dos camponeses, uns e outros em situação-limite de exaustão e equiparados a quase-mortos e a fantasmas; humilhados, degradados e reduzidos a pouco mais do que vísceras, corpos habitados por dores e parasitas. São corpos nus, “vida nua” (Agamben, *Homo sacer*), mera existência biológica, no sentido foucaultiano e agambeniano. Nos estados tendencialmente totalitários ou não-democráticos, nos estados de exceção, a existência política, inerente a todos os seres humanos (como sustenta Aristóteles, que relevou como o ser humano passou, graças à linguagem verbal, de ser vivente a animal político), é anulada por técnicas políticas que animalizam o humano:

Diga-se agora que o inferno não é longe. São cento e cinquenta homens e mulheres, divididos em cinco ranchos, e esta condenação durará dezasseis semanas, é uma safra de sarna e de febres, uma empreitada de sofrimento,

mondar e plantar desde o sol que ainda vai nascer ao sol que já se foi embora, e quando a noite começa são cento e cinquenta fantasmas que se arrastam até ao monte onde tem quartel, homens para aqui, mulheres para ali, mas todos por igual coçando a sarna dos canteiros alagados, todos curtindo as febres do arrozal. (*Levantado* 282)

O paralelismo entre os campos de morte e o latifúndio, entre a Alemanha de Hitler e o Portugal fascista, entre Hitler e os proprietários das terras, e entre a História e as histórias de gentes comuns, estabelece-se, não menos diretamente, na alusão irónica e caricatural a Hitler Horques Alemão, quando o narrador se refere à “guerra que começou agora na Europa” (*Levantado* 124):

um Hitler Horques Alemão mandará ajuntar crianças de doze e treze anos para fazer delas os últimos batalhões da derrota, com fardas que lhes caem dos braços e enrolam nas pernas, também manipanços, e boa arma de coice, sem ombro que a aguente, e isto é o mesmo que clamarem os patrões do latifúndio que já não há crianças de seis e sete anos para irem guardar os porcos ou os perus, aonde vai isto parar se não ganham os garotos o seu sustento, dizem-no eles aos brutos pais que já deram o sangue e os cruzados e ainda não entenderam nada, ou começam a desconfiar, como desconfiaram noutro século das esquivanças de sua majestade. (*Levantado* 124)

“Tudo isto são males, e grandes males” (*Levantado* 124), continua, um pouco mais abaixo, a voz narradora. Esta não é uma afirmação meramente dramática e plangente; é um testemunho, entre magoado e revoltado, contra os caminhos e as cumplicidades da História na construção do mal, de que Auschwitz é a prova e o símbolo do terror e da crueldade sem limites e, nos termos de morte industrializada em que aconteceu, inimaginável. Na verdade, contra a crença de que uma tal violência seria impensável e impossível na contemporaneidade, diz-nos Giorgio Agamben: Auschwitz é a evidência indesmentível e trágica de uma das formas que a lei pode assumir no território político (não apenas no espaço político nazi). Esse território é não a maravilhosa (e utópica) cidade de todos e para todos, a *pólis*, mas antes o *lager*, o campo de concentração:

O campo é o espaço que se abre quando o estado de exceção começa a tornar-se regra [...]. Na medida em que os seus habitantes foram despojados de todo o estatuto político e reduzidos integralmente à vida nua, o campo é também o mais absoluto espaço biopolítico jamais realizado, no qual o poder não tem diante de si senão a pura vida sem qualquer mediação. (*Homo sacer* 175)

O latifúndio alentejano é, em *Levantado do chão*, a antecâmara de um campo de morte, que se caracteriza pela total ausência de normas. O romance é literatura

de testemunho, obviamente não à maneira de livros como *Se isto é um homem*, mas testemunho mediado por um narrador-autor que ouviu relatos de quem viveu os acontecimentos de que se compõe a obra: relatos sobre uma administração político-teológica que estabelecia uma ordem regida por vontades arbitrárias e totalitárias. Primo Levi mostra, participa, mas não julga nem condena; Saramago dá a ver, comenta, julga, dá razão a Theodor Adorno: depois de Auschwitz, a poesia (a literatura) não é mais possível, ou é-o, segundo Saramago, enquanto literatura que se institui no espaço que resta da biopolítica e do estado de exceção que nos ameaçam continuamente. Daí *Levantado do chão* ter tanto de literário (ficção) como de investigação histórico-sociológica e de reflexão ético-política.

3. Auschwitz, se não nos soubermos precaver, repetir-se-á, diz Saramago

O problema do mal é uma das mais fortes raízes (de pensamento e de ação) a partir das quais toda a obra literária de José Saramago nasce e se ramifica. Por isso, é natural que o fenómeno Auschwitz tenha estado sempre presente na mundividência de José Saramago. Para além de todas as novidades de género e de composição estrutural e temática que esta escrita contém, em particular um estilo único em toda a história da literatura universal, nela contraria-se um princípio: o da irreduzível fragmentação e ininteligibilidade do mal. Mas em Saramago não se questiona menos o contrário deste postulado: o de que o mal é, maniqueisticamente, monolítico e reconhecível (no outro). Este problema, que parece ser cada vez mais próprio da contemporaneidade, não tem em Saramago, nem poderia ter, uma solução definitiva e unívoca. Todavia, inspirada na unidade, na persistência e na eloquência das palavras do cidadão e do escritor José Saramago, a nossa capacidade de compreender o mundo e de agir nele pode ganhar muito em clarividência e vigor. Se nos resignarmos a ver no mal um problema em tudo ininteligível e insolúvel, ou uma manifestação fácil de compreender e extirpar, por aceitarmos que ele, nas instituições e em cada um de nós, está em todo o lado e em lado nenhum, deixaremos, em definitivo, de o saber discernir. Não temos de nos submeter à combinação moderna entre uma sociedade patriarcal opressiva e uma sociedade ultraliberal e neocolonialista desumana, e entre um bom e um mau selvagem. Esta é uma fórmula simples (mas esclarecedora) por que Saramago sempre se regeu.

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Le contrat de lecture imaginative dans *Le Palais des Orties* de Marie Nimier

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Résumé : Dans *Le Palais des Orties*, Marie Nimier, connue comme étant la Reine du Silence, fait des lecteurs ses sujets. C'est à leur silence de parler. Outre l'espace ludique, déjà exploité dans de nombreuses études, cet article examine le contrat de lecture imaginative qui, résonnant sur le lien social, fait glisser, sous l'angle d'un point de vue participatif et performatif notre imagination hors du livre et l'histoire du *Palais des Orties* dans le domaine de la fiction et de la création contemporaine.

Mots-clés : repérage spectatorial - création contemporaine - espace de liberté - ellipse - processus narratif - performativité

Marie Nimier a publié seize romans et a établi sa renommée de romancière, tout particulièrement avec *Sirène* en 1985 (couronné par l'Académie française et la Société des Gens de Lettres), *La Reine du Silence* en 2004 (prix Médicis) et *Les Inséparables* en 2008 (Prix Georges Brassens).¹ Pour mieux apprécier l'écriture de cette autrice, il faut noter, d'une part, ses contributions prolifiques de tous genres dont : une quinzaine de livres pour la jeunesse, des textes pour le théâtre, des nouvelles, ou encore des paroles de chansons pour, entre autres, Juliette Gréco, Johnny Halliday, et Eddy Mitchell ; d'autre part, sa participation à l'art contemporain, spécialement dans le domaine de la performativité, en écrivant pour des comédiens, des danseurs, des musiciens, une funambule, des peintres, des cinéastes et autres inventeurs de formes hybrides. Cet engagement dans des formes d'art participatives se retrouve dans les romans de l'autrice et il n'est pas surprenant qu'à ma question « Quelle est la

¹ Lors de la 24^{ème} Conférence Annuelle de Cincinnati sur les Littératures et Langues Romanes, qui s'est tenue du 9 au 11 mai 2002, Marie Nimier était invitée d'honneur pour sa communication intitulée « Corps de texte. » Lors de cette conférence, j'ai présidé une session spéciale « Marie Nimier » en présence de l'auteure et en compagnie des professeurs et intervenants Kimberley Healey, Margaret-Anne Hutton, Joy Rich et Cathy Wardle. Cette session a fait l'objet d'un débat littéraire qui a donné lieu à l'organisation de nouvelles sessions spéciales en compagnie de l'autrice au Colloque International d'Etudes Françaises et Francophones organisé par le professeur Carol Murphy pour l'Université de Floride à Gainesville du 31 mars au 3 avril 2005. Outre une sélection d'articles présentés à ces conférences et la nouvelle « Un Enfant disparaît » que Marie Nimier nous avait aimablement autorisé à reproduire, un appel à contribution avait permis la mise en œuvre du « Numéro Spécial Marie Nimier » pour la *Cincinnati Romance Review*, paru en mai 2006.

place du lecteur ? »² Marie Nimier ait répondu « Ce que 'le lecteur' va ressentir, imaginer, est plus puissant que tout ce que je pourrais développer... Ce n'est pas à moi de lui dire ce qu'il doit ressentir. J'aimerais, dans mes livres, qu'il y ait beaucoup de place pour le lecteur. Et en fait, beaucoup de place pour moi aussi, puisque je suis ma première lectrice » (de Larquier 16). Je propose alors avec cet essai qu'il existe un contrat de lecture imaginative dans *Le Palais des Orties*. Pour ce faire, au cours d'une première étape, je montrerai d'abord, que dès le début du livre et en poursuivant la lecture du roman, l'injonction « Il faut imaginer » (9) qui s'impose au lecteur prend immédiatement place dans l'imaginaire puis, qu'elle amorce un principe narratif constitué d'ellipses qui, sous forme d'écheveau à filer ou démêler, sont autant de brèches s'ouvrant sur un univers scriptural gratuit, poétique et ludique auquel ce procédé donne le temps de se traduire en langage vivant pour confronter tout interlocuteur, multiplier les espaces imaginaires, personnaliser à l'infini toutes les formes d'imagination qui, y prenant racine, éclairent ces trouées. Lors d'une deuxième étape, poursuivant la lecture et à l'abord des dernières pages, j'évoquerai la notion de représentation, en précisant comment Marie Nimier attire l'attention par un système de repérage spectatoriel qui autorise, sous toutes leurs formes, images sensorielles, mentales et autres, à se joindre et à se superposer dans les imaginaires aux traces laissées par les premières impressions de lecture initiale.

Avant même d'entrer en matière, la quatrième de couverture de la collection Folio dévoile *Le Palais des Orties* de la manière suivante :

En général, on arrache les orties. Eux les cultivent. Eux ? Simon, Nora et leurs deux enfants adolescents. C'est la débrouille, et c'est plutôt gai. Mais l'arrivée d'une inconnue, Frederica, vient troubler les habitudes. Fred fait du woofing : contre le gîte et le couvert, elle offre ses bras. Tous les habitants de la ferme, chien et chat compris, tombent sous son charme. Même Nora se montre décontenancée par l'irruption de cette jeune femme solaire...
Le Palais des Orties est un roman d'amour et de métamorphoses. (Quatrième de couverture)

Si la présentation figurant sur cette lodiciquarte a son utilité, en l'occurrence pour ceux qui n'auraient pas lu le texte à l'abord de cet essai, en revanche pour Marie Nimier, dans l'entretien « Se risquer à raconter (des histoires) » qu'elle a accordé à Karin Schwerdtner, « [s]on rêve serait une quatrième de couverture qui dirait 'Faites-moi confiance, je n'ai rien envie de vous raconter à l'avance, prenez-le, soyez vierge, prenez-le comme quand vous rencontrez quelqu'un par hasard dans la rue et acceptez de ne rien savoir' » (Schwerdtner 60). Autrement dit et plus précisément, la quatrième de couverture est une trahison du contrat de lecture imaginative que nous propose l'autrice.

² Entretien public avec Marie Nimier, retravaillé par la suite avec l'autrice, organisé à l'occasion d'une conférence internationale intitulée *Marie Nimier : Absence et Perte*, qui s'est tenue les 7 et 8 juillet 2014 sur le campus parisien de l'Université de Kent (*Paris School of Arts and Culture*).

Oublions alors ce que nous venons de lire ou du moins souvenons-nous que nous sommes censés l'ignorer. Chemin faisant, ce roman nous entraînant mystérieusement dans un petit coin de terre normande banale qui a déjà toute une histoire, nous fait entendre Nora, la narratrice, y parler de la ferme dont son compagnon Simon Carpentier et leurs deux enfants, Anaïs, 17 ans, et Noé, 13 ans ont hérité, de sa vétusté, de sa rentabilité problématique, de la monoculture d'orties dont elle a eu l'idée. Dans le même temps, Nora raconte l'histoire de sa ferme devenue exploitation et qui, avec humour et dans la bonne ambiance familiale, prend le nom de Palais des Orties pour ne pas rebuter une woofeuse appelée en renfort sur un site soucieux d'efficacité et de convivialité. Ce site, c'est celui du réseau mondial de fermes biologiques, le WWOOF. Cette histoire cache bien son jeu ; elle commence « un jeudi [. . .] au printemps, le 28 mars très exactement » (9) ou plutôt « le jeudi 28 mars très exactement » (12) et pourtant « commence vraiment » (23) lorsque Fred, la woofeuse, s'installe dans la maison, nous semble vouloir la défier en jetant son foulard « comme on jette un gant » (23). Son titre, *le Palais des Orties*, continue d'intriguer, laisse planer inquiétudes, interrogations, suspense. Formé de deux mots qu'aucun alibi grammatical ou explications ne relie, il se présente sous la forme d'une ellipse qui garde muet tout événement à venir et ne s'avère pas avoir comme finalité de communiquer les informations qui accompagnent habituellement le premier moment de lecture d'un roman.

Ainsi le titre opère par impression, il en appelle à deux mots simples aux allures d'oxymore, aux antipodes l'un de l'autre, qui nous saisissent comme deux indices dans un roman policier, deux images génératrices de questions à retourner dans tous les sens pour les faire parler. Carol Murphy à propos de *Photo-photo* avait déjà remarqué « ces éléments [qui] attirent notre attention, de façon hypercodée, [...] en même temps qu'ils font de la lecture du livre un vrai polar, où le lecteur est appelé à faire un décodage des différents éléments du texte pour en faire un sens » (81). Acteurs à notre insu, d'une histoire inconnue, poussés par le désir d'en connaître l'intrigue, nous échafaudons des hypothèses et élucubrons avec nos propres mots le lien qui manque entre ces deux mots, en nous laissant aller à ce que, dans notre langage courant, nous appelons donner libre cours à son imagination. Le lecteur averti se voit confronté à l'émergence des titres des romans ou des mots de Marie Nimier qui se confondent en analogies plus ciblées. Il se laisse emporter par un lien entre ce palais et l'autrice qu'il connaît bien comme étant la Reine du silence et soupçonne le mot « palais » de polysémie et homophonie dont la double signification dénotée de demeure d'une reine et de sens du goût, un sens que nous possédons tous, fait universellement allusion à la sensorialité³. L'insinuation d'un trait d'union entre *Le Palais des Orties* et les autres romans de l'autrice est une tentative d'exutoire au contraste des deux mots du titre

³ Tandis que Marie Nimier n'avait que 5 ans, son père, le célèbre écrivain Roger Nimier, peu avant sa mort, semble n'avoir laissé derrière lui pour Marie qu'une carte postale dont la question en cul-de-sac « QUE DIT LA REINE DU SILENCE ? [sic] » (Marie Nimier, *La Reine du Silence* 171) va hanter Marie Nimier tout au long de son œuvre.

qui le laisse gardien de son sens secret et qui, malgré leur essai de remplissage de l'ellipse, ne la comble pas.

En revanche, les images qui nous traversent l'esprit côtoient les deux mots du titre proposés par l'autrice et truffent le vide fictif de l'ellipse. L'autrice donne leur place aux lecteurs perdus en conjecture, ainsi qu'à leurs suppositions qui, se coulent réellement dans l'espace liminaire du roman. Cette présentation qui mêle réalité et vérité libère notre intuition qui entraîne notre imagination et fait penser qu'il est question de participer à un événement ou au dénouement d'une énigme, de « goûter », comme s'il s'agissait d'un palais gustatif, à quelque chose comme un lien caché entre ces deux mots, un point commun qui nous regarde tous. Pour les uns, le mot « palais » bénéficie d'une connotation positive et pour les autres pâtit d'une connotation étouffante liée au concept de prince charmant, de princesse et d'amour idéal impossible. Pour les uns encore, les « orties », plantes urticantes, souffrent le plus souvent d'une réputation de dangerosité alors que, pour les autres, il s'agit d'un végétal utile au maintien de la biodiversité ou possédant des vertus curatives. Selon qu'ils s'intéressent à l'antiquité ou au langage des fleurs, l'ortie serait, pour certains, plante de Vénus et symbole de luxe, pour d'autres symbole de trahison, mais pour tous, sujet à *a priori*, à interprétation, à imagination. On peut, à partir de là, se demander si le choix de ce titre accrocheur qui n'utilise le langage référentiel que par défaut, ne nous fait pas, par analogie, nous représenter les idées reçues comme les vraies coupables de cette énigme.

Au fil de la lecture, pour succéder au titre ou précéder le texte et même le commencer n'apparaissent ni dédicace, épigraphe, avertissement en italique, préface, préambule et rien, toujours, ne porte atteinte à l'intégrité, la vérité de ce qui se raconte ou va se raconter. Surgissant du blanc de la page, sans transition, les trois premiers mots du texte « Il faut imaginer » (9) prennent le contrepied d'un traditionnel « Il était une fois » et du même coup sans explication, du conventionnel et du saturé. Ce qui transparait et capte l'attention c'est l'autrice mettant en scène des mots de tous les jours pour confirmer son rôle de locutrice et, nous interpellant de façon abrupte et inhabituelle pour une première ligne de roman : « Il faut imaginer une campagne modeste » (9). C'est aussi la confiance accordée à ce verbe qui émerge en position phare d'un phrasé courant, pour ainsi dire automatique qui connote le roman, fait office d'embrayeur de discours. Ce même verbe « imaginer » comme « verbe du premier groupe [. . .] sans appel » (59) qui, de par cette formulation incitative prend pour le lecteur l'importance d'une injonction, confirme à ce dernier son rôle d'acteur dans le roman. Pris en tenaille entre la forme impersonnelle « Il faut » et « la campagne modeste » personnifiée, ce verbe « imaginer », à la fois message spectaculaire et figure référentielle équivoque, se glisse, avec fluidité, dès l'incipit, dans le texte sous la forme de premières injonction et locution verbale, et désormais d'un avertissement liminaire.

Comme sous l'emprise d'une poésie élégiaque, nous, les lecteurs, sommes exhortés non plus à rêver ou délirer, mais à nous représenter par-delà la campagne un paysage lyrique ou encore un contexte épique habité de personnages héros à leur façon, et tout autant immédiatement à imaginer « au fond de la vallée, notre vallée »

(9). L'équivoque grammaticale prend le relai du suspens ; le possessif « notre », sous la forme d'une ellipse narrative, confirme et entame le glissement d'un personnage à un autre, nous installe au cœur d'un décor personnifié, devient la métaphore qui implique sans plus d'explication tous les lecteurs, non comme témoins mais en tant que « spect-acteurs » dans la narration, laisse se profiler un roman qui intéresse la terre entière et toute l'humanité. Répétant cette technique du leurre grammatical, l'autrice, sans crier gare, lève l'équivoque du possessif « notre » : « Les orties, c'est nous qui les avons plantées » (9) lui substitue le pronom personnel « nous » qui fait référence aux fermiers et devient le sujet de la narration. Ces derniers font irruption dans le récit en personnages actifs représentés chez eux et dans leur environnement et même au village. Parce que celui-ci se confond avec « notre » propre environnement, les événements à venir, par déduction, même s'ils nous sont étrangers, vont, par analogie, se mêler à ceux que nous côtoyons ou avons côtoyés et nous prendre à partie, substituer au simple clin d'œil notre active complicité et servir de référence.

Selon ce même processus de substitution et de glissement, Nimier passe du « nous » au « mon » : « Les orties, c'était mon idée » (9), cédant ainsi la parole à Nora qui devient sujet narrant du récit et voix narrative du roman, narratrice autodiégétique de son histoire et point de vue interne d'une narration qui, on le comprend, est déjà commencée. Jonglant entre mode impersonnel / non temporel et mode personnel / temporel : « Il faut imaginer » (9), enchaînant présent, passé indéfini, imparfait, Nimier établit un rapport de cause à conséquence en revenant au présent dans la narration de Nora, et, faisant fi de l'analepse, maintient une actualité présente qui établit la communication avec les lecteurs. Ces derniers commencent à se sentir proches d'une histoire réellement entreprise par l'autrice dont elle aurait elle-même rédigé le prologue « Il faut imaginer », et de celle fictive de Nora qui s'ébauche mais aussi d'une histoire qui les interpelle, ne livre de l'énigme du titre que cette triple résonance et de ce début de roman l'impression d'un prologue qui situe l'histoire dans le temps jusqu'à ce que, plus loin dans le livre, « commence vraiment l'histoire » (24), faisant ainsi figure d'introduction. En glissant subrepticement d'une ellipse à une autre, ce prologue prolonge les équivoques grammaticales et passe de l'article indéfini « une campagne » au défini « les orties », du redoublement objectif d'adverbe « Et ce jour-là » (9) à l'adverbe « vraiment » plus subjectif, du printemps impersonnel à un univers intime aussi joliment connoté que mystérieux. Passant du tout au détail il dénonce et fait concevoir l'importance d'une date « le jeudi 28 mars » qui, cependant, garde le secret de son année et de son motif puis, passant du particulier au général donne à cette triple résonance la force et le plaisir d'exciter curiosité et soif de connaissance. Comme Marie Nimier l'a partagé dans son entretien avec Karin Schwerdtner, selon elle, « Tout est 'interprétation.' Si on le sait, on se sent plus libre, et le terme 'justesse' vient remplacer celui de 'vérité.' » (Schwerdtner, 50). Ainsi, le prologue donne à imaginer et fait passer sous la forme de lignes de force pour le roman, ces concepts de vérité, justesse et liberté que l'autrice veut donner à imaginer.

Toutefois, nous prenant au jeu d'une narration qui reflète le langage et se fait l'écho de la parole, Marie Nimier rétablit la donne, fait prendre corps à la triple

résonnance détectée, en actualise plus concrètement les rôles : elle-même autrice en embuscade, Nora la fermière narratrice autodiégétique désormais seule locutrice, et les lecteurs « spect-acteurs ». Ces derniers ayant voix au chapitre animent un contexte vivant peuplé d'interlocuteurs et individus réels en proie à des mots et expressions, figures linguistiques qui leur parlent et servent, désormais, réellement de stimulus à frapper au plus juste l'imagination de chacun. Nora Cottille-Foley observe à propos de *La Nouvelle pornographie*, que « la narratrice se projette en tant qu'actrice dans les histoires qu'elle invente » (Cottille-Foley 61), dans *Le Palais des Orties*, ce sont les lecteurs qui se projettent en tant qu'acteurs dans leur lecture qu'ils s'inventent. En effet, différemment, grâce ici à ce rapport de proximité avec le texte, le lecteur se sent incité à imaginer ; il interroge chaque mot et occupe le temps laissé par les ellipses qui se glissent entre les mots au fil du texte sous forme de figures de style, glissements de sens, sons et langages, et avec eux ce sont autant de chaînages morphosyntaxiques qui rythment la narration. On voit s'y faufiler l'histoire du *Palais des Orties*, une histoire toujours autre, redémarrant sans cesse autour de saynettes de la vie de tous les jours, motifs et points de fuite nouveaux. Ces ellipses s'imposent ainsi à l'imaginaire du lecteur, lui procurent des images qui lui permettront d'interpréter ou de résoudre toute énigme selon son imagination ou les représentations qu'il s'en fait.

Concernant les ellipses, Joëlle Papillon avait déjà pertinemment observé, encore au sujet de *La Nouvelle Pornographie*, que « si la syntaxe déraile avec ces phrases suspendues dans le vide, le sens, lui, n'en est pas affecté, et notre imagination [...] les complètent. Les parenthèses encadrant la suspension s'impriment comme cicatrices de l'ellipse, ouvrant des fenêtres de distraction dans le texte [...] » (Papillon, 54). Dans *Le Palais des Orties*, on peut adapter cette remarque et dire que c'est la construction linéaire qui déraile, ouvre des fenêtres de distraction dans le texte et stimule notre imagination. En effet, l'histoire se retourne de la forme vers le fond et inversement, laisse entendre l'écho de mots ellipsés et, tout à coup, donnés à prononcer « sans état d'âme » (252). Sans plus d'explications, Marie Nimier qui nous fait distinguer les « petites taches blanches qui sont apparues sur les orties » (186) éclaire, dans le champ des possibles, de nouvelles perspectives qui pourraient gagner l'histoire de toute l'humanité, mais dont il faut choisir, imaginer le sens.

Par ailleurs, l'autrice repousse les limites en remontant à la source du langage comme clef et lieu de jouissance et de créativité et, avec elles, au plaisir du jeu avec les mots. Avec le sens et le son de mots rapprochés de façon inattendue par un ensemble d'ellipses qui structurent le roman et donnent de la souplesse au déroulement du texte, Marie Nimier remplace les règles académiques de rédaction d'un récit par la gratuité du jeu, les jeux de mots et la fantaisie verbale, invente et libère un espace de roman, une gourmandise qu'elle offre et partage. Selon David Gascoigne, à propos de *Photo-Photo*, le douzième roman de l'autrice, l'espace du roman s'ouvre avec « le choc de la rencontre entre l'imaginaire [...] et ce qu'il y a de plus banalement réel ». Il précise que :

le lecteur découvre sans cesse dans l'écriture de Marie Nimier, que cette jonction entre deux plans divergents, entre le réel et l'imaginaire, le référentiel et le figuratif, peut se trouver à n'importe quelle échelle, au niveau soit du simple mot, soit de toute la construction narrative [et que]je vide qui s'ouvre [. . .] peut représenter [. . .] une source d'angoisse, mais pour l'auteur il est l'espace ludique indispensable à la création. (Gascoigne 98)

En cherchant à comprendre comment, bien qu'atteignant son paroxysme, le suspense initial cède le pas au plaisir du texte, il devient captivant de s'intéresser à la construction narrative de ce roman qui nous fait prendre part à son jeu en même temps que l'autrice nous prend au sien, instillant ainsi un principe de récursivité qui nous ligote au fonctionnement du texte, fait appel à la fonction métalinguistique du langage en tant qu'idéation ou, autrement dit, à un processus créatif de nouvelles idées et de nouveaux ressentis aussi bien concrets, abstraits ou sensoriels. On constate que la construction narrative active la démarche de synecdoque présumée, la concrétise en un espace de jonction qui repousse, ici encore, un angle de deux plans divergents, mais, pour ainsi dire circulaire, afin que puissent se mêler ceux de la fiction et du réel avec celui de l'imaginaire, et ceux de l'imaginaire de l'autrice avec celui de chaque lecteur. Enfin, cette construction est aussi susceptible d'illustrer un tour d'horizon complet, de remonter le temps, de vivre dans l'instant ou de poursuivre un cycle, et encore de s'imaginer et de se projeter dans l'avenir. Comme s'il s'agissait du déroulement du film de la vie, passant de la mise en exergue d'une simple date au bout à bout d'images et de scènes que relie les métaphores et tout particulièrement la métaphore filée du fil à linge évoquée dès la première scène du roman à celle des lessives des aïeux, l'autrice laisse le lecteur relier les fils, imaginer le nœud de l'intrigue. Tandis que Marie Nimier décrit, semble filmer Nora, comme en amorce, se retournant, le linge fait figure d'écran entre champ et contre-champ, entre histoire et réalité. En contre coup de ce retournement, l'histoire nous regarde : le face à face Nora-Fred est tout autant celui du lecteur avec l'histoire. Entraînant ces derniers à se remémorer Virginia Woolf décédée le 28 mars 1941, un vendredi, autant que Joëlle Gonthier se lançant dans l'aventure collective de la manifestation de « La Grande Lessive » précisément le jeudi 28 mars 2019, date contemporaine de l'écriture du *Palais des Orties*, Marie Nimier, pour ainsi dire, au jour le jour, laisse imaginer la persistance de nos problèmes de société, provoque un face-à-face avec l'histoire, le convertit en face-à-face avec les problèmes de société reconnus, et sollicite notre participation pour les solutionner.

En outre, l'autrice, de fait, étayant l'espace narratif de nombreux faisceaux porteurs de motifs divers, éprouve la résistance du texte, lui donne envergure et « temps long » qui vont de pair avec une lecture à plusieurs niveaux qui entraîne toujours ailleurs, dans l'espace et le temps, le langage, nos imaginations et le texte auquel elle donne une portée linéaire plurielle. Il nous semble retrouver ici, à propos de l'écriture de Marie Nimier, l'approche imagée de « la technique du gant » relevée par Marinella Termite :

la technique du « gant » qui semble revêtir un espace à priori défini [. . .] mais qui, au fond, n'habille pas l'écriture. Le besoin de créer des vides, la nécessité de jouer sur les prises de distance finissent par mettre au point des formes de renversement, de détournement capables de questionner [. . .] les différents débuts possibles, en envisageant d'autres bifurcations pour une histoire apparemment sans histoire, entament le retournement du gant narratif [. . .] alors que les ellipses, les raccourcis commencent ainsi à être mis en place pour qu'ils puissent créer les vides nécessaires au démarrage d'une intrigue. (CRR, 300-2)

D'une ellipse à une autre, allant jusqu'à les réduire au blanc qui sépare un mot d'un autre, une image d'une autre, un son d'un autre, Marie Nimier instaure une ponctuation visible et figurative qui travaille en surface un réseau de mots et expressions dont l'acuité et la mobilité soudaines retournent le « temps long » en « temps court », ne cesse de faire ricocher la linéarité du texte en faisant passer, sous forme d'épiphanies non maîtrisables, images et idéations qui transgressent sans cesse les axes du langage du récit.

Tel un épais tissu de flanelle multiples extensible, le texte laisse respirer le roman, confère à la construction narrative un espace de liberté illimité dans lequel se déploient des figures de style génératrices d'extension de sens. Métaphores, métonymies, synecdoques et symboles se succèdent sur l'axe syntagmatique du roman, tandis que sur l'axe paradigmatique les mots, pourvoyeurs de déplacements de sens, mettent en scène polysémies, homonymies, paronymies, et toutes sortes d'inversions, détournements, répétitions et allusions qui font entendre qu'il y a des mots dans les mots, des ellipses dans les ellipses. Cet ensemble structural laisse imaginer au dos de cette flanelle langagière que l'autrice déplie une doublure satinée glissante. De façon remarquable, la construction narrative dont les outils sont ici contrastes, ambiguïtés, équivoques, trucages de décors et truchements de personnages traduit, en ce qui concerne l'autrice, le choix de donner vie au suspens, de montrer ce qu'il a de caché, mais aussi de laisser planer questions, imprécision et sens virtuel qui font la part belle au rêve et à l'imagination.

Ce n'est qu'avec du recul, en toute fin de lecture, que de nouvelles impressions se bousculent. De point d'interrogation en point d'interrogation jusqu'au « pourquoi ? » (255) de la dernière page, de paragraphe en paragraphe, d'espace blanc en espace blanc, – il nous semble que l'excipit n'en soit pas « vraiment » un. Au cours de cette dernière page, entre une ultime astérisque et la partie manquante du mot « Fin », pendant que Nora passe en revue les personnages et lieux stratégiques de sa narration, l'impression de roman qui continue se confirme et peut s'interpréter comme un système de représentation créé par Marie Nimier qui donne à Nora la possibilité de se représenter et de nous représenter sans cesse son histoire sous forme de présentations toujours autres et renouvelées, susceptibles de soulever interprétations et perspectives nouvelles.

Le paratexte qui suit dans lequel Marie Nimier remercie « Anne Sylvestre pour sa chanson *Les gens qui doutent*, qui passait à la radio juste au moment où [elle a] envoyé ce roman chez Gallimard » conforte par ses paroles dans cette impression :

J'aime ceux qui paniquent
 Ceux qui sont pas logiques
 Enfin, pas comme il faut
 Ceux qui, avec leurs chaînes
 Pour pas que ça nous gêne
 Font un bruit de grelot

Le paratexte, lui aussi, semble prendre la place et jouer le rôle de prologue d'une histoire qui reprend et qui « commence vraiment ». Stipulant qu'il s'agit d'un roman et d'une histoire fictive, il attire l'attention sur un contrat de lecture fictive qui a toutefois un pied dans la réalité. Le bruit de grelot de cette chanson actuelle réveille le tintement du grelot que Fred portait à son bracelet de cheville lors de son arrivée au Palais des Orties. Ce même grelot fait imaginer l'homosexualité de femmes étrangères, ou encore celui des grelots portés par les pestiférés lors de la peste Noire à Rouen en 1348. La peste Noire évoque, elle, les médecins au masque de corbeaux au long bec blanc, les enterreurs et l'image colportée depuis des corbeaux oiseaux porte-malheur ou encore le culte de Saint Roch soignant les pestiférés et sauvé à son tour par son chien ou encore ce culte faisant penser à l'image de Saint Roch et son chien désignant depuis deux personnes inséparables. De maillon en maillon, de métaphore en métaphore, ce chaînage et cette succession d'ellipses accompagne la présence de corbeaux et corneilles confondus qui hantent tout du long ce roman tandis que Nora et Fred, amoureuses l'une de l'autre, deviennent inséparables et que l'attachement indéfectible du chien de la ferme à ses maîtres, d'emblée, ne se manifeste plus que pour Fred, faisant prémonitoirement imaginer l'inévitable union de Fred et Nora. Tant ce texte affleure l'exception, il aura fallu tout le temps du roman et plus pour retrouver les traces de mots et images qui ont marqué les imaginaires et mémoires, n'ont cessé de rebondir tout au long du roman, et de certains qui continuent de ressurgir laissant imaginer et anticiper une suite à cette histoire, et de certains encore à imaginer nous-mêmes, et à entendre au-delà du roman. Ce processus de reprise entretenu par l'autrice qui ne cesse d'entraîner à son rythme tout autant le déroulement que l'ordre narratif de l'histoire et du roman, laisse imaginer pour le premier des tracés de lignes parallèles échelonnées à plusieurs niveaux, pour le second la géométrie d'une construction symétrique et, pour l'ensemble, une impression d'uniformité paradoxalement solidaire de la permanence d'une dualité latente ubiquitaire et protéiforme qui prend possession du texte.

Alors que ce processus de reprise, sans explication ni autre forme de transition que le rythme qu'il donne à tout le récit se transforme en phénomène de reprise, il semble utile de s'intéresser aux agencements grammaticaux et enchaînements lexicaux de mots, phrases, paragraphes qui servent à alimenter le moteur stylistique à la fois représentatif et constitutif de cette narration. A ce moment du roman, alors que le texte aborde l'excipit, sous l'impulsion du moteur stylistique arrivé au summum de son efficacité, les donné à voir et donné à entendre se côtoient. Ils laissent imaginer une présentation perceptible et parlante de cette histoire et un roman qui s'organise sur le

modèle des langues et de leur double articulation autour du sens et du son et, par-là, en transparence, une invitation au dialogue au cours d'un roman ouvert. Ce dernier, au départ d'unités de sens et unités phoniques, entame la conversion d'images en images premières, de mots en termes et modèles, faisant fonction d'embrayeurs de discours qu'aucun apriori ne contraint et qui transforment performativement les ellipses et ce que tracés parallèles et symétrie laissent imaginer en espace de liberté et de vérité. En toute fin du roman, Fred partie, Nora continuant sa narration voit remonter à la surface les images qui émaillaient sa narration à l'arrivée de Fred et d'autres qui s'attachaient, ça et là, à sa présence. Avec les yeux du moment, bouleversée, retournée, elle revoit ces images initiales mais devenues fades se confondre avec le contexte du moment, lui aussi perturbé et changer de tonalité, de gamme et de registre. Ne cherchant, ni à nier, ni à effacer ces images, elle se les représente sans concession, dans sa narration avec des mots sans prétention particulière, qui dévoilent, pour chacune d'elles, leur vraie nature de simple image redevenue originelle qui lorsqu'on la retourne, présente ou sa face cachée ou sa face visible. Cette succession d'images premières de vérités fait imaginer le retournement du sens du texte et de la narration dont les images qui se retrouvent en fin du roman rejoignent, sans que cette fin ne soit un obstacle, celles du début du roman. Le déroulement de toutes ces images, associé au retournement isolé de chacune d'elles en train de poursuivre elle-même son propre motif et sa propre ligne de fuite, se retrouve rallié à un nouveau point de fuite commun de vérité qui fait office de nouveau point de départ et qui laisse chacun imaginer la narration reprendre autour d'une histoire qu'il est possible, qu'il faut imaginer autant que tout ce qui compose ce retournement sous l'angle élargi du toujours plus juste.

Ainsi en cette fin de texte, comme point de départ de ce parcours, ce sont des images fixes visuelles, olfactives couplées à des images mentales qui se répondent ; « La voiture [qui] sentait l'herbe coupée » (254) et la perspective de « feuilles [. . .] suspend[ues . . .] aux rétroviseurs intérieurs des voitures » (254) remplacent le « vert cru des champs d'Orties » (10) et « les parfums d'ambiance » (214) imaginés par Fred. C'est ensuite une imagerie sociale qui montre le comportement de Noé préadolescent, sa façon de se cantonner dans son monde, à sa musique et à ses habitudes, choisissant d'écouter « un morceau qu'il semblait connaître » (254), jugeant tout le reste « Nul, nul, nul » (254). Elle se substitue à l'image mouvante de Noé dansant, à son attitude créative d'enfant fabriquant « Une danse. [. . .] La danse des mamans » (139) et son empressement à « chercher la musique qui va avec », (139), à celle du jeune garçon s'enfermant dans sa chambre à lui, et qui pourtant, surmontant sa réticence prudente et naturelle pour ce qui lui est étranger, inconnu, goûte la *Marmaille* de l'ancien woofeur jusqu'à ce que « en insistant, le goût [vienne] » (34). C'est aussi la face cachée d'une image qui représente un monde d'adultes qui s'est habitué à cette façon d'être de nombreux jeunes qui lui sont proches, la face cachée aussi d'une étape qui précède notre comportement d'adulte qui, s'il ne s'en détache pas, se limitera souvent à des stéréotypes, se bornera aux images mortes de clichés qui vont de pair avec l'ignorance, l'erreur, le mensonge et la violence parfois, mais toujours avec le manque d'imagination.

Dans la continuité de ce processus, le « filon à exploiter » (254) se substitue à l'image poétique du « territoire à explorer » (135) permettant à cette image sonore allitérative de servir sans explication de transition à d'autres images sonores et de s'en faire l'écho. Ainsi encore, sous forme d'images mentales inconscientes, l'image mouvante et sonore des jumeaux roulant « en sens inverse » (254) actionnant leur sonnette fait remonter les souvenirs de Nora, imaginer des larmes éventuelles et un revirement de sens : « Je me revoyais avec Fred, sur la route du village, la première fois » (254). Ainsi, par analogie, une image prend la place de l'image mentale précédente, à ce moment-là consciente, en l'occurrence du beau rêve de Nora qui ne s'est pas réalisé « je nous imaginai assises l'une à côté de l'autre dans le sens contraire de la marche » (108). C'est encore le bruit de sonnette, à présent perceptible, qui reproduit l'image sonore inquiétante qui avait fait battre le cœur de Nora, à laquelle elle avait pensé en entendant le grelot « la première fois » (254) qui s'étend à la métaphore d'un cœur prêt à « s'arrêter de battre » (250). Tandis que le bruit s'éloigne, l'image fixe du grelot et du foulard de Fred cachés dans la réserve dont Nora « allai[t. . .] avoir besoin » (254) suggère aussi un point de départ pour l'histoire. Ce bruit relance le geste du gant lancé par Fred, le trouble de Nora oubliant ses gants sur le tracteur, le prix des gants qu'il faut se procurer pour se protéger des orties et finalement l'histoire du *Palais des Orties* à prendre avec des gants.

Sous forme à présent d'image mentale construite, l'image naturelle des « soldats pacifiques, avec des masques sur le dos [. . .] qui allaient et venaient le long du tronc » (254) retrouve celles des métaphores guerrières et sensuelles des « colonnes de soldats qui prenaient le tronc d'assaut [. . .] à la queue leu leu, collés l'un à l'autre » (56). La représentation métaphorique des masques des soldats emboîte le pas à celle sociale des langages du père de Fred et des « gendarmes », de celui de Fred et des « punaises rouges » (56), de celui de Nora elle-même parlant d'insectes qui « s'accouplent » (57) pour reprendre le terme et l'image sonore d'homosexualité prononcé par Fred : « Je ne sais pas si l'homosexualité existe chez les punaises [. . .] s'ils ont du plaisir » (57). De fil en aiguille ce langage imagé fait entendre un message masqué lui aussi qui, en faisant prononcer le mot homosexualité, montre comme preuve préexistante à sa représentation la place des punaises dans la nature et par extension et analogie la place de l'homosexualité dans la biodiversité du vivant et par déduction la nécessité de connaître pour représenter, se représenter, imaginer. Pour figurer ces métaphores, il ne reste que « des soldats qui allaient et venaient le long du tronc. Des soldats pacifiques [. . .] qui faisaient l'amour en marchant pendant des jours, des heures » (254), et leur image mouvante suivie de leur image fixe et autre point de départ pour l'histoire lorsqu'ils « s'arrê[ent] nez à nez » (254) en position de défi ou hésitant à faire comme Fred « volte-face » (13) ou comme Nora elle-même à présent posant et se posant la question « Qui céderait sa place à l'autre ? » (254) dont nous pouvons nous figurer qu'elle signifie : allait-elle céder à l'injonction de Fred : « ne me cherche pas, sinon tu vas me trouver » (254) ou, au lieu de quoi, à la place, allait-elle rester avec Simon ?

Nous concernant faut-il nous poser la question de nature et nature humaine, et alors que, dans ce contexte renoué le suspens reprend, ne faut-il pas extrapoler la

perspective de questions d'un ordre différent ou la possibilité que cette question en cache d'autres d'un genre, de nature différente ? Dans cette histoire fictive, quelle suite Nora va-t-elle donner à sa narration ? Dans la réalité y aura-t-il une place accordée à une histoire qui pourra prendre la place de celle-ci ? Lorsqu'elle succède à la répétition, aux allitérations et assonances Nul, nul, nul, explorer et exploiter, au bruit des sonnettes des vélos et à l'image mentale du bruit du grelot, à la phrase doublement balancée « si l'homosexualité [. . .] s'ils ont du plaisir » (57) aux mots rimés et binaires queue leu leu, nez à nez, « La voix de Noé » (254), plate, prend la place des mimiques et de la voix de Fred, « grave, légèrement poudrée » (11) et celle aussi de façon touchante, jusque-là non verbale de l'enfant, du jeune Noé s'exprimant par gestes, dansant, laissant parler son corps. Elle se transforme en une nouvelle image sonore non lexicalisée qui résonne sous une simple forme phonique laissant entrevoir la justesse d'un son pur.

Succédant et se substituant à l'image sonore du bruit du grelot, opposant celle de Nora ou de Fred ou celle de la narratrice Nora, la voix devient le phénomène de liaison qui donne au discours narratif sa fluidité. Ainsi, lorsque la voix de Noé se fait entendre, elle devient le lien qui remplace par d'autres les images mentales qui assaillent Nora et en orchestre le sens : « La voix de Noé interrompit mes pensées. Il me demandait si j'avais vu la photo de la nouvelle woofeuse, celle que Simon avait repérée sur le site » (254-5). Sans transition, elle bouleverse la narration en cours de Nora, substitue au style direct que Nora utilisait le style indirect qui, en même temps qu'il fait irruption dans le texte, sème le doute, questionne, retourne l'histoire et la fait réimaginer. Cette phrase retrouve dans notre mémoire cet enchaînement situé en début de deuxième moitié de la narration de Nora mais que nous n'avions pas, en première lecture, reconnue ni comme modèle narratif ni comme principe générique constructif associant dans tout le roman liaison et comparaison : « Ou héberger une nouvelle woofeuse. Simon avait repéré une candidate qui lui plaisait, disponible à partir du mois d'août. Izabel Rumí désirait [. . .] Izabel Rumí serait [. . .] » (144-5). Notre attention est retenue par la position inhabituelle en tête de phrase de la conjonction de coordination « Ou » qui, au départ du point final de la phrase précédente, coordonne en deux temps ce qui lui précède, c'est-à-dire l'installation éventuelle de Fred dans la caravane et le fait logique qu'Anaïs allait devoir se réinstaller dans sa chambre mais marque une pause pour les coordonner à ce qui suit, c'est-à-dire l'installation d'une nouvelle woofeuse dans la caravane. Uniquement enchaîné au verbe héberger transitif et à l'infinitif, ce « Ou » fait pressentir l'implacable imminence de l'éventualité au Palais des Orties d'une woofeuse qui prendra la place de Fred. Lorsque Nora, en utilisant le plus-que-parfait, dit que Simon avait repéré une candidate, elle indique bien que la future candidate a été choisie et, en continuant avec des simulacres de mode indicatif et imparfait, qu'elle en a retenu les nom et prénom « Izabel Rumí désirait [. . .] Izabel Rumí appréciait [. . .] Izabel Rumí s'entendrait [. . .] Izabel Rumí serait [. . .] » (145).

Ce court passage à l'imparfait narratif, « je me revoyais avec Fred, la première fois » (254), s'inscrit avec fluidité dans la lignée du reste de la narration, assure la continuité avec l'histoire en train de se vivre racontée dès le prologue au style direct, et au

présent ponctuel et étendu : « Et ce jour-là, il y a du vent. [. . .] L'histoire commence un jeudi. Elle commence au printemps » (9). En tant qu'homologue du temps présent, cet imparfait ne concerne pas la temporalité de la narration, préserve tout ce qui constitue l'actualité de la locutrice Nora à ce moment de son histoire et a pour effet de continuer à situer le procès dans une actualité plus vaste en commençant par évoquer des faits à venir, hypothétiques, qui devraient, eux, être exclus de l'actualité ou de la réalité vivante de Nora. Elle se les représente ici, nous les propose sous forme d'images virtuelles qu'elle énumère d'euphémisme en euphémisme. Le glissement et le doublement de l'imparfait par le conditionnel passé s'est fait tout naturellement en raison de leur similitude homophonique. Ce dernier temps intensifie les images, en renvoie un écho différent de celui de la réalité du moment qui est aussi trompeur que l'est la figure de style de l'euphémisme suggérant qu'il faille parfois se méfier des mots. Ainsi, en préparant la caravane ou pour Fred « Ou » pour une nouvelle woofeuse, Nora, sous la forme d'images virtuelles qu'elle se force à connoter positivement anticipe sous la forme d'une figure de style à type de prolepse la présence de la nouvelle candidate au Palais des Orties. Sans le dire, sous forme d'ellipses et de préterition, elle attire constamment en parallèle et systématiquement sous forme d'analepse l'attention sur Fred et sur tout ce qui accompagnait son arrivée et sa présence au Palais des Orties. Vues sous l'angle de figures de style, elle oppose les images qui accompagneraient la présence d'Izabel au Palais des Orties à celles qui accompagnèrent l'arrivée et la présence de Fred au Palais des Orties qui servent ainsi de référence juste et réelle et, par différence, performativement de vérité. Sans, ni juxtaposer ni subordonner les images les unes aux autres, elle réinvente son histoire, la reconstruit si bien que, toujours porteuse de suspens, ces images taisent, cachent et rejettent le véritable sens de l'événement à affronter : le départ programmé de Fred ou leur séparation éventuelle.

A partir de ces images positivement connotées, en une page, Marie Nimier déroule un procédé double de liaison et comparaison en faisant raconter à Nora, dans ce passage de sa narration, tout ce qui lui est arrivé, sans que rien ne s'y oppose, tout seul, au départ de rien et qui a pourtant, pour elle, quelque chose d'inavouable. Cette forme de coordination enchaîne mots et phrases avec pour seuls indices les sens autonomes ou spécifiques des outils que sont les adverbes déterminants, en tant que termes et marques, groupes de termes, adjectifs, interrogations adverbialisées, le tout se glissant de locutions adverbiales en expressions du langage parlé et à ses homonymes et glissements paronymiques soulignés par des clins d'œil humoristiques. Se parlant à elle-même, nommant Izabel par son prénom, elle se la représente comme une autre Fred qui ne serait « pas particulièrement intéressée par la culture de l'ortie » (145). Elle raconte, énumère « Izabel s'entendrait bien avec Noé », rappelant qu'avec Fred « ça trainait. *Au moins. Un peu* [sic] » (36). En continuant d'agiter ce jeu d'adverbes qui résonne comme un trousseau de clefs, elle rappelle le baiser qu'elle-même et Fred ont échangé et, la phrase qui suivit rimée, scandée « Ça : ma légère résistance. Sa légère insistance » (122). En glissant du son au sens, elle attire l'attention sur la nouvelle woofeuse et « sa bouche n'aurait rien de particulier, ses lèvres ne seraient ni répugnantes ni appétissantes, ce ne

seraient pas des lèvres à embrasser, voilà tout. Des lèvres pour manger, sourire [. . .], articuler et bayer aux corneilles : c'était déjà beaucoup » (145) une formule qui résonne à la manière des premiers mots qu'elle a échangés avec Fred : « mon *au moins* et son *un peu* [sic] » (22). Tout se passe comme si elle comparait avec le fruit défendu la chose secrète à cacher, ce qu'elle vient de raconter à propos de Fred : « le goût de sa bouche dans ma bouche. Ses lèvres enveloppantes [. . .] la chaleur de ce baiser. [. . .] Et après ? Rien. Surtout rien » (122). Il en est de même avec l'épisode des corneilles qui trahit sa liaison avec Fred, une liaison qui n'a pas son pareil comme, justement, elle venait de le sous-entendre au moyen d'une nouvelle phrase conjonctive après avoir vu le film évoquant la vie amoureuse de Colette « la même chose avec sa langue, ses lèvres douces ... » (123-4). Sur le modèle d'un texte dont les limites chronologiques et spatiales sont violées, du « pas particulièrement » au « rien de particulier », la narration, emprunte les raccourcis des figures de style, des rapprochements phonétiques, des expressions et sentences du langage parlé, les oppose aux détours et barrières des procédés narratifs conventionnels.

Cette narration voit se concrétiser un principe d'alternance et une autre présentation de l'histoire elle aussi tout autant stylistique que constructive. En effet, une pluralité d'images défile : images virtuelles et réelles, images trompeuses et de vérité. La narration évoque Izabel ou Fred et Nora et entrecroise cette histoire avec celle racontée auparavant dans le texte de la vie amoureuse de l'écrivaine Colette comme d'une personne anonyme, tout autant qu'à celle de Virginia Wolf dont Anaïs parlait à Noé comme d'une amie. De la même manière, la narration mêle l'histoire de Fred se réclamant parfois du prénom Frederica avec la chanson éponyme de Charles Trenet à quelques mots près, ou encore avec celle du paquebot de Frederica comme lieu réel de sa conception. L'alternance, au fur et à mesure du déroulement du texte, comme point de départ ou de transition avec des sujets d'ordre essentiel permet de faire rebondir les déclis imaginatifs du lecteur et transforme chacun de ces départs en antécédent. Ces antécédents, ainsi investis du rôle d'embrayeurs de discours, gagnent les imaginaires, y laissent germer l'idée de mouvement perpétuel entretenu par l'énergie des mots et ouvrent les perspectives de mouvement alternatif, révolution et activité créatrice.

Avec ce recul, les deux phrases suivantes, séparées d'une centaine de pages dans le livre, dont les cinq mots en commun, « nouvelle woofeuse » et « Simon avait repéré », illustrent et participent de ce principe d'alternance :

Phrase 1 : « La voix de Noé interrompit mes pensées. Il me demandait si j'avais vu la photo de la nouvelle woofeuse, celle que Simon avait repérée sur le site » (254-5).

Phrase 2 : « Ou héberger une nouvelle woofeuse. Simon avait repéré une candidate qui lui plaisait, disponible à partir du mois d'août. Izabel Rumí désirait [. . .] Izabel Rumí serait [. . .] » (144-5).

En effet, ces phrases se situent dans deux paragraphes différents du roman, l'un situé au milieu de la narration de Nora, l'autre à la fin de celle-ci. Sans qu'il soit explicite qu'il

y ait un rapport entre elles et qu'elles soient comparables, chacune d'elles, par contre, attire l'attention, au moment où elle est prononcée, sur ce qui lui sert d'antécédent ailleurs dans le roman pour, à son tour, faire fonction d'antécédent ailleurs dans le roman et attirer, entraîner les regards sur d'autres perspectives.

La première, en tête de paragraphe traduit la décision de Nora de connoter systématiquement de façon positive des images reprises au tout début du roman à partir de l'arrivée de Fred. Elle les prend pour modèle et s'en sert d'antécédent pour anticiper et rejeter la perspective d'éventualités qui la taraudent à ce moment du récit. Elle déguise et confesse à force d'euphémismes ces images reprises qui serviront performativement d'antécédent à l'idée de mensonge qui fait son nid dans un texte enchaînant analepse et prolepse, le virtuel et la réalité. La seconde phrase, avec ces mêmes cinq mots prononcés par Noé, enchaînés à la réponse de Nora « Non, je ne l'avais pas vue, pourquoi ? » (255), émerge juste après ce passage qui lui sert d'antécédent et durant lequel elle vient de reprendre, cette fois dépourvus de toute connotation, les mots qui lui ont servi au début de la narration à noter les images qui l'ont marquée à l'arrivée de Fred au Palais des Orties. Cette phrase toujours, mais solidaire de son point d'interrogation final devient l'antécédent : à présent, au sortir de l'analepse et au bord de l'ellipse qui la sépare du paragraphe suivant, elle enchaîne aux images de mensonge des images de vérité.

Ces images dénotées, redevenues premières qui persistent, elles, vraiment ça et là dans le roman sont, à leur tour, performativement des images génériques dont l'une révèle et appelle l'autre et qui laissent envisager images et termes génériques ouvrant l'histoire aux idées de permanence, reproductibilité, commutativité dans le temps et l'espace. En tant que pièces d'assemblage, elles donnent à la fluidité du roman le sens d'unité et de lien entre les motivations poursuivies et l'idée de renouvellement à caractère évolutif, perpétuel et de réactualisation laissant imaginer l'infini de cette histoire dans le temps. Chacun de ces termes génériques plus ou moins imagés, antécédent à son tour d'un point d'interrogation révèle et appelle ubiquitairement dans le roman d'autres termes, images et représentations, qui, alliant vérité et questionnement engagent tout le roman dans ce sens. Cet enchaînement, à la fois narratif et constructif, au départ duquel se filent, de façon répétitive, points de départ syntaxiques et figures de style particulièrement choisies, ébauche, dès son début, la perspective d'une construction dont la trame qui se noue autour de la forme et du fond touche et la morphologie et le cœur de l'histoire.

L'histoire, comme si elle reproduisait une motivation, tout en progressant, repart de zéro, faisant, à son tour fonction d'antécédent pour une histoire qui reprend. La condition de cette progression se fait par le passage de la voix à la prise de parole de Nora lorsqu'elle interrompt sa narration pour confier le rêve qu'elle a fait deux fois. Avec du recul, en tant qu'image supplémentaire et image inconsciente reconstruite par la narratrice Nora émotionnellement perturbée, son rêve répété, mais présenté avec la prétérition comme figure de style, s'avère être une synthèse combinatoire éclairant le surgissement de toutes ces images en en traduisant le sens au moyen des glissements

des sons vers le sens : « Depuis l'arrivée de Frederica, j'ai fait deux fois ce rêve, presque à l'identique : je monte dans un train qui s'arrête, pour toujours repartir. C'est une sensation difficile à expliquer. Un train qui ne s'arrête jamais de repartir » (61). Ellipse et transition, sans le dire, mais en le laissant entendre, ce rêve évoque la poésie de Verlaine en communique la musicalité, la rime, la répétition, l'allitération, la fausse coupe et par analogie les symboles, tabous, euphémisme et litote à la fois, antiphrase et prétérition.

Je fais souvent ce rêve étrange et pénétrant
 D'une femme inconnue, et que j'aime, et qui m'aime
 Et qui n'est, chaque fois, ni tout à fait la même
 Ni tout à fait une autre [. . .]
 Son nom ? [. . .] doux et sonore
 Son regard [. . .]
 Et, pour sa voix, lointaine, et calme, et grave, elle a
 L'inflexion des voix chères qui se sont tues. (Verlaine 87)

A ces détours ou raccourcis poétiques s'attachent les raccourcis du jeu avec le sens et le son des mots. Il prend en route la métaphore esquissée du train par l'image sonore de Nora qui « déraile » (13) qui ne maîtrise plus son langage, qui a « abboy[é] » (14) comme le suggère le mot « chien » et la présence du chien qui pourtant n'aboie pas et qui joue encore avec la symétrie en évoquant l'image de Fred qui débarque et continue avec l'image du train encore qu'elle rêvait de prendre avec Fred dans « le sens contraire de la marche » (108).

En conclusion, il se signe entre la romancière et ses lecteurs un contrat de lecture imaginative qui, résonnant sur le lien social, fait glisser, sous l'angle d'un point de vue participatif et performatif notre imagination hors du livre et l'histoire du *Palais des Orties* dans le domaine de la fiction et de la création contemporaine. De fait, Marie Nimier, en prenant pour auxiliaire la parole, offre au texte un espace imprévisible de liberté qui évolue entre impression et expression au gré des inventions du langage, qu'il soit celui des uns ou des autres, d'ici ou d'ailleurs, d'aujourd'hui, d'autrefois ou de demain. Chacun de ces langages amène avec lui ses mots, ses images, ses figures de style et son message linéaire. Ces langages, glissant du sens au son, ou l'inverse, en reliant unités phoniques et images sonores entre elles, donnent au roman une tonalité juste qui laisse imaginer que chaque message pourrait être une des lignes parallèles des portées d'une partition et s'avérer message de justesse. L'histoire, ainsi, se présente autour d'interprétations successives et de leurs réinterprétations complémentaires ou même diamétralement opposées, soudaines, changeant les niveaux de lecture et l'échelle du roman. A partir des constituants du langage, agencements sémantiques, sens et son, ce jeu de construction d'images concrètes ou abstraites, à retourner dans un sens ou dans l'autre pour les interpréter, démontre cette faculté de l'imagination de glisser les mots de l'un à l'autre, les uns dans les autres et d'en changer le sens. En laissant

physiquement entendre le langage, l'autrice le libère de sa structure conventionnelle organisée autour des relations sens-sens préétablies, pour qu'à son tour, avec le langage comme complice, le roman se prête à d'autres images à interpréter pour en imaginer soi-même le juste sens. Porté par les symétrie, commutativité, chaînage, parole, redondance et évolutivité du langage, cette histoire tend à notre imaginaire le piège de nouveaux points de vue à envisager, de questions et de solutions à réactualiser, et se démarque définitivement d'un principe d'épanadiplose. Plutôt que circuit en boucle fermée avec un début et une fin, qu'un verdict de comparaison, qu'un lien de subordination, ce roman poursuit le motif du questionnement.

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Comfort, Kathy. *Representations of Marginalized Populations in French WWI Literature: Muted Voices*. Lexington Books, 2023. 196 pp. ISBN: 978-1-66691-636-2 (Hardback); 978-1-66691-637-9 (eBook).

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Kathy Comfort's *Representations of Marginalized Populations in French WWI Literature: Muted Voices* examines the multifaceted ways in which a diverse group of five authors—Maxence Van der Meersch, Colette, Bakary Diallo, Blaise Cendrars, and Roland Dorgelès—depict World War I in their works. As a pivotal and traumatic moment in world history, the Great War has inspired a wide range of representations in literature and film. However, Comfort argues that the best-known literary depictions of World War I are predominantly shaped by the Eurocentric perspectives of white male writers, who focus primarily on combat experiences while often neglecting the experiences of marginalized groups. As Comfort notes, “Women’s voices in general, along with those of children, colonial troops, disabled veterans, and former combatants returning to civilian society are not often a part of the conventional World War I novel” (5).

Conversely, Comfort aims to provide a more nuanced, complex, and equitable view of this historical event, which has shaped—and continues to shape—the social, political, and cultural aspects of our contemporary world and our global experiences with ongoing conflicts in different regions. The meticulous and insightful analyses in each chapter offer a broad and inclusive perspective that foregrounds the “peripheral” fronts of the war, challenging the dominant narratives of male valor and sacrifice typically associated with the conflict. As Comfort puts it: “In a modest way, the present project contributes to the goal of reconnecting the fragments of World War I survivors by bringing together the narratives that shed light on what those on the periphery endured, in effect, re-centering war narratives to include the muted voices” (6). Comfort’s discussion of women’s experiences during the war is particularly noteworthy. By underscoring their multiple roles on the home front and their often selfless contributions to the war effort, Comfort portrays them as overlooked yet central agents during this period. Similarly, her analysis of the representation of colonial subjects and disabled soldiers constitutes a significant contribution to both historical and fictional accounts of the Great War.

One of the book's most significant threads is its focus on the material and psychological impacts of the Great War on these authors, all of whom experienced it firsthand. Comfort demonstrates that, from the violence and destruction wrought by the war, these authors crafted diverse literary accounts that can be read as trauma narratives stemming from the marginalized conditions of their authors or protagonists. These narratives also invite readers to reflect on a range of issues, including the roles of nature, the body, silence, and memory, as well as the potentially therapeutic functions of literature. If, as Comfort illustrates, our representations of the Great War have been largely shaped by fictional narratives (literature and film), these alternative narratives allow us to reimagine and understand the Great War differently. Another significant aspect of the book is its interdisciplinary approach. Comfort combines literary analysis, historical context, and cultural studies, enabling readers to grasp how the Great War and various wartime experiences have been critically shaped by discourses on gender, race, and disability. Moreover, Comfort deconstructs the traditional separation between the "military front" and the "home front," again foregrounding the roles played by "muted," marginalized agents in the war effort.

Each chapter, focusing on a specific author, provides a distinct account of the Great War. Chapter one examines Van der Meersch's *Invasion 14*, a contender for the Prix Goncourt in 1935, which presents an epic, Zolaesque realist narrative and is one of the few novels to depict the lives and suffering of civilians in the occupied North. While considered an important chronicle by historians, it is less recognized by literary scholars; Comfort convincingly argues that this novel offers a "psychosomatic" approach to the war experience. Chapter two focuses on Colette's war reporting, highlighting the specific sufferings and abuses faced by women, including sexual assaults and unwanted pregnancies. Colette's essays, Comfort writes, "are especially timely" because they "find their twenty-first-century equivalent in war-torn Ukraine" (2). In chapter three, Comfort examines one of the few accounts of the Great War from the perspective of a *tirailleur sénégalais* in Bakary Diallo's memoir *Forve-Bonté*. A significant dimension of this work is its grounding in the native Peuhl value system of its author, providing a rare non-Western perspective on the war. In chapter four, Comfort analyzes Blaise Cendrars's opposition to the glorification of the war and his focus on the French Foreign Legion, often overlooked in narratives of the Great War, in his "prose collage" *La Main coupée*. Chapter five looks at Roland Dorgelès's novel *Le réveil des morts*, where Comfort analyzes the author's portrayal of returning veterans grappling with the challenges of reintegration.

Comfort's scholarship not only enriches our understanding of WWI literature but also highlights complex stories that remain largely unheard, untold, or ignored. It is a welcome contribution to both literary studies and historical discourses surrounding World War I. Moreover, the book opens new perspectives on the complexities of war literature and experiences, emphasizing the critical importance of inclusive representations in both historical and fictional texts.

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La edición crítica de Graciela Maglia ilumina la obra de Helcías Martán Góngora (n. Guapi, el Cauca, 1920-1984, m. Cali), hijo mestizo de una familia adinerada. Su formación educativa católica dejó una huella duradera en su poesía. Como político, llegó a ocupar los cargos de Secretario de Educación del Cauca, Alcalde de Buenaventura y Representante a la Cámara. En estas funciones abogó por mejoras en la infraestructura de una región que, al pasar a las manos de los antiguos esclavizadores, avanzó muy poco, tanto en los recursos materiales como en los derechos humanos para la gran mayoría de los ciudadanos, muchos de los cuales eran afrodescendientes. Martán Góngora, por su compromiso con su región y su raza, utilizó la política y la literatura para representar a una población invisibilizada. En Bogotá, el caucano fundó el Club Negro de Colombia en 1939 y el Centro de Estudios Afrocolombianos en 1947. Martán Góngora es una de las grandes voces negras de la poesía de mediados del siglo XX de lengua española. El “renacimiento negro” de los últimos treinta años en Colombia, simbolizado en parte por la ley 70 (1993), junto a la donación de los archivos del autor al Instituto Caro y Cuervo en 2018, han permitido este “redescubrimiento” de un gran autor de más de 103 libros de índole literario a lo largo de sus cuarenta años de carrera artística.

Maglia enmarca su edición crítica con una introducción que explica por qué cayó en el olvido un escritor prolífico y premiado y por qué hay un renovado interés en su obra. Ella explica que los poemas antologizados representan una *summa poetica* de la obra del “escritor del mar” de 1939 a 1984, incluso obras inéditas y de poca circulación. Su meta es la integración del autor a los programas académicos nacionales. Sin embargo, sus alusiones a los estudios pioneros de Lawrence Prescott muestran que, además de un público nacional, Martán Góngora merece un público lector internacional, sobre todo dentro del marco de los estudios afro-diaspóricos. Con Guillén, Artel y Palés comparte la apreciación – problemática, es cierto – por la belleza femenina negra. Las

fiestas, la música y la alegría se juntan a la temática tradicional negrista, tal y como la jitanjáfora poética. Como otros poetas de su época, le inspiraron los músicos y los poetas afroamericanos, sobre todo los del Renacimiento de Harlem. Por otro lado, los que investigan el catolicismo de autores como Plácido apreciarán su poesía religiosa. El folclore hace su impacto a través de la transliteración del habla popular de los negros de la costa que trabajaban en el mar y los ríos, como los bogas de Candelario Obeso, agregando a estos los trabajadores de las minas del Pacífico.

Además de ser un estudio literario, el libro de Maglia hace un análisis material iluminador. Un interfolio de fotografías del archivo crea un juego de signos entre las imágenes de la vida del autor, sus manuscritos y su obra poética que seguramente rendirá sus propios estudios e invita al lector a visitar los archivos del autor en Bogotá para conocer otros elementos efímeros de su vida y obra. Peter Rondón Vélez explica cómo estos archivos fueron donados a la Biblioteca José Manuel Rivas Sacconi del Instituto Caro y Cuervo. Rondón Vélez nota la importancia de las dos revistas literarias que Martán Góngora fundó y las redes sociales que mantuvo como político, activista e intelectual. Aunque era de ascendencia triétnica, de piel clara y de gran privilegio social y económico, Martán Góngora siempre se comprometió con la clase trabajadora negra, sus tradiciones y su lucha por sus derechos. Rondón Vélez termina su ensayo con una bibliografía de obras escritas por y sobre el poeta.

El libro incluye una serie de estudios literarios que iluminan el texto desde distintas disciplinas. Por su parte, Maglia resalta la aproximación crítica-teórica a los textos del poeta caucano. Ella nota la intertextualidad con la oralitura negra del Pacífico, por un lado. Por otro, ella muestra que es un escritor latinoamericano que lleva influencia de – no determinación por – las formas literarias españolas y francesas. El análisis del léxico reafirma el anclaje del poeta en su contexto afro-colombiano. Las teorías del Glissant y Walcott sobre el Caribe, además de comparaciones con Artel, Guillén y Manuel Cabral también ayudan a iluminar la poética de un escritor de la costa sin quitarle su identidad regional. Además, la crítica reafirma la autonomía de la obra poética, siguiendo el pensamiento de Adorno. Maglia concluye afirmando que la temática del paisaje en la obra de Martán Góngora se presta a la ecocrítica aunque desafía la óptica anglocéntrica de ese campo al unir el paisaje con el individuo y la colectividad en un contexto híbrido latinoamericano. Carlos Alberto Valderrama Rentería explica el rol de Martán Góngora en la creación de una inteligencia nacional negra. El crítico muestra tanto los logros como las contradicciones de este gran pensador. Por un lado, él no distinguió entre poesía emancipadora escrita por negros de poesía estereotipada escrita por blancos – entre ellas, la *María* de Isaacs.

El libro de Maglia y sus colegas es de gran valor para cualquier curso universitario o proyecto de estudio sobre la afrodescendencia en Latinoamérica, sobre todo en el contexto de mediados del siglo XX. El paradigma del “Atlántico Negro” del mundo anglófono y las múltiples definiciones del “Caribe” se han expandido en los últimos años al “Pacífico negro” para abarcar a los afro-chilenos, ecuatorianos y peruanos, y Martán Góngora forma parte de esa tradición recientemente (re)descubierta. Una discusión

de la preservación y divulgación de los archivos de los escritores afrodescendientes merece un estudio detallado como este. Esta iluminación crítica de Martín Góngora es una introducción excelente a un pionero de las letras, el antepasado de los grandes innovadores de hoy en Colombia y todo el continente americano.

Lasso-Von Lang, Nilsa (ed.). *Gloria Guardia (Panamá): acercamientos críticos*. Casasola, 2024.
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Reviewed by Kathleen Cunniffe Peña
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Gloria Guardia (Panamá): Acercamientos críticos reúne en un solo tomo entrevistas, crítica, reseñas, biografía, sinopsis de obras, fotografías y otros materiales sobre la escritora panameña-nicaragüense Gloria Guardia (1940-2019). La editora, Nilsa Lasso-Von Lang, es ensayista, crítica y profesora de Literatura Latinoamericana Contemporánea en Moravian University. Nativa de Panamá, la doctora Lasso-Von Lang ha dedicado una gran parte de su carrera al estudio de la literatura centroamericana, y sobre Panamá ha publicado *Bertalicia Peralta: Life and Works* (2007) y “Evolution of Panamanian Poetry: 1950s to Present” (2009).

Este volumen se concentra en la vida, la obra, y el legado de Gloria Guardia, conocida por sus novelas como *El último juego* (1977) y *Libertad en llamas* (1999), además de otros textos donde a veces se entretajan distintas formas de narrativa, como fue el caso con sus *Cartas apócrifas* (1997). La editora anota: “Este tomo se originó con la intención de recopilar en un solo volumen los estudios más representativos sobre la obra de Gloria Guardia para facilitar el conocimiento profundo de sus contribuciones innovadoras a las letras” (23). Además de destacar la premiada obra de una escritora centroamericana cuyas ficciones no han recibido hasta ahora suficiente atención crítica, *Gloria Guardia (Panamá)* sirve como excelente recurso aun para los que ya conocen su obra. Incluye algunos estudios escritos expresamente para esta colección, una exposición iconográfica personal y profesional, además de la sección *In memoriam*, compuesta después del fallecimiento de la autora, con reflexiones por personas que la conocieron o estudiaron su obra.

El libro abre con introducciones por la editora, y por Azriel Bibliowicz, escritor, sociólogo y periodista colombiano, amigo personal y colaborador profesional de Gloria Guardia, quien observa: “Sin duda, Gloria fue una escritora multifacética que supo ejercer con distinción y gracia el periodismo, la novela, el cuento, el ensayo, la crítica literaria” (25). Confirma el aporte de la autora en la academia, como su colaboración en la primera Maestría de Escrituras Creativas de América Latina que se inauguró en la Universidad Nacional de Colombia. La segunda sección presenta una cronología bibliográfica que incluye las publicaciones de Guardia y honores que recibió.

La sección tres resume sus obras principales, incluso su trilogía nacional *Maramargo* compuesta de *El último juego* (1977), *Lobos al anochecer* (2006) y *El jardín de las cenizas* (2011), además de: *Estudio sobre el pensamiento poético de Pablo Antonio Cuadra* (1971), *La búsqueda del rostro* (1983), *Cartas apócrifas* (1997), *La carta* (1997), *Libertad en llamas* (1999), *En el corazón de la noche* (2014) y *Apenas ayer*, su última obra completada pero inédita. En la cuarta sección, se juntan entrevistas con la autora, comenzando con la que Lasso-Von Lang realizó en 2019. Además, aparecen entrevistas anteriores con Daniel Domínguez, Roy Boland Asegueda, Maida Watson, Consuelo Meza Márquez y María Roof. En la parte cinco, se reproducen discursos, conferencias, y ensayos de Gloria Guardia, comenzando con el famoso “La mujer en la Academia” pronunciado en la recepción pública de su incorporación a la Academia Panameña de la Lengua en 1989, seguido de su “Aspectos de la creación en la novela centroamericana”, conferencia dictada ante el Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo en 1998, y otros textos. En las secciones seis y siete, se recogen artículos de su larga labor periodística y se señalan sus contribuciones pedagógicas.

La sección ocho, “Reseñas, prólogos, presentaciones”, incluye algunas de las reseñas más destacadas de su obra, escritas por Lasso-Von Lang, Ramón Luis Acevedo, Azriel Bibliowicz y otros. “Acercamientos críticos”, capítulo nueve, es uno de los más extensos del volumen, ya que incluye quince artículos sobre la obra literaria de Guardia. Casi todos los autores de esta sección son críticos de renombre en el campo de las letras centroamericanas, y en sus análisis proveen un panorama de los temas recurrentes en el estudio de la autora: el feminismo y las relaciones de poder, la nueva novela histórica, el género epistolar, la construcción de la identidad femenina, la novela posnacional y la impunidad histórica.

Una bibliografía extensa, presentada en la sección diez, está dividida entre obras escritas por Guardia y sobre ella. *In memoriam* ofrece una colección inédita de recuerdos y reflexiones sobre el legado de Gloria Guardia, tanto en el mundo literario como en los corazones de los que compartieron amistades con ella. Finalmente, después de notas sobre la editora y los contribuyentes al tomo, aparece una colección de fotografías que trazan la historia familiar, trayectoria personal, conexiones artísticas y vida literaria de Guardia. Entre otros tesoros, aquí se encuentra un poema del poeta mexicano Efraín Huerta del año 1977, dedicado a la autora.

Al examinar la trayectoria y la obra multifacética de la autora, este tomo confirma sus importantes contribuciones a la literatura latinoamericana en general, y en específico al realismo poético y la novela histórica. Será lectura requerida para todo estudiante de su obra y brinda una valiosa contribución a la historia de las letras centroamericanas.

La serie de *Escritores Esenciales de la América Central* fue concebida por María Roof, profesora emérita de Howard University y editora general de la serie, con la intención de promocionar la lectura y el estudio de escritores cuya valiosa obra no ha recibido su merecida atención crítica. Este tomo representa el tercero de la serie, siguiendo a *Rosario Aguilar (Nicaragua): acercamientos críticos* (2017) editada por ella

misma, y *Julio Escoto (Honduras): Memoria e imaginación en su obra literaria* (2023), de Helen Umaña. Los tres volúmenes están disponibles en casasolaeditores.com y en Amazon. Los próximos volúmenes, anticipados en 2024 y 2025 respectivamente, serán sobre Ana María Rodas (Guatemala) y Quince Duncan (Costa Rica).