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*Impreso en España*
*Printed in Spain*
*Artes Gráficas Soler, S. L.*
*Valencia, 2007*
SPECTERS OF NAIVETÉ AND NUANCE IN VERLAINE’S *POÈMES SATURNIENS*

MATTHEW D. ANDERSON

**In** 1860, twenty-four years after the publication of his first collection of poems, *Poèmes saturniens*, Verlaine writes a *Critique des poèmes saturniens* in which he reaffirms his commitment to a poetics of naiveté:

Puis – car n’allez pas prendre au pied de la lettre mon “Art poétique” de *Jadis et naguère*, qui n’est qu’une chanson, après tout, – JE N’AURAI PAS FAIT DE THÉORIE! C’est peut-être naïf ce que je dis-là, mais la naïveté me paraît être un des plus chers attributs du poète, dont il doit se prévaloir à défaut d’autres. (722-723)

For Verlaine, here, to be naïve means to not “do theory.” He feels frustrated with the tendency (evidently as pronounced in his day as it is in ours) to read his celebrated lyric, “Art poétique,” as a declarative poetics – a frustration likely to strike most readers as puzzling, if not disingenuous, for if the poem does not declare a poetics, why name it such? Even if the tone of the title is one of irony and signals that the poem expresses an anti-poetics, Verlaine knows well enough that an anti-poetics is a poetics nonetheless; it would be naïve to claim otherwise.

James Lawler, in what remains one of the most sensitive essays we have on the topic of Verlaine’s naiveté, draws attention to how frequently Verlaine refers to naiveté in his writings and to the central place the term occupies in his lexicon. He argues persuasively that in his work Verlaine searches for a state of “self-conscious ‘naiveté’” (31) – a nuanced for-

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1 All references to Verlaine’s prose writings are to *Œuvres en prose complètes*, and all references to his poems are to *Œuvres poétiques complètes*.

2 Lawler writes, “[h]e started his career as a Parnassian whose aim was to be as ostentatious in form as possible; but his brilliantly rapid evolution showed he had learnt that the
mulation that neatly encapsulates a central tension at the heart of Verlaine’s poetics. For the trouble with naiveté, of course, is that it has to be involuntary; it cannot issue from a conscious intention. The question, then, is how, if at all, Verlaine finesse the tension between, on the one hand, his yearning for naiveté and, on the other, the self-consciousness that attends a poetics of anti-self-consciousness. The present article explores this question and reveals, through a close reading of “Nuit du walpurgis classique,” a poem in Poèmes saturniens, his first collection, that from the earliest stages of his career the structure of Verlaine’s poety is haunted by specters of naiveté and nuance.

1.

In another telling moment of the Critique, Verlaine implicitly reveals the connection, in his poetics, between naiveté and nuance. He states that although many of the governing aims and principles of his poetry may have shifted over the course of his career, his interest in nuance has remained constant and every bit as obdurate as the absolute of which it is the antipode: “En quoi j’ai changé partiellement. La sincérité, et à ses fins, l’impression du moment suivie à la lettre, sont ma règle préférée aujourd’hui. Je dis préféré, car rien d’absolu: tout vraiment est, doit être nuance” (720). The insistence on nuance echoes the aesthetic proclaimed in “Art poétique,” where Verlaine describes a further connection between nuance and musicality:

Car nous voulons la Nuance encor,
Pas la Couleur, rien que la nuance!
Oh! la nuance seule fiancée
Le rêve au rêve et la flûte au cor! (13-16)

For Verlaine, nuance marries dreams to dreams, musical instruments to musical instruments, and thus presumably makes it possible to fulfill the imperative declared in the opening verse of the poem, “[D]e la musique avant toute chose.” The repetition of the word “nuance” underlines at greatest art was to conceal art behind the most tenuous, and simple, and childlike manners. Surrendering none of his rights as a poet in the process, he found, in a transcended Parnassianism, the self-conscious ‘naiveté’ that is characteristic of his work” (31).
once the centrality of the concept and the intimate connection he imagines between nuance and musicality by contributing a rhythmic beat to the strophe – a connection the rhyme of the first and fourth verses underscores by reprising the theme of music and linking it to nuance, again through repetition (“cor”/“encor”). Yet, as with his insistence, in the Critique, that he never will have “done theory,” the emphasis here calls attention to itself, to how difficult it is to achieve nuance when the intention is self-conscious. Even as the repetition of the word “nuance” rhythmically lulls the reader into a state of receptivity to the musicality of language, one senses that Verlaine is trying to drum something out of the language of the poem. In “Nuit du walpurgis classique,” as we will see, that “something” is explicitly identified as “la pensée”; indeed, the poem tells the story of an attempt to achieve naiveté through nuance and musicality, an attempt that ultimately gives way to “la pensée” and the absolute.

2.

There are many nuances in the opening verse of the poem, “C’est plutôt le sabbat du Second Faust que l’autre.” The first owes to the ambiguity regarding the antecedent of the contracted pronoun: does the poem begin in media res? Is the Sabbath in question one the speaker observes and intends to represent, or is it one he will call into being through his verse? In other words, does the poem begin with a description or an incantation? A similar, related uncertainty attends the selective hesitation denoted by the adverb, “plutôt”: is the poetic subject trying to decide which Faustian Sabbath the one before him most closely resembles (the Walpurgis Night of the first part of Goethe’s Faust, or the Classical Walpurgis Night of the second part of the play), or is he deciding which of those two scenes will provide the model and inspiration for his description? In the notes to his edition of Verlaine’s Œuvres poétiques, Jacques Robichez writes that with this “plutôt” Verlaine “affecte un scrupule de nuance qui ne vas pas sans malice” (521). If I understand

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1 Robichez writes, “‘Nuit du walpurgis classique’ est fort éloigné de la scène de Goethe et le ‘plutôt’ de ce premier vers affecte un scrupule de nuance qui ne vas pas sans malice” (521).
him correctly, he means by this that Verlaine does not care about the distinction between the two Walpurgis Night scenes but rather is poking fun at people who do – an effective rhetorical strategy for a young poet eager to make his mark, as it allows him to exhibit the wit and erudition that might earn him a place in precisely the tradition he would disparage. But there is another more mundane reason for not reading too much into the allusion to the two parts of Goethe’s Faust, namely that what we know of Verlaine’s literary formation suggests that he did not have first-hand knowledge of the second part of Faust (Zayed 93).\(^4\)

This does not mean that the choice of the Walpurnis Night as the setting for the poem is unimportant nor that its significance is limited to the playful tone of malice that may underlie his selective hesitation with the adverb. The hesitation is consistent with his interest in nuance; it marks a deliberate blurring of details and differences, a shift away from strict categorization and absolutes. Moreover, I would argue that in the context of the poem the differences between the two Walpurgis Night scenes are less significant than the commonalities, for they represent a same thematic interest. Verlaine’s turn to the pagan, nocturnal May Day celebration can be read as a celebration of the carnivalesque possibilities depicted in both of Goethe’s Walpurgis Nights scenes, their promise of a breaking-free from rational codes, a transgressive movement from the symbolic realm of reason, with its motifs of day and light, of clear and distinct boundaries and categories (social, personal, political, aesthetic), to the seemingly diffuse, disorderly, and licentious realm of night, darkness, and unreason.\(^5\) But as we will see, if Verlaine’s turn to the terrain of Goethe’s Walpurgis Night scenes expresses a desire to find a realm where the hegemony of “la pensée” or reason does not obtain, the self-conscious questioning that interrupts the scene, in strophe eight, makes plain that no such realm is available to his imagination. To his chagrin the implied author of “Nuit du walpurgis classique” finds that that realm is already occupied by precisely the figures he had hoped to evade, the spectral representations of thoughts that had been displaced from consciousness, chief among them the specter of self-conscious reflection, which dispels any pretension of naïveté.

\(^4\) Georges Zayed, in his book-length study of Verlaine’s literary formation, determines that Verlaine had only read the Porchat translation, which does not include the second part of Faust (93).

\(^5\) See Bakhtin’s classic articulation of a theory of the carnivalesque.
In addition to the nuances occasioned by the unspecified relationship of the poem to Goethe’s two plays, there is another nuance, on the level of prosody, occasioned by the caesura of the first verse. The twelve syllables of the alexandrine fall into three unequal syllabic groups organized in descending order: a first group of six (“C’est plutôt le sabbat”), with the caesura after the last syllable of “sabbat”; next a group of four (“du second Faust”); then a pair (“que l’autre”). The second group poses a problem of scansion: is there an internal rejet after the caesura, or is the second group merely enjambed with the first one? Jean Mazaleyrat, in his *Éléments de métrique française*, selects this verse as a paradigmatic example of a limit case between rejet and enjambment. He says that in conformity with a certain habit of reading (the habit of reading classical French verse) the reader is tempted to insist on the metrical stability of the verse, that is, to respect the caesura at the sixth syllable and thereby turn a smooth enjambment into a rejet that emphasizes the elements of the second group by accentuating them. This yields two possible readings (emphasis added): if there is an internal rejet, “C’est plutôt le sabbat DU SECOND FAUST que l’autre”; if the two groups are enjambed, “C’est plutôt le sabbat du second Faust que l’autre.” The reader has to decide between two possible forms of discordance, or as Mazaleyrat puts it, to find the “[la] nuance juste.” Mazaleyrat, for his part, does not question whether it is a problem that admits of a solution: with bracing, Gallic self-confidence he assures his reader that “[l’]analyse métrique pose le problème: c’est l’interprétation qui le résout” (129). Yet Verlaine might not want the reader to resolve – at least not analytically – the problems of interpretation raised by the nuances. Indeed, I would argue that in “Nuit du walpurgis classique” he works deliberately to develop and maintain the potential for nuance latent within the strictures of the Alexandrine and habitual patterns of reading it. For Verlaine nuance is an end in itself, congruent with his poetics of naïveté, his desire to avoid “théorie” and the realm of absolutes.

The nuances of the first verse are immediately accompanied by music in the second and third verses, verses that not only describe the rhythmic beat of the Sabbath revelry but also perform it through a repetition of the adjective “rhythmique” and the refrain of alliteration, “Un rhythmique sabbat, rhythmique, extrêmement / Rhythmique.”

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6 I have suggested that the repetition of the word “rhythmique” gives the sense that
pervades the poem: strophes two and three share a similar, enumerative syntactic structure; the third verse of the fourth strophe repeats in reverse a series of elements enunciated in the second verse of the same strophe; strophes four and five begin with and are composed of music; strophes six and seven are anaphoric; and in the ninth strophe the elements of the question posed in strophe eight are reiterated in reverse order. The structure of repetition foregrounds the central theme of the poem: the tension provoked in the speaker's imagination by his apprehensive sense of the deleterious influence of "pensée" and the absolute. And in this connection the symmetry between the rhyme scheme of the first strophe and that of the final strophe is the most significant repetition in the poem. The strophes share not only an identical pattern of rich rhymes but also a nearly identical set of words, with one revealing difference: (first strophe) "l'autre / extrêmement / Lenôtre / charmant," (second strophe) "l'autre / absolument / Lenôtre / charmant." The parallelism and the shift from "extrêmement" to "absolument" make visible that the tension between nuance and the absolute structures the poem.

Having induced nuance and music into the poem with the first two verses, the speaker immediately conscripts the dilatory powers of imagination, "Imaginez un jardin de Lenôtre," to create a setting for the Sabbath and by extension the poem. The next six strophes describe the scene: a garden by Lenôtre on a moonlit summer night; the sound of a melody similar to a motif from Wagner's Tannhäuser; and finally, ethereal forms awakened by the sound of distant hunting horns, weaving around the statues and sculpted plants of the garden and slowly dancing together in a circle. As scholars such as Jacques-Henry Bornecque have

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Verlaine is trying to drum something out of the language of the poem, and that this "something" is explicitly identified, in the poem, as "la pensée." Steven Murphy, in an article on Poèmes saturniens in which he publishes the fruits of his important textual research, which uncovered information about manuscripts and variants of the poems of the collection, makes a similar observation: "l'importance du rythme étant marquée par l'emploi à trois reprises de l'adjectif 'rhythmique,' ce martèlement permet de passer du sémantisme du mot à son exploitation métrique, dans une ouverture qui joue avec la perception de la forme binométrique." Murphy also brings to light differences between the version of "Nuit du walpurgis classique" published in the original edition of the collection and two previous versions of the poem: in the initial versions, the commas of the second verse of the first strophe and the semicolons of the second strophe were periods. He suggests that Verlaine makes the punctuation change in order to support the rhythmic feeling of the opening strophes, and to lend it the tone of a work of art criticism, which Murphy sees Verlaine as imitating in this poem.
noted, it is here, in these strophes, that Verlaine discovers the setting of his next collection, the painterly *Fêtes galantes*, whose poems, as the title implies, deliberately recall the frivolously gay and idyllic world of Watteau’s depictions of trysting aristocrats (120). In “Nuit du walpurgis classique,” however, it is a Watteau with a twist – a scene dreamed by Raffet (“Un Watteau rêvé par Raffet”), the painter of the ghosts of the Grande Armée. This gloss is thematically appropriate since it lends a sense of hauntedness befitting of a Walpurgis Night revel; moreover, it gives a sense of the contrast between the thematics of the first two collections and of the itinerary that leads Verlaine from the first to the second. I would argue that if in his first collection Verlaine is drawn to the at once more pagan and darkly baroque Walpurgis Night theme rather than to the purely rococo sensibility of a Watteau, it is precisely because the former allows for a recognition of the potential for unreason – literally, madness – which in this and many other subsequent poems underlies the interplay of reasoning and imagination.

In the seventh strophe the poetic subject interrupts the scene and asks if the figures of the Walpurgis Night are allegorical projections of the poet’s thought, remorse, and regret, or merely anonymous specters of the dead:

– Ces spectres agités, sont-ce donc la pensée
  Du poète ivre, ou son regret, ou son remords,
  Ces spectres agités en tourbe cadencée,
  Ou bien tout simplement des morts? (29-32)

7 The edition produced by Bornecque is a valuable source of information about the literary antecedents of each poem of the collection. Also, Jean Mourot, at the end of his book on Verlaine, provides a superb annotated bibliography (now somewhat dated), which focuses exclusively on the scholarship pertaining to *Poèmes saturniens* and *Fêtes galantes*.

8 A treatment of madness as a motif in Verlaine’s poetry is beyond the scope of this article, but it is worth noting, by way of example, the points of contact between “Nuit du walpurgis classique” and “Limbes,” a poem Verlaine publishes nearly twenty years later. The poem features two principal characters: “Imagination,” represented as a winged queen who longs to take flight but is bound by the heaviness of her robe; and “Pensée,” identified as a butterfly and who, by contrast, flutters about frivolously. Ultimately, “Imagination” devolves into madness – indeed, by the end of the poem she is described only as “La Folle-du-Logis” – through her passive engagement with “Pensée,” a pattern that is consistent, I would argue, with the one delineated in “Nuit du walpurgis classique,” where the interplay of “la pensée” and imagination leads Verlaine’s poetical imagination to a thematic of unreason.
In the eighth strophe he repeats the question but in reverse order, a move that signals that the three terms – thought, remorse, and regret – are interchangeable as figures of self-conscious reflection:

Sont-ce donc ton remords, ô rêvasseur qu’invite
L’horreur, ou ton regret, ou ta pensée, – hein? – tous
Ces spectres qu’un vertige irresistible agite,
Ou bien des mort qui seraient fous? (33-36)

As in the first iteration, the poetic subject again leaves ambiguous whether Goethe is the poet to whom the speaker refers or whether Verlaine himself is the addressee, but the familiarity denoted by the second person singular in this strophe intimates that the question is of immediate personal concern to the author of “Nuit du walpurgis classique.” And Verlaine has good reason to be concerned, for the effects of this moment of self-conscious reflection are devastating; indeed, the interruption proves fatal. This is signaled first by the linguistic rupture in strophe eight following the reiteration of the question (“L’horreur, ou ton regret, ou ta pensée, – hein? – tous / Ces spectres […]”), then by a telling change in the characterization of the figures of the dance. Whereas in strophe seven the speaker proposes that perhaps they are figures of the dead, in strophe eight he now adds to this description, asking whether they are dead people who have gone mad.

In the ninth strophe the speaker tries to dismiss the question, and the figures briefly continue their dance; but the poem soon comes to end. The language and imagery indicate that the advent of “la pensée” spells the end of the Walpurgis Night. Dawn arrives – a classic trope for the emergence of thought and the faculty of reason – and the first rays of the sun evaporate the ghostly apparitions. As the language of the final strophe makes plain, the devastation is absolute:

N’importe ils vont toujours, les fébriles fantômes,
Menant leur ronde vaste et morne et tressautant
Comme dans un rayon des atomes,
Et s’évaporant à l’instant

Humide et blême où l’aube étêt l’un après l’autre
Les cors, en sorte qu’il ne reste absolument
Plus rien – absolument – qu’un jardin de Lenôtre,
Correct, ridicule, et charmant. (37-44)

When “la pensée” appears, the poem ends.
Against this backdrop, the final verse can be read as a self-reflexive commentary on the poem. If the poem tells the story of the staging of an attempt to achieve naiveté through nuance and musicality, the final strophe leaves no doubt as to the outcome of that attempt; its failure is absolute. There is no longer any nuance, no hope of naiveté. Nothing is left – nothing, that is, besides a Lenôtre garden: correct, ridiculous and charming. No longer animated by the optimistic spirit of the poetics of naiveté that inspired the lyric, the poetic subject is left with only the form of the beauty he had imagined; in the wake of the shipwreck of that project, that form now appears ridiculous to him, a mocking rebuke of his ambitions. And yet if the final verse registers a tone of dejection, its structural relationship with the opening strophe intimates that the fate of the poem was clear from the beginning. As we have seen, the description of the garden, in the final verse, repeats the closing verse of the first strophe, which not only lends structural integrity to the poem but, more importantly, suggests that if the early strophe expresses a yearning for naiveté, it also encodes a proleptic sense that naiveté is out of reach. And it is this double consciousness, this yearning for naiveté coupled with the foreknowledge of its unattainability, that accounts for what we witness in the poem: the spectacle of an imagination driven to the ground of unreason, the terrain of the Walpurgis Night, only to find that that ground is already populated by precisely the figures that the poet had hoped he might evade, namely, “la pensée” and the absolute, the specters of his poetics of naiveté and nuance.

The adverb “extrêmement” in the first strophe, which will be supplanted by “absolument” in the final strophe, denotes both the degree of Verlaine’s awareness of the shadow that the absolute casts over his project and the self-consciously rhetorical lengths to which he will go in his attempt to elude that awareness. As we have seen, he takes the language of his poem to rhythmical extremes; in the second verse, he at once describes and performs a heavy rhythm in an effort to drum the sense out of words and create the linguistic conditions for enacting his poetics. That is, he does not elide his awareness of the spectral presence of “la pensée” and the absolute so much as write over it and attempt, rhetorically, to defer it to the end of the poem and open up the space for a limited, qualified act of imagination. Thus the refrain of “rhythmique” in the second verse is followed, in the third verse, by a rhetorical act of imagination in the imperative voice, “Imaginez!”
We find a similar rhetorical gesture of deferral in the temporality of his exclamation in the *Critique*, “après tout, – JE N’AURAI PAS FAIT DE THÉORIE!” On one level, the logic of his claim is straightforward: given that he will never let his poetry originate with “théorie” it stands to reason that, in the end, he will have succeeded in eluding it throughout his entire career. On another level, however, it is telling that he locates the realization of his project in the future, not the past or present; the choice of verb tense could indicate that he recognizes that the fulfillment of his wish for naïveté will be forever unrealizable in the present and must therefore be displaced and deferred to an indefinite future. According to this account, Verlaine turns to the future because he knows that “théorie” will always frame the present; he sees that insofar as he orients himself negatively in terms of “théorie” his poetry necessarily originates with it. Yet this does not prevent him from rhetorically imagining a future in which naïveté might be possible, a future whose promise frames and structures “Nuit du walpurgis classique.”

Later in the *Critique* Verlaine makes a similarly suggestive claim about “Paysages tristes,” the section of *Poèmes saturniens* to which “Nuit du walpurgis classique” belongs. He claims that a discerning reader will grow convinced not only that there is an organic continuity between his early verse and his later, more mature work, but more specifically that the “Paysages Tristes” section contains in ovo the genetic nucleus of his originality as poet:

Mais plus on me lira, plus on se convaincra qu’une sorte d’unité relie mes choses premières à celles de mon âge mûr: par exemple les Paysages tristes ne sont-il pas en quelque sorte l’oeuf de toute une volée de vers chanteurs, vagues ensemble et définis, dont je suis peut-être le premier en date à oisiller? (721)

One could say that Verlaine, here, looks back upon his career and sees himself trying, in his earliest work, to imagine the possibility of naïveté – or more to the point, that he sees himself in the past imagining a future moment (i.e., the present of the *Critique*) when he will be able to look back upon his career and in good faith claim that he is and always has been naïve. If this is the case, it marks an interesting reversal. Whereas in his earlier pronouncement he defers naïveté to an unrealizable future, he now projects it back to the historical origin of his career and naturalizes that origin through a metaphor of organic birth (“l’œuf”), a rhetori-
cal gesture that figures his first collection as the seminal expression of a sequence thereby endowed with the organic integrity of natural, genealogical development. The two gestures are linked of course: if Verlaine is going to claim that he never did “théorie,” he has to say that he always was naive. But moving the locus of his naiveté back to the beginning of his career and figuring that beginning as a natural origin merely displaces the question of whether naiveté is, was, or ever could be possible for him.

There is something utopian about a poetics whose temporal actualization, in a sense, lies nowhere. Yet I would argue that what matters in the connection between the Critique and “Nuit du walpurgis classique,” and thus more broadly in the relation between Verlaine’s declarative poetics and his poetry, is not so much the thematic of impossibility and failure, though there is one in the poem, but rather that his self-conscious awareness of the fate of his naiveté is generative. What matters is not simply that he is self-consciously aware from the beginning of the poem, and thus of his career, that naiveté is out of reach but that this awareness yields a pattern of deferral that structures the poem and motivates the rhetoric of his declarations in the Critique; in other words, it generates a form for the poem and determines how he articulates his poetics.

According to this account, a close reading of “Nuit du walpurgis classique” reveals that the “self-conscious ‘naiveté’” that James Lawler identifies as a defining ambition of Verlaine’s art is visible in the poet’s earliest work – a finding that supports Verlaine’s claim, in the Critique, that Poèmes saturniens is a seminal text and thus makes a case for according particular significance to the poem in the context of a consideration of Verlaine’s career as a whole. From the beginning, then, naiveté for Verlaine is a matter not of quixotic self-deception but rather of mining and integrating a self-conscious understanding of the declarative terms of his poetics as a structuring principle of his art.
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“EL AMANTE LIBERAL”: CERVANTES’S IRONIC IMITATION OF HELIODORUS

SEAN MCDANIEL

“El amante liberal”, from Cervantes’s 1613 Novelas ejemplares, has been described as one of Cervantes’s least popular works to readers in the twentieth century. This is, no doubt, because it shares little of the content or purportedly more realistic style of his more popular works, such as the Quixote, or with other novelas from the same collection, such as “La gitanilla” and “Rinconete y Cortadillo.” Nevertheless, “El amante liberal” was quite popular in its original Spanish as well as in translation in the period immediately following its publication (Hart, 41-42, and El Saffar xii).

It is the story of how an essentially good but willful young man, and the woman who initially detests him, find love and personal growth through long and difficult trials. The exceptional nature of their trials is one of the story’s main sources of interest; they are captured by Turkish pirates, sold and resold as slaves, threatened with physical violation and its subsequent dishonor, lost at sea in storms, witness to political intrigues of the Ottoman colonial administration, and, on the way to Constantinople, are engaged in a terrible naval combat of no fewer than four separate factions on three different ships.

This collection of peripecias, of combat, travel, surprise, and recognition, with a distinct maritime flavor, clearly distinguishes the story’s generic heritage as that of novela bizantina. This genre of Greek romance of late-classical origin provided the source materials for works such as the medieval Libro de Apolonio or the early-modern re-casting of the same story in Timoneda’s “patraña oncea” of his 1567 Patrañuelo. In Cervantes’s day the genre had become particularly important because of the role it played in debates regarding the theoretical and moral impli-
cations of extended prose fiction. Many sixteenth-century literary theoreticians had concluded that extended prose fictions, such as the immensely popular *libros de caballería*, were inherently immoral and in violation of the eternal rules of art, as expressed in the writings of Horace, for example. Others, though, suggested that it was possible to write extended imaginative prose that could be both morally instructive and entertaining—Horace’s *dulce et utile*—as well as obey the established rules for art. This latter position was strengthened by the discovery in 1526, during the sack of a Hungarian palace, of a copy of Heliodorus’s third-century *Ethiopian History*. The work was soon translated into a variety of European languages and held up as an example of a classical extended prose fiction that could be used as an appropriate model for contemporary writers. Cervantes’s take on this debate, and its importance to the composition of the *Quixote*, was studied in Alban Forcione’s *Cervantes, Aristotle and the Persiles*. As such, and we can safely conclude that Cervantes’s decision to write a contemporary *novela bizantina* would not have been accidental, and that his imitation was likely to reflect some of the theoretical issues that concerned writers of his day. While Cervantes does not refer to “El amante liberal” as either a *novela bizantina* or as a work related to the *Ethiopian History*, we know that such a project was on his mind, because in the introduction to the *Novelas ejemplares* he promises “si la vida no me deja, te ofrezco los *Trabajos de Persiles*, libro que se atreve a competir con Heliodoro, si ya por atrevido no sale con las manos en la cabeza” (53).

Calling “El amante liberal” a *novela bizantina*, or suggesting that it is related to Heliodorus, is not especially original; many others have already done so, including those who have worked extensively on the *Novelas*, such as Ruth El-Safar and Thomas Hart. My interest here, though, is in exploring how Cervantes chose to render those features of the *Ethiopian History* that were most appreciated by his contemporaries, and in particular, those features specifically singled out for praise by the text’s most influential translator.

The edition of Heliodorus’s *Ethiopian History* that Cervantes was likely to have read was a 1554 Spanish translation of an edition by the French translator Jacques Amyot. Included in the Spanish edition is Amyot’s prologue to the text, which, as Forcione notes, is important because it was a concise expression of the “dominant tendencies of Renaissance criticism” that surrounded the *Ethiopian History* (58).
Amyot does indeed present Heliodorus’s work as a model for the improvement of modern writing, and notes that in *Ethiopian History* “the educated reader will find all that is wanting in the old Spanish romances” (Forcione, 60). As such, the specific features of the work that Amyot praises are important, because they represent an outline of the work’s model nature, or its exemplary function. That is to say that these features were praised not only because they are by themselves good in this particular text, but also because they can be seen as the chief elements in the construction of an improved form of fiction.

One of these features is the beautiful and eloquent language in which Heliodorus’s characters express themselves. Amyot writes “hay en algunos lugares hermosos discursos sacados de la filosofía natural y moral, muchos dichos notables y palabras sentenciosas, muchas oraciones y pláticas, en las cuales el artificio de elocuencia está muy bien empleado” (lxxx). Heliodorus’s text is in fact dominated by dramatic and sententious declarations around which the plot is structured. They come in the form of asides, descriptions, speeches, dialogues, and the occasional tragic monologue, such as this one by the female protagonist Cariclea:

¡Oh Apolo, cuán más áspero y cruel nos das el castigo, que nuestras culpas merecieron! ¿Los males y trabajos que habemos padecido, no son suficiente satisfacción para tu venganza?; Estar apartados y privados de nuestros parientes y amigos; haber sido presos de los piratas y corsarios de la mar; haber pasado tantos peligros de tempestades y tormentas en él; y después en la tierra, haber caído otra vez en las manos de saltadores y gente de mal vivir. ¿Pues, qué otra cosa nos quede que pasar? ¡Oh, cuándo pones fin a nuestras miserias! (22)

Cervantes too makes use of this particular rhetorical style, and in particular in the mouth of Ricardo, his story’s willful male protagonist, who begins the *novela* with a monologue before the walls of the fallen city of Nicosia:

¡Oh lamentables ruinas de la desdichada Nicosia, apenas enjuntas de la sangre de vuestros valerosos y mal afortunados defensores! Si como carecíes de sentido, le tuvierades ahora, en esta soledad donde estamos, pudiéramos lamentar juntas nuestras desgracias, y quizá el haber hallado compañía en ellas aliviara nuestro tormento. (137)

His beautiful and carefully chosen words are clearly representative of
the model of declamatory discourse to which Amyot refers. Strangely though, the narrator then informs us that Ricardo is a Christian prisoner talking to the walls of the fallen city “como si ellas fueran capaces de entenderle; propia condición de afligidos que, llevados de sus imaginaciones, hacen y dicen cosas ajenas de toda razón y buen discurso” (137). This intervention on the part of the narrator is curious because, on the one hand Ricardo’s words seem to be precisely the “razón y buen discurso” that was praised in the genre while, on the other hand, the intervention specifically underscores the objective lack of verisimilitude of the character’s action, i.e., speaking to the inanimate walls, and attempts to explain them as an act of misery-inspired insanity. Ricardo’s words seem more directed at the pleasure of the reader and the demands of the genre than faithfully depicting supposedly real events, and are similar to passages in Heliodoros’s work such as Cariclea’s words quoted above. Given the appropriateness of Ricardo’s initial monologue in the *novela bizantina* context and its obvious use of “buen discurso,” what is the narrator’s comment meant to do? Is it meant to grant the story a level verisimilitude, or to subtly undermine our expectation for it? What other role could it play but to complicate and obscure the high moral purpose and exemplary quality to which Ricardo’s speech is directed? The higher moral purpose and rhetorical function of this initial monologue is further undermined by a comedic interjection by Mahumut, a renegade Turk, who has found Ricardo among the stones of the fallen walls. Ricardo concludes his monologue by speaking of his heavy sorrows:

> ¿qué aprovecha si en ninguna parte a do voy hallo tregua ni descanso en ellos, antes me los han acrecentado estas ruinas que desde aquí se descubren?
> – Por las de Nicosia dirás – dijo el Turco.
> – Pues ¿por cuáles quieres que [lo] diga? – repitió Ricardo –, si no hay otras que a los ojos por aquí se ofrezcan? (138)

Like the narrator’s comment which characterized his initial words as “ajeno de razón y buen discurso,” Mahumut’s need for clarification as to precisely which ruins are the subject of his impassioned speech seems aimed at pulling Ricardo’s words out of the mode of exalted rhetoric and into another more potentially realistic one. They also serve to highlight the distance between his rhetorical style and his objective reality. Thus,
from the very beginning of the story, Cervantes’s imitation is an ironic one, in that he seems to simultaneously exalt and parody his model.

Ricardo’s words are used to further parody his model in his extensive recounting of the sad events that led him to Turkish captivity. His discourse, which takes up nearly a third of the whole novela, is a function of the story’s in medias res beginning. This particular technique of beginning the story in the middle was another of the features that Amyot praised for its ability to capture the readers’ interest and produce “admiration” (Hart, 45). He writes that Ethiopian History “comienza en la mitad de la Historia, como hacen los poetas heroicos, lo cual causa, de prima facie, una grande admiración a los lectores, y les engendra un apasionado deseo de oir y entender el comienzo, y todavía los atrae también con la ingeniosa lección de su cuento” (lxxxi). In medias res also implies, structurally, the need for a character, such as Ricardo, to fill the gap between the text’s “beginning in the middle” opening and the story’s genuine chronological beginning that Amyot imagines us anxious to hear. Ricardo, at Mahumut’s prompting, gives a lengthy, moving, and detailed description of what he has been through. Thomas Hart, in his Cervantes’s Exemplary Fictions, makes particular note of the variety of rhetorical devices used by Ricardo in his retelling, and in particular, in his recounted haranguing of his beloved Leonisa and her effeminate suitor, Cornelio (48). Hart demonstrates how Cervantes’s readers would have recognized those same rhetorical devices from their own schooling. Thus, Ricardo’s retelling of his story appears a perfect structural, stylistic and even didactic expression of the virtues that Amyot sees in Heliodoros’s text.

In the same way, though, that Ricardo’s initial words were undermined by the narrator’s interjection in a way that tended to highlight the distance between rhetoric and reality, in the extensive retelling of his troubles Ricardo undermines his own mimetic credibility and rhetorical stance by continually promising, but failing, to be brief. He promises at the beginning “te la contaré en las menos razones que pudiere” (140), and later “en breves razones te contaría mis desventuras” and soon after “haré lo que pudiere y lo que el tiempo diere lugar” (141). What follows, though, is the long and rhetorically varied presentation of his story. At one point, he states “No quiero detenerme ahora, ¡oh Mahamut!, en contarte por menudo los sobresaltos, los tenores, las ansias, los pensamientos que en aquella luenga y amarga noche tuve y pasé, por no ir
contra lo que primero propuse con contarte brevemente mi desventura” (151). We, as readers, aren’t the only ones who tire of his incessant tears and apparent inability to cut it short, as at one point he indicates that while on the ship that captured him “eran tales los sentimientos que hacía, que mi amo, enfadado de oírme, con un grueso palo me amenazó que si no callaba me maltrataría” (150). One critic has noted that perhaps “at this point, the reader might silently applaud” (Clamurro, 60). Finally, towards the end, and long past our recognition that there will be no “breves razones”, and in a way that again comically highlights the extensive nature of his discourse, he expresses the need to end his retelling “por no ser tan prolígo en contar como la tormenta lo fue en su porfía” (153).

While one or two references to the length of his recounting could be considered incidental, six references, particularly when several of them are couched in terms of promising to be short, when the retelling is clearly not, would seem to specifically highlight and make evident the somewhat unnatural implications of the *in medias res* beginning. What I mean by unnatural here is that by promising, repeatedly, to be brief, Ricardo seems to be recognizing that in normal human interactions, it is unusual to go on at great and florid length about one’s tragic past. By failing in the promise to be brief, he makes that unnaturalness evident, particularly when he stops in mid-story to promise yet again to cut it short.

The highlighting of some of the implausible mimetic implications of the genre would seem to run counter to another of the virtues that Amyot praised in Heliodoros’s text; that being its careful maintenance of credibility, especially when compared with the fantastic elements that were common in the *novelas de caballería* of the period. Amyot notes “entre las ficciones aquellas que están más cerca de natura y en las cuales hay más de verisimilitud son las que agradan más a los que miden su placer con la razón y que se deleitan con juicio. Porque, siguiendo los preceptos del poeta Horacio, es menester que las cosas fingidas para deleitación sean cercanas de las verdaderas” (lxxix). Cervantes’s explicit highlighting of the genre’s mimetic weaknesses appears intended primarily for comedic effect, but it nevertheless appears to cast his imitation in an ironic mode.

A similar highlighting of the inherent mimetic weakness of the genre
can be seen in the nearly miraculous preservation of the female protagonist’s chastity, despite her capture and multiple sales into bondage. Leonisa is depicted as being so exceptionally beautiful that she has not only left our hero Ricardo unable to control himself, but she also captures the lustful hearts of a number of Turkish pirate captains, both the outgoing and incoming Ottoman governors of conquered Cyprus, and even the island’s aged Muslim cleric. It is, in fact, the competition between these last three Turkish leaders to satisfy their baser urges that provides the opportunity for our heroes’s eventual bloody escape. In nearly all of these cases, the desire for Leonisa drives these men to the edge of abandoning wealth and endangering their social standing, if not their lives. As such, Leonisa’s virtue is constantly under threat by her multiple masters and tormenters. The threat, though, to women’s virtue was a common plot device in both classical romance and early modern fiction. It is important to note, though, that the plot device was the threat, not its consummation, for far fewer women end up actually violated than are threatened in these texts. So, what is curious in this work is not the improbable preservation of her virtue, nor the unreasonable passions that her beauty causes – yet another common plot device – but rather, the way in which she seems intentionally to highlight the implausibility of her intact virtue given the extreme nature of her circumstances. In her recounting of the events, Leonisa informs the now repentant renegade Mahamut “que por muy muchos y varios casos he venido a este miserable estado en que me veo; y aunque es tan peligroso, siempre por favor del cielo he conservado en él la entereza de mi honor, con la cual vivo contenta en mi miseria” (163). Later, when she has been reunited with Ricardo and they make plans to escape, she tells him “yo pongo mi honor en tus manos, bien puedes creer dél que le tengo con la entereza y verdad que podían poner en duda tantos caminos como he andado y tantos combates como he sufrido” (my emphasis, 173). Both of her statements of preserved honor are framed in such a way as to underline its implausibility. It is as if she can scarcely believe it herself. The implausible nature of her intact virtue is made even more obvious when, in describing how she survived the shipwreck that killed one of her smitten Turkish captains, she states “ocho días estuvimos en la isla, guardándome los turcos el mismo respecto que si fuera su hermana, y aun más” (171). The Turks’ benign, and even fraternal, behavior is quite
unusual here, given that for the rest of the novela they explicitly exemplify the baser human weaknesses, and in particular, of lust. It seems that her beauty bewitches men, but only at narratively convenient times. What is at issue here is not the unlikely nature of the events, as readers are already prepared to suspend a certain level of disbelief. Instead, the issue is the author’s seeming insistence on underlining and making evident the mimetic weaknesses of this supposedly model genre whose primary plot device is the perpetual peripecia.

Am I suggesting that Cervantes did not see value in Helidorus’s text and did not view it as an appropriate model for theoretically informed imitation? No, clearly not, as his Persiles comes identified as precisely that sort of imitation. Instead, there may be in “El amante liberal” a process similar to the one noted by Gerli in “La gitanilla,” in which Cervantes used irony to undermine the commonly accepted norms of early modern romance. Gerli writes “by means of the interplay of idealism and irony, Cervantes continually points to the disparities between literary norms and the realities of experience... Relying on his readers’ familiarity with the patterns and expectations of romance, Cervantes plays ironically with, and subtly reshapes, our literary preconceptions” (39). In a similar manner, Cervantes’s ironic treatment of Heliodorus is less intended to disparage his model than to help shape his readers’ expectations. What we can see in “El amante liberal” is a manifestation of a model of an improved form of fiction that is less informed by what Amyot sees in Heliodorus and more by what Cervantes himself expressed in his other writings and which was influenced, but not limited to, theoretical discussions on Helidorus’s text.

Forcione, among others, found in the Quixote’s Canon of Toledo a statement on that improved literary form which I think can shed light on this particular reading of “El amante liberal.” The Canon states that one of the virtues of the improved form of romance is that in it “pudiese correr la pluma, describiendo naufragios, tormentas, rencuentros y batallas,” and the author “Ya puede mostrarse astrólogo, ya cosmógrafo excelente, ya músico, ya inteligente en las materias de estado” (Quixote, 519). Consequently, the thrilling plot twists and surprising amount of geography, culture, and curious details of the Ottoman Empire present in “El amante liberal,” and even the information about pirates and slavery with which Cervantes was personally acquainted, would seem the per-
fect expression of that idea. It is even in line with the Horatian precepts in its combination of instructive and entertaining information. At the same time, though, the Canon recognizes the existence of different sorts of audiences with different capacities for belief and contends that this improved literary form needed to appeal to all of them. It is not for nothing that the Canon, in describing the hundred pages of an ideal romance that he has written, notes “las he comunicado con hombres apasionados desta leyenda, dotos y discretos, y con otros ignorantes, que solo atienden al gusto de oír disparates, y de todos he hallado una agradable aprobación” (521). In the same way, perhaps, Cervantes intends the vivid cultural details and exciting plot twists of “El amante liberal” to make the story readable and entertaining for those unaware or disinterested in the *novela*’s theoretical implications. For the “lector discreto,” though, who was familiar with Heliodorus and the role his text played in the literary theory of the day, Cervantes’s gentle parody of some of its features must have been an intentional and somewhat rarefied source of humor. As Forcione notes, “[i]t is well to note here that Cervantes was very conscious of the existence of the two audiences and their different standards of judgment and capacities for belief. In nearly all the critical examinations of literary principles in his works, the point of view of the prospective audiences are present as dramatic participants” (Forcione, 103-4). In fact, the parodying of those elements of *Ethiopian History* that Amyot and others praised could be seen as strengthening, rather than weakening, its exemplary quality in a process similar to that of Leonisa’s oft-threatened chastity, which “mientras más se acri sola, queda con más pureza y más limpio” (173). In this constructive, rather than destructive use of irony and parody, perhaps Cervantes is taking a cue from Amyot, who writes “siguiendo el precepto del sabio que dice que es menester burlar para hacer de veras, y no hacer de veras, para burlar” (lxxxii).
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Any reader of medieval literature is aware of the heavy degree of intertextuality that often exists between narratives. In his work *Barbarolexis*, Alexandre Leupin describes the medieval concept of writing as “a constant and endless transformation of the obsolete, a perpetual relaunching of the old” (21) that fulfills an author’s needs and aims. Yet this transformation of the already written was not haphazard and random. Rather, the author’s reworking was guided by the *ars rhetoricae* and the *ars poetriae* that he had studied during his formative years (Kennedy 174). Gonzalo de Berceo (1198? – 1268?) was no exception to this rule. Since Richard Becker discovered in 1910 what was probably Berceo’s source (Ferreiro Alemparte 266), or at least a close approximation to it (Snow 2), modern critics have attempted to explain how the Spanish poet reworked the original material. Joseph Snow, for instance, offers a detailed analysis of “El milagro de la casulla de San Ildefonso,” and concludes that

The arrangement of [Berceo’s] version is given depth of contrast, dramatic force of presentation, the personal involvement that comes from author / listener in personal, literary contact, and a pleasing, planned proportion that fully complements its didactic purpose. (9)

What Snow does not explain, however, is how Berceo came to make some of these changes.

I would like to concentrate on two of the most notable differences between versions: the characterization of the protagonists as well as the presentation of the main events of the plot. While I agree with Snow’s conclusions, I think it also worth noting that Berceo employs the rhetori-
cal circumstances of person and circumstances of action learned from medieval school rhetoric in order to achieve a two-fold purpose: not only to make for a more dramatic and fluid narrative, but even more importantly, to expand on themes given no importance in his source text, the dangers and power of language, and the tangible benefits one accrues as a devoted servant of the Blessed Mother.

In their treatises, many medieval writers of the *ars poetriae* incorporate the eleven circumstances of person found in Cicero’s *De Inventione* (Murphy 165, 167). Simply defined, the circumstances of person are the attributes of any person, and the rhetorician would recur to these topics to support his argument. They were an organized way of considering (or later in composition, describing) a person, and the fuller one developed these circumstances, the more real that person appeared in a speech or poem. In the *Milagros* Berceo supplements the circumstances of person found in the Thott version in order to describe his characters more completely. The eleven circumstances are, in the order that Cicero gives them: name, nature (sex, race, place of birth, family and age, as well as things like intelligence and physical descriptions), manner of life (friends, teachers, occupation, home life and such), fortune (free or slave, official with authority or not, etc.), habit (the acquisition of a capacity for an art, or some special knowledge or dexterity that is learned), feeling (a temporary change in mind or body), interest (an unremitting mental activity devoted to a particular thing), purpose (a plan for doing something), and achievements, accidents, and speech.

Only seven of the eleven circumstances of person defined in Cicero are employed in the Thott manuscript. Ildefonso’s *name*, the first of the circumstances, is given in the title, and again in the first sentence of the exemplum: “…archiepiscopus, qui vocabatur hildefonsus…” (59). The title “archiepiscopus” is also used to denote the fourth circumstance of person, *fortune*. His *nature* receives somewhat more attention; he is “in toletana urbe” (59) and is also “religiosus valde et bonis operibus ornatus” (59). Conspicuously absent from the description is any of the good works with which he is adorned, except his devotion to the Holy Mother: “studia sanctam dei genitrícem maríam multum diligebat et, prout poterat, omni reverencia eam honorabat” (59). The two verbs, “diligere” and “honorare” denote the protagonist’s *interest*. At the end of his life, he is characterized as “feliciter” (60), also an attribute of *nature*. Of Ildefonso’s achievements, the anonymous author recounts two: “volumen…
compusuit. . .” (59) and he established a Marian feast “ut celebraretur sollempnitas [annunciationis]” (59). The description of how the book was written, “stilo eleganti” (59), perhaps referring to its rhetorical qualities, may be an indication of the author’s habit, and the reason for establishing the new feast, “cupiens” (59) indicates his feeling. The character’s accidents are the two visions of the Virgin.

Berceo uses ten of the eleven Ciceronian circumstances in his verse reworking of his source. The omission of the eleventh is not an oversight, but as we will see, serves to underscore one of the themes of the Spanish milagro. The name, Ildefonso, is a direct translation of the Latin, but after the title of the miracle, it is not given until the third stanza (49a). In the first two verses, as Dutton observes, Berceo “amplifica la brevedad de su fuente” (47). Thus the stark adverbial phrase “in the city of Toledo” becomes “…en Toledo la magna un famado logar” (47b, emphasis mine), “En Toledo la buena, essa villa real. . . qe yaze sobre Tajo, ess agua cabdal. . .” (48ab, emphasis mine). Dutton does not give any explanation for the changes, though Snow notes that the elaboration is used to build interest before Ildefonso’s name is given (5). Likewise, the modification may be attributed to metonymy, which links the town (and the adjectives) to the archbishop, and it is in this way that Berceo prepares for the simple introduction of the protagonists: “Diziénle Ildefonso” (49a).

Berceo also uses the circumstances of person to highlight the importance of the Virgin Mary. Thott simply says that Ildefonso’s devotion to the Blessed Virgin is one of many good works, but Berceo uses the manner of life to present the relationship between the archbishop and Mary, saying “fue de la Gloriosa amigo natural” (48b). This exemplifies the importance that she has in his life, and this is especially important to the overall theme of the Milagros. In the Thott manuscript, though, this friendship is just found “inter cetera bonorum operum” (59). In the Spanish version, the primacy of the Virgin is developed within the circumstance of interest as well. In the source manuscript, the poet laconically notes that Ildefonso is devoted to the Holy Mother “prout poterat” (59). Berceo, however, changes the description of the circumstance by stressing the importance that Marian devotion has in Ildefonso’s work: “Siempre con la Gloriosa ovo su atención” (50a). He further develops this motif with the profane metaphor, “nunca varón en duenna metió
mayor querencia” (59b). By means of these amplifications, Berceo’s Ildefonso appears to the listener (and the reader) as a pious and devoted servant of the Holy Mother.

The circumstance of fortune receives the most elaboration from Berceo by means of one adjective, “leal.” This epithet does not appear at all in the Thott manuscript, but Berceo employs it five times. As Matthew of Vendôme observes in his *Ars poetriae*, the most appropriate way to characterize a bishop is to “stress constancy of faith, desire for virtue, unimpaired devotion, and the charm of piety” (72). By the repetition of the one word, Berceo makes clear that Ildefonso is a worthy pastor of his flock, a fact not denied in the Thott version, but one that is not given its due importance.

Berceo chooses not amplify Ildefonso’s achievements, translating almost literally from the Latin text “fizo della un libro” (51c) and “fizolí una fiesta” (52b). However, instead of saying that the book is composed in an elegant style as in Thott, Berceo uses a more technical rhetorical term, “dichos colorados” (51c), which would at the same time more clearly define his *habit*. Berceo also amplifies his character’s other achievement: Ildefonso establishes a new Marian feast day since one of her solemnities occurs in Lent and therefore cannot be celebrated properly (“Tiempo de quadragésima es de afflictïón, / nin cantan ‘aleluya’ nin facen processión” [56ab]).

In addition to modifying the rhetorical circumstances found in his source, Berceo also chooses to “correct” the text, developing one of those circumstances not dealt with in the original, purpose. Thott does not describe the archbishop’s mental state, opting instead for a purely physical description: “[Maria]. . .ei rursum sedenti in cathedra. . .apparuit. . .” (59). Berceo not only gives nearly the same physical description, “en su preciosa cátedra se sedié asentado” (58c), but also has added a description of the missing circumstance: “por entrar en la Missa estaba aguisado” (58b).

Analyzing this character from the point of view of the Ciceronian circumstances of person, one immediately notes the absence of the development of any of Ildefonso’s *speech*. This important circumstance is not mentioned in Thott and neither does Berceo choose to include it. Far from being an oversight by the Spanish author, this lacuna is intentionally left to serve as a counterpoint to the behavior of the other protagonist of this miracle, Siagrio.
In the same way that the poet amplifies the circumstances of person found in his source to demonstrate the goodness of Ildefonso, he also reworks them to show the wickedness of the antagonist Siagrio. Neither name, nor manner of life, differs significantly. Berceo also follows the achievements found in his Latin source – Siagrio sits in the chair and uses the vestment that has been prohibited – without substantial modifications. Accidents – his appointment as archbishop and his death by strangulation – also remain unchanged.

Nevertheless, the Spanish poet gives a series of negative images that are not found in the Latin model, all of which are attributes of the character's nature. He describes Siagrio as “lozano” (67a), “muy sovervioso e de seso liviano” (67b), “villano” (67c), “torpe pecador” (68c). All of these epithets are presented even before the name is mentioned in stanza 70. This rapid succession of negative adjectives is set in opposition to those positive ones used in the amplification of the character of Ildefonso, albeit by means of metonymy.

Berceo intentionally abbreviates the description of Siagrio to avoid excusing his presumptuous behavior; the Spanish poet does not include “deceptus astuciis inimici” (60) in his account. Berceo’s Siagrio is responsible for his own actions and cannot shrug the blame off using the excuse “the devil made me do it.” Moreover, the inferiority of this new prelate is so obvious that “por bien non gelo tuvo el pueblo toledano” (67d), which also contrasts with the public’s reaction to Ildefonso’s decision to say Mass on the feast of the Immaculate Conception: “fincaron en Toledo pocos en su ostal” (57c). Under the circumstance of purpose, Berceo gives the reason for the actions of the new bishop Siagrio: “quiso egualar al otro” (67b).

Examples of Siagrio’s speech are given in both Berceo’s text and in the source, but the Spaniard, departing from Thott, characterizes the words of the new bishop even before they are quoted directly, calling them “palabras locas” (68c) and “palavras de muy gran liviandat” (69a). As Dutton notes (52), Berceo reduces somewhat the actual words spoken by Siagrio, but the sense of vanity seems even greater in the poem and “further arous[es] the antipathy of the listener toward this unseemly arrogance in an archbishop” (Snow 8). The amplification that Berceo places immediately after Siagrio’s discourse gives new meaning to the entire episode:
Instead of being deceived as in the Latin version, Berceo’s Siagrio is responsible for the consequences of his vanity. Yet, he would not have been condemned for it; he falls afoul of the Creator because of his “palavras locas” and his inability to restrain his language, a motive not found in the Latin story. Ildefonso is rewarded because he is not so foolish as to abuse language – indeed, he uses his dichos colorados to praise the Mother of God. To ensure that his audience understands the dangers that language can pose, Berceo contrasts the behavior of his source’s two characters so that this new message stands out.

Even a cursory survey of the circumstances used in Berceo’s description of his characters lead to the conclusion that the Spanish poet paints a more detailed portrait of them than found in the Latin manuscript. This elaboration seems to be done in order to fill in the missing circumstances and to amplify those already described in the Latin version, though Berceo does not embellish simply for the sake of providing the missing circumstances per se. Rather, by adding the missing details, he highlights the differences between Ildefonso and Siagrio, between what is good and what is evil.

In addition to changing the circumstance of person, Berceo also chooses to rework the circumstances of action found in his source in order to streamline the narrative and to place greater emphasis on the power of the Virgin Mary. These circumstances, as Cicero notes in his De inventione (74), must be considered in three temporal aspects when describing a particular deed (factum): what has happened before the act, what actually happens during the act, and finally, what will happen after the act. In this milagro, we find two acts (facta) central to the development of the plot: the apparition of the Virgin Mary, and the death of Siagrio. Berceo unifies the two apparitions found in Thott, streamlining the entire narration (Dutton 52), increasing the dramatic impact of the narrative (Snow 6) and further emphasizing the binary opposition between Ildefonso and Siagrio developed by means of the circumstances of person.

Because of the unification of the two apparitions of the Virgin, the sequence of events differs notably between the two stories. In Thott, the
Blessed Mother appears to Ildefonso after he has finished his book in her honor. After he establishes the feast of the Annunciation, it is then confirmed by a general Church council. Then Mary appears again, presenting Ildefonso with the vestment and granting him the right to sit upon the episcopal throne. The archbishop dies well after the apparition. Berceo changes the order of these events. Ildefonso establishes the feast day and appears to be celebrating it for the first time; this becomes the specific reason of the Virgin’s appearance. In the Spanish version, Mary also presents Ildefonso with a vestment and gives him sole right to sit on the throne.

After the fact, Berceo chooses to make more changes. He abbreviates the actions of the individual (Ildefonso) and instead tells of a general reaction after the apparition:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original Latin</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Esta festa preciosa que avemos contada</td>
<td>This precious feast that we have told about</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>En general concilio fue luego confirmada</td>
<td>In a general council it was later confirmed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Es por muchas iglesias fecha e celebrada</td>
<td>It is celebrated by many churches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mientras el siglo fuere non sera olvidada</td>
<td>While the century lasts, it will not be forgotten</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The confirmation of the feast day and its universal celebration are the result not of the work of Ildefonso, as in the Latin version, but rather are a direct result of the appearance of the Virgin, a clear demonstration of her influence and power. In contrast, the Thott author does not explicitly mention any general reaction after either appearance.

In much the same way, Berceo reworks the circumstances that follow the second major event of the milagro, the death of Siagrio. Once again the poet opts to suppress the particulars and instead emphasizes the wider ramifications of what has happened. The author of the Latin text first narrates the action of those present immediately after the evil man’s death: “Quod videntes. . .sacrum vestimentum. . .tulerunt et in thesauro ecclesie. . .reposuerunt” (60). He then draws a sententia after recounting the particulars of the case:

Sic sancta dei genitrix beatum hildefonsum, qui ei devote servierat, honoravit. Siagrii vero presumpicionem morte multavit ostendens quia, quisquis eam honoraverit, graciam dei et suam habebit. (60)

Just as after the apparition of the Virgin to Ildefonso, Berceo omits the particulars after Siagrio’s death and amplifies the universal. As in the
source, Berceo’s villain is strangled when the vestment grows smaller and smaller around his throat, although Berceo amplifies, illustrating the manner of death with a simile, “como cadena dura” (72c). No particular is narrated after the fact as in Thott, but rather Berceo states the universal truth, not even basing it explicitly on the particulars of his narration:

La virgen gloriosa gualardón bueno dar;
Sabe a sus amigos el bien gualadonar
Bien sabe a los buenos sábelos mal curar.
A los que la dessierven

Here, instead of the term “gracia” as in the Latin version and all the theological implications it carries with it, Berceo uses “gualardón” and then repeats it again in the verbal form. The good person who is devoted to Mary is not given grace so as to grow in good works, but rather is given the prize – eternal life. So while the particulars of the Ildefonsine case are not recounted specifically but rather generally, the more abstract “gracia dei” becomes a concrete “gualardón,” a much more material, and therefore more motivational, reason to follow the example set forth in the milagro.

Based on this analysis, we see that Berceo’s artistic genius lies not in any modern concept that links literary achievement with originality. It is based instead on his ability to manipulate an established narration to suit his own purpose, and he amplifies and abbreviates his text based on the rhetorical notion of circumstances not only in order to “darle una dimensión dramática,” to his narration (Vicente García 21), but also to develop themes not found in his source. In the “Milagro de la casulla de San Ildefonso,” Berceo emphasizes the dangers of language and the consequences of its misuse. In the Spanish poem, Siagrio dies not only because he presumptuously uses the vestment given to Ildefonso, but especially because he cannot hold his tongue. Berceo again emphasizes that “those who use language effectively to further God’s plan belong to the group of God’s chosen, who are clearly destined for heaven” (Kelly 87). The second thematic change is equally as evident: ardent devotion to the Holy Mother is not rewarded with the abstract “gracia” of the Latin version, but rather the “gualardón” of eternal life, something that each of Berceo’s listeners could immediately understand.


Most Voltaire scholars insist that he hated Jews. They quote various writings to show his hostility to the Old Testament and the absurdities of Jewish religious dogma and fanaticism and his contempt for Jews, both as depicted in the Bible and in their contemporary European lifestyle to the extent he was familiar with it. They argue that he retained resentments dating from a time when former business partners who were Jewish merchants or bankers had cheated him or gone bankrupt, despising wealthy Jews for their alleged obsession with money and poor Jews for their rumored unkemptness, primitive superstitions, insularity, and failure to develop a substantive cultural identity.¹

Usually, scholars quote from Voltaire’s corpus of erudite, semi-scholarly writings, such as the Essai Sur Les Moeurs and the Dictionnaire Philosophique, his multi-volume Correspondance, and obscure pamphlets that focus particularly on the Jewish religion’s shortcomings and the violent, barbaric history of the Jewish people as literally depicted in the Old Testament, to reveal his irrational prejudice against the so-called Chosen People. Occasionally, however, Voltaire’s well-known masterpiece, Candide, is brought into the argument to “prove” the ubiquity of his antipathy toward the Jews.

¹ Some of the many studies that emphasize Voltaire’s hostility to Jews and insist that he engendered a universal legacy of hatred include Hertzberg, 280-313; Vital, 137-138; Carroll, 420-423; Sutcliffe, “Myth,” 107-126; Sutcliffe, “Philosophe,” 31-51; Goldkorn, 42-44; Manuel, 193-201; and Katz, 34-47. Among the less numerous general defenses of Voltaire against scholars’ charges of Anti-Semitism are Roper; Gay, 97-108; Schechter, “Rationalizing Enlightenment,” 279-306; Schechter, Obstinate Hebrews, 239-240, 294; Chisick, 577-600; and Badir, 709-715. Although seldom-cited, Arkush 223-243 is one of the best defenses of Voltaire against charges of Jew-hatred.
Briefly discussing Voltaire in his essay, “The Attitude of the Enlightenment Towards the Jew,” using *Candide* as an example, Paul H. Meyer concluded that the sage of Ferney’s animosity against Jews was appalling and unremitting. Meyer asserts:

A great deal has been written on the specific issue of Voltaire’s attitude to the Jews, and neither the fact that his hostility did primarily serve as a protective screen behind which he could attack the Roman Catholic Church with relative impunity, nor the thesis that he was genuinely repelled by the instances of primitive ferocity found in the Old Testament, will completely explain either the irrelevance of the numerous gratuitous aspersions cast on the Jews as individuals, as in *Candide*, or his frequent and deliberate distortions of the facts related in the Bible. There is no question but that Voltaire, particularly in his latter years, nursed a violent hatred of the Jews and it is equally certain that his animosity...did have a considerable impact on public opinion in France. (Meyer 1177)

Similarly, Arnold Ages, who has written numerous indignant attacks on Voltaire’s Anti-Semitism, based on selections from diverse sources, points out: “His *Lettres philosophiques*, *Dictionnaire philosophique*, and *Candide*, to name but a few of his better known works, are saturated with comments on Jews and Judaism and the vast majority are negative” (361).

However, a closer examination of *Candide* makes evident that, for Voltaire as for most *philosophes*, Jews, like Frenchmen, Englishmen, and myriad other groups, embodied what David Hume, one of the age’s leading thinkers, referred to as the “constant and universal principles of human nature,” no more, no less (Hume 93). As Voltaire put it in his *Examen Important de Milord Bolingbroke*, “Nowadays, in Rome, in London, in Paris, in all the great cities, in place of religion, as in Alexandria from the time of the Emperor Hadrian, as the letter to Sevarius, written from Alexandria, asserts: ‘All have only one God; Christians, Jews, and all the others, adore it with the same ardor: it is money.’” After quoting this statement, Voltaire scholar Pierre Aubery notes that “the Jews of his time were indeed very similar in their values and behaviour to Christians and other people whose values and behaviour were, for the most part, far from admirable” (Aubery 181-182).

Surprisingly, none of Voltaire’s defenders against charges of anti-Semitism have paid any attention to how Jews are actually depicted in his greatest work, *Candide*. This may be because the broad humor of the *conte* makes it hard to take its ideas about race and ethnicity seriously. Although Jews are not prominent in the *conte*, a careful reader can get a
good idea of Voltaire’s opinion of Jews in relation to other ethnic or religious groups. He is generally more sympathetic to them than he is to Roman Catholic priests, Dutch businessmen, Italian landlords, Turkish ship captains, Spanish governors of Buenos Aires, and other ethnic and racial groups mentioned in the tale.

In *Candide* as in most of his writing, Voltaire’s opinion of human nature is low. He finds despicable most societies, governments, and religions, which persecute and kill minority groups or individuals that disagree with them, and then confiscate their wealth. Indeed, compared with *Candide*’s depiction of other races and religious groups, the Jews come off quite well. When a group of Peruvian Indians, under the impression that Candide is a Jesuit, prepares to cannibalistically eat him for dinner, Cacambo, Candide’s Latin-American valet and partner in sharing El Dorado’s riches, pithily observes, “The law of nations teaches us to kill our neighbor and this is how people behave all over the world” (Voltaire 270-271). Many of the characters who appear in *Candide* are more odious than the Jews. The Batavia-born sailor (of unclear nationality) who assaults the good Dutch Anabaptist Jacques and looks on when he is thrown overboard, then searches for prostitutes in Lisbon’s wreckage (240-241), is far more vicious than the Jews in the *conte*. As for the Franciscan friar who steals Cunégonde’s jewels when she and Candide are in flight to Cadiz, and the Benedictine friar who bought her horse “very cheap” (251), *Candide*’s secularized Jewish merchants are more honest and generous than these Roman Catholic monks.

Jews first appear in chapter six of the *conte*, in the famous scene in which, in order to appease God’s wrath, two Jews are arrested and burned at the stake by the Portuguese Inquisition in an *auto-da-fé* following the Lisbon earthquake in 1755. Perhaps in order to increase the sense of the absurdity of the atrocity perpetrated against the Jews because of their race and religion, Voltaire initially refers to them only as “two Portuguese who, when eating a chicken, had pulled off the fat *lard*” (242). He soon informs us, “the two men who had not wanted to eat bacon were burned” (243).

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2 I have supplied the translation of *lard* as chicken fat, finding it more correct than the customary translation as “bacon,” which actually makes little sense, since there would be no reason for Jews to eat bacon and chicken together. Indeed, the translation of *lard* as chicken fat increases the situation’s absurdity as well as being more accurate, because chicken often does have fat on it.
The two executed Jews are first identified as such in chapter 8, when Candide’s lover Cunégonde describes her attendance at an auto-da-fé at the invitation of one of her paramours, the Grand Inquisitor, who ordered the Jews, a Biscayan, and Pangloss burned at the stake (although Pangloss is hanged instead when a rainstorm quells the fire), and Candide whipped. She says, “I was indeed horror-stricken when I saw the burning of the two Jews” (247). Although Voltaire’s objective narrator shies from outrage, in a sense Cunégonde speaks for him, in one of her most emotional moments. In this scene, Jews are depicted as tragic, persecuted beings.

The most prominent Jewish character in Candide is Don Issacar (or Issachar), the Portuguese merchant-banker who purchased Cunégonde from the Bulgarian captain who captured her in the attack on Castle Thunder-ten-tronkh. Although in some respects Don Issacar’s presence in the conte is ludicrous, we learn enough about him to infer that, like Candide and the murdered Jews, he has suffered at the hands of the Roman Catholic Inquisition personified by the Grand Inquisitor, who greatly outdoes him in villainy.

Cunégonde supplies us all the information we have about Don Issacar. Although she is virtually Issacar’s slave, so far as we are told he treats her well and does not sexually abuse her. As a member of the Jewish race (though in no way religiously observant), Don Issacar is denied most civil rights, including that of having a Christian woman for a mistress, despite his (probably spurious) title of nobility. Thus, the Grand Inquisitor, who is also infatuated with Cunégonde, easily forces him to share her with him. The Inquisitor pays the Jew nothing for this privilege, although Don Issacar alone takes care of Cunégonde’s physical needs and provides the country house where both men court her. Somewhat like Shakespeare’s Shylock, Don Issacar suffers discrimination and is treated unjustly despite his wealth. This contributes to the bitterness he vents in the few words he speaks in the conte before Candide kills him.

In need of money, and bored with Cunégonde, the Bulgarian captain who enslaved her sold her to the Jew Don Issacar (the latter’s name is also the moniker of the fifteenth son of Jacob and Leah in the Old Testament, a

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3 Prince 51-64 praises Candide’s narrator for epitomizing common sense and the Enlightenment’s particularistic, empirical orientation.
founder of one the original Twelve Tribes of Israel). Don Issacar traded in Holland and Portugal. With a passion for women, the Jew was kind, even subservient to Cunégonde. He “devoted himself” to her, although she refused to submit to his advances (246-247). Unlike the Bulgarian soldier, the more civilized Don Issacar never raped her. He tolerates her resistance, at least temporarily. Moreover, his servant La Vieille, despite her loquaciousness throughout the conte, never disparages him as a cruel master.

Eventually, in order to convince Cunégonde to become more accommodating (pour m’apprivoiser), Don Issacar brought her to a country house he owned. She was much impressed by its décor: "I had believed, up till then, that there was nothing on earth so beautiful as the chateau of Thunder-ten-tronckh. I was undeceived [détrompée],” she admits (247). Nevertheless, she assures Candide she has resisted the Jew’s blandishments.

The stalemate persists until the Grand Inquisitor, who later orders the two Jews burned and has Candide whipped, notices Cunégonde. He ogles her at Mass – hardly an appropriate activity for a high prelate – and takes her to his palace, pretending he wants to talk to her about secret affairs. When she tells him she is a German noblewoman, he observes that it was much below her rank “to be the kept woman of a Jew [appartenir à un Israélite] (Pomeau 110).” The Grand Inquisitor sends his intermediaries to propose that Don Issacar give Cunégonde up to him, but Don Issacar, the court banker and a man of influence despite his Jewish background, flatly refuses. Aware of Don Issacar’s racial Achilles heel, the Inquisitor, by threatening to have him burned at the stake, intimidates him into agreeing to a deal whereby the Jew’s country-house, as well as Cunégonde, would belong to them in common. The Jew would reside there with her on Mondays, Wednesdays, and the “Sabbath day” – only three days, despite his actual ownership of the house and the woman – while the other four days would belong to the Grand Inquisitor. This tenuous arrangement had so far lasted for six months, during which the Jew and the Inquisitor had argued over who enjoyed the night hours between Saturday and Sunday morning, which threatened to whittle down Don Issacar’s time still further. Like Can-

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4 For a more detailed discussion of the Biblical significance of Don Issacar’s name, see Jory.

5 For further information on this incident, see McGregor.
dide, Don Issacar was deprived of the pleasure of Cunégonde’s company by the society’s hegemonic powers. (Although Cunégonde assured Candide she had not been sexually intimate with either worthy, opining that this had kept their obsession with her strong, hints conveyed by La Vieille indicate that her statements may not be true.)

Finally, to further intimidate Don Issacar into surrendering all his rights to Cunégonde, and hoping to forestall the occurrence of another Lisbon earthquake, the Grand Inquisitor announced an auto-da-fé, and “honored” Cunégonde with an invitation to attend. She was given an excellent seat, and along with other ladies was served refreshments in the intermission between the Mass and the executions. Appalled by the killing of the two Jews, she fainted when she saw her old tutor Pangloss hanged and a nude Candide flagellated, events which she felt refuted Pangloss’s dictum that this was the best of all possible worlds. She secretly reviles the Grand Inquisitor for the evil acts that shatter her formerly optimistic world view, telling Candide that, after he was whipped, she pondered: “How does it happen that the charming Candide and the wise Pangloss are in Lisbon, the one to receive a hundred lashes, and the other to be hanged, by order of My Lord the Inquisitor, whose darling I am?” (248).

Painfully aware of the atrocities committed by her lover the Grand Inquisitor, Cunégonde, while negatively depicting “mon vilain don Issacar,” more pointedly denounces “mon abominable inquisiteur” (Pomeau 112). She seemingly depicts the Roman Catholic more unfavourably than the Jew, since in the French language, abominable connotes heinousness, foulness, and loathsomeness, while vilain is generally translated as “nasty” or “unpleasant.” To the extent that Cunégonde voices Voltaire’s views, we must consider him as foregoing any particularly injurious accusations against Jews as compared with non-Jewish figures in the novel.

When Don Issacar arrives, probably around midnight on Saturday night/Sunday morning, to “enjoy his rights and to express his tender love” (249) to Cunégonde, he finds her on the sofa talking with Candide (or perhaps love-making, the conte is not clear which). In chapter nine, he is introduced as “le plus colérique Hébreu qu’on eût vu dans Israel depuis la captivité en Babylone” (Pomeau 114). He utters a few justifiably angry words: “‘What!’” said he. ‘Bitch of a Galilean, isn’t it enough to have the Inquisitor? Must this scoundrel share with me too?’” (249).
Thus, Don Issacar is painfully aware of Cunégonde’s non-Jewish (gentile or “Galilean”) status, whereas his Jewishness makes it possible for the Grand Inquisitor to treat him with contempt and exploit his “property” – Cunégonde and his summer house. Such abuse undoubtedly increases Don Issacar’s hostility to Christians.

Don Issacar is unheroic but impetuous. The narrator tells us that, after his hot-tempered remarks, he lunges at Candide: “He drew a long dagger, which he always carried and, thinking that his adversary was unarmed, threw himself upon Candide.” He did not know that La Vieille, Cunégonde’s servant and Issacar’s employee, had given Candide an “excellent sword. . . along with his suit of clothes,” when she visited his hovel to put balm on his wounds after the Inquisitors flagellated him, whereupon Candide kills the Jew.

Don Issacar’s death goes unlamented. Although he provided Cunégonde with the roof over her head, she merely exclaims: “What will become of us? A man killed in my house! If the police come we are lost” (249). Fortuitously, the Grand Inquisitor, having arrogated Saturday night/Sunday morning to himself, thus leaving Don Issacar only Monday, Wednesday, and Saturday’s daylight hours, arrives an hour after midnight on Saturday night/Sunday morning. Candide, who hates him for ordering him whipped, executing Pangloss, and courting Cunégonde, instantly kills him.

The Grand Inquisitor appears far more brutal and nefarious than Don Issacar. This is appropriate to Voltaire’s ideology, for he hated the infâme of tyrannical Roman Catholic religious establishments that suppressed human freedom far more than what he conceived of as provincial-minded, ignorant, money-grubbing Jews, who were after all like most everybody else in these respects, not sadistically, unconscionably
seeking to deprive other human beings of their pursuit of happiness and freedom like the Grand Inquisitor and his ilk.

The aftermath of Candide’s murders also indirectly bespeaks Voltaire’s greater sympathy for the Jew: When the Grand Inquisitor’s henchmen, too late to save their confere, arrive at Don Issacar’s house, the dispassionate narrator describes the disposal of the dead men’s bodies: “My Lord was buried in a splendid church and Issacar was thrown into a sewer” (250). Just like his body, Issacar’s honorific title (“don”) has entered the sewage of oblivion. Yet for Voltaire – who despised the tyranny embedded in “splendid churches,” and one of whose lovers, Adrienne Lecouvreur (1692-1730), a famous Parisian actress the Catholic Church denied proper burial, depositing her corpse in potter’s field because of her “sacrilegious” vocation – a Lisbon sewer may have been a more honorable interment.8

The malevolent Dutch merchant, ship captain and slave-holder Vanderdendur, who lives in Dutch Guiana (Surinam), is likewise far more vicious than any of the Jews.9 Perhaps Voltaire intended him to serve as a brutish foil to another Dutchman who plays a significant part in the story, the “good Anabaptist” Jacques.10 He thereby balances a “good” with a “bad” Hollander, in pursuit of his idea that race or ethnicity does not unvaryingly determine the goodness or evil of one’s “human nature,” whether one is Spanish (the Governor of Buenos Aires is particularly evil), Dutch, German, French, Portuguese, Jewish, Moslem or Christian. The Negro slave whose leg Vanderdendur has cut off because he tried to escape has experienced perhaps even greater malevolence from his own parents, who initially sold him into slavery (282). Compared with Vanderdendur and the slave’s African mother and father (who do not appear in the conte), Candide’s Jews are kind.

Indeed, one of Candide’s recurring themes is that most people, certainly not only Jews, are evil. Candide naively implies this underlying message several times in the tale. For instance, early in the conte he tells Cacambo, “Venice . . . is a free country where there is nothing to fear . . .”

8 For Voltaire’s relationship with Adrienne Lecouvreur, see Mason 147-148; Carlson 14-16, 19, 39-40; Besterman 63, 169-170; and Pearson 54, 65-66, 88, 375. The noun Voltaire uses, la voirie, may also be translated as garbage dump.

9 For the appearance of Captain Vanderdendur in the conte and the actions that distinguish him as Candide’s most evil character, see Voltaire 282-288.

10 However, for the limitations of the Anabaptist’s benevolence, see Scherr 74-76.
from Bulgarians, Abares, Jews, or Inquisitors” (283). (That he had thus far met only a kind-hearted Hollander, the Anabaptist Jacques, and has not yet encountered the Dutch Surinam merchant, ship captain and slaveholder Vanderdendur, the meanest person in the book, may account for his omitting the Dutch from this list).

At the same time, Candide reveals that he is not especially virtuous. Although he “shed tears” after speaking with the mutilated slave in Surinam, the knowledge that Captain Vanderdendur is the sadistic slaveholder who perpetrated this act does not deter Candide from hiring Vanderdendur to transport him to Venice a few minutes later and agreeing to pay the exorbitant fee he demands. When Vanderdendur (in an instance of poetic justice) steals Candide’s sheep, bearing the gold, diamonds and emeralds he had picked up in El Dorado, and a corrupt judge defrauds Candide by a more subtle form of robbery, Candide experiences his most cynical and depressing moment: “This behavior reduced Candide to despair; he had indeed endured misfortunes a thousand times more painful; but the calmness of the judge and of the captain who had robbed him, stirred up his bile and plunged him into a black melancholy. The malevolence of men revealed itself to his mind in all its ugliness; he entertained only gloomy ideas” (284-285). By contrast, the Jews he dealt with at least gave him some kind of service in exchange for funds received rather than blatantly rob him.

Ironically, in the final chapters 28-30 of the novel, Jews are the vehicles of Candide’s secular salvation. The money they provide enables him to buy a small farm at Constantinople and begin a new, more productive life, in which he will rely for his well-being on his own activity rather than the largesse of a mean-spirited Baron or precious jewels he finds in the streets of El Dorado. Needing funds to ransom Pangloss and the young Baron, both enslaved on a Turkish galley, upon landing in Constantinople Candide prefers to sell his diamonds to a Jewish banker rather than to Moslems – whose duplicity and intolerance Voltaire had earlier stridently denounced in a mediocre play, Mahomet the Prophet; or Fanaticism (1741) – or Christians, apparently believing Jews would treat him more fairly. As the novel informs us, “They [Candide, Martin and Cacambo] sent for a Jew, and Candide sold him for fifty thousand sequins a diamond worth a hundred thousand, for which he swore by Abraham he could not give any more. The ransom of the Baron and Pangloss was immediately paid” (319).
The Jewish merchant is humorously depicted as a shyster who gives Candide only fifty percent of what the diamond is worth. However, by comparison with the Christians he has encountered, who blatantly steal his wealth without paying him anything, and the Moslem Turkish ship captain, who dubs him a “dog of a Christian,” and who, like the deposed Sultan who owned his friend Cacambo, charges him an exorbitant ransom for Pangloss and the Baron, the Jew is a model of civility, fairness and good will. In any case, Candide had picked up the jewels gratuitously from the pavement of El Dorado, so in a sense the Jew is giving him something for nothing. Jews are the only people in the novel to pay him money for what might be considered unearned wealth. In Paris, venal police officers, French priests, and prostitutes had stolen his money, along with a person hiding behind a screen, pretending to be his lover Cunégonde.

Thanks to Jewish bankers, Candide acquires the funds to ransom Cacambo, the Baron and Pangloss from the brutish Turks. Again, in order to obtain money to buy passage on a ship and ransom Cunégonde, who is the slave of a prince of Transylvania exiled to Constantinople among the Turks (320), Candide seeks the services of Jews, whom he knows to be more honest than Moslems and Christians, who abound in Constantinople. As in the previous case, he “immediately sent for two Jews; Candide sold some more diamonds; and they all set out in another galley to rescue Cunégonde” (319).

Ironically, the conniving Jewish merchants, signifying the salutary social consequences of economic self-interest, are in a sense responsible for the conte’s relatively happy ending. By purchasing Candide’s diamonds (even at bargain prices), they provide the capital he employs to liberate his friends and lover from Moslem enslavement. Paradoxically, the Jews’ monetary gain benefits humanity, epitomized by Candide and his group, lending the “invisible hand” that Adam Smith delineated in *The Wealth of Nations* in 1776.

Indeed, the Jews’ money providentially enables Candide to buy the “little farm” he and his friends settle at the conte’s conclusion, which provides a possibility of future contentment (322). As the narrator informs us, Candide’s efforts to sell his last few diamonds resulted in him being “so cheated by the Jews that he had nothing left but his little farm” (324). Compelled to live a hand-to-mouth existence as a result of Jewish merchants’ profit-maximizing behavior, Candide and his little
community embark on a regimen of productive work. Paradoxically, this life-style leads them to feel useful, for the first time giving their existences some meaning and themselves a semblance of pleasure. The denouement is made clear in the last chapter's final sentences, when Candide concludes, “we must cultivate our garden.”

The devious Jew-merchants, whom Voltaire depicts as embodying the pecuniary mentality, nevertheless make possible Candide's second “providential fall” (the first one being his exile from the Baron's castle, which forced him to undertake the conte's journey of self-discovery). By reducing him to a small farmer, they have also paradoxically provided him an opportunity to create his own identity, that of the self-sufficient, petit bourgeois landowner. Thus, the Jews enable Candide and his coterie to start a new life.

As an outcast from the Ancien Régime, booted out of Castle Thunder-ten-tronckh as a bastard with the temerity to kiss the Baron’s daughter, Candide knows how it feels to be an outsider. But the gold and diamonds he acquired at El Dorado enabled him to transmute himself, albeit tenuously, from outsider to insider, just as the possession of monied wealth had helped Jews gain a precarious economic security, although they were constantly persecuted, subjected to exorbitant extra taxation, and their property was often confiscated by the authorities. Indeed, in the course of the tale, Candide suffers similar abuses and the confiscation of his wealth. Thus, we may conclude that Candide, an illegitimate child and an abused outsider whose acquisition of wealth gained him a certain fragile legitimacy, is himself a prototypical “Jew.”

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WORKS CITED


TRANSATLANTIC VISIONS: IMAGINING MEXICO IN JUAN REJANO’S *LA ESFINGE MESTIZA* AND LUIS BUÑUEL’S *LOS OLVIDADOS*

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The role of Mexico in support of the Second Spanish Republic during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) is well known. The government of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940) provided military equipment to the Republican Army and subsequently, when the war was over, offered assistance to many Spanish Republican intellectuals.¹ This article examines the constructions of Mexico in the work of two such Spanish exiles taking as a point of departure Juan Rejano’s *La esfinge mestiza: crónica menor de México* which is then juxtaposed with Luis Buñuel’s film *Los olvidados*.

In Mexico exiled Spanish artists hoped to pursue the intellectual work that had become impossible in Franco’s fascist dictatorship. In these works, one finds differing images of mother figures in an effort to rethink the very notion of origin, apparently reversing the traditional colonial discourse of “the motherland.” To describe the experience of exiled Spaniards the philosopher José Gaos, who also sought refuge in Mexico, forged the neologism *transterrados*, as a way of avoiding the negative connotations of the word *desterrados* (or “the uprooted”), suggesting a transfer rather than an upheaval. However, the solitude and nostalgia that many of these artists explore in their work would seem to undermine the appropriateness of Gaos’ neologism. *Transterrados* suggests a unidirectional movement forward across lands, whereas what one sees in exile writing is more of a circular or zig-zagging movement.

¹ As Francie Cate-Arries has pointed out, Mexico became a utopian space for the Spanish Republican refugees (Cate-Arries 227).
between imagined spaces on both sides of the Atlantic. Furthermore, the dynamic of recognition many Spanish exiles express in their writings presents its own risks whereas Mexico functioned as a “virtual Spain” fulfilling the promise of what Spain might have been if Franco had never come to power. This unfulfilled promise appears often as a space of virginal purity and freedom. In other words, Mexico is treated as a blank slate on which to project a lost, idealized Spain. Yet, paradoxically, as I will suggest, this image of a virginal paradise is not far from that which the conquistadores saw in the New World.2

Juan Rejano was one of many Spanish intellectuals whose life radically changed as a result of the Spanish Civil War. Although he became a well-established intellectual in Mexico, his literary work has not attracted much scholarly attention. A native of Córdoba, his exile began in 1939 when he moved to Mexico where he died in 1976 never having returned to Spain.3 His chronicle (La esfinge mestiza: crónica menor de México) published in 1945 is a fundamental text of Spanish exile writing which deploys two visions of Mexico: one that lies outside historical time, and a second one, which may be compared with Buñuel’s film and which is grounded in its present.

For Rejano, writing presents itself both as an attempt to understand a country that seems a mystery and a way to render homage to the land that adopted him. He shows his admiration for Mexico by portraying it as the utopian space of what the Spanish Republic could have been. However, his text is also an exploration of his past which serves to forge a new self in conflict with Franco’s Spain. As he warns the reader, this is not a “transcendental book on Mexico,” but a text on his impressions of Mexico’s cities, landscapes and traditions.4 Yet, one may to ask what Rejano is avoiding here. His writing reveals a sense of guilt and a certain doubt as to the legitimacy of his project, which appears in his references to the Spanish conquest. Rejano finds himself in a delicate situation which requires him to forge new alliances by praising the early

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2 In Marvelous Possessions, Stephen Greenblatt argues that from Columbus onward there was a tendency to view the Amerindians as “virtual blanks” or “virtual doubles” upon which to project (or construct) Spain’s identity (95).
3 For other biographical references see Sabas Martín (1980).
4 And he adds: “se omite, deliberadamente, cuanto atañe a los problemas y a los hombres que juegan dramáticamente en torno a ellos. Ni política, ni cuestiones sociales, ni conflictos económicos, ni disputa de razas” (Preface).
heroes of the Mexican independence movement and of the Mexican Revolution, the values of the Mexican Republic, as well as those who opposed imperial Spanish power.

Taking Rejano’s chronicle as my primary focus, one question that I would like to explore here is what lies behind the image of Mexico that these two refugees forged. In the case of Rejano, exile is almost a physical uprooting that is reflected in a poetics of solitude and nostalgia. For the exile at first, the real Mexican space is annulled in order to open the door to the labyrinths of the past. Thus, Rejano’s point of departure is the desire to recuperate or reconstruct a lost space and a lost self on a new terrain.

At the beginning of his chronicle, Rejano finds “Spanish resonances” in Mexico, which allow the poet to immerse himself in his own origins. Mexico becomes therefore the ideal space for this introspection due both to the geographical distance that separates him from Franco’s Spain and to the traces of Spain that he finds there. However, the Spain that he is indirectly writing about does not exist, it inhabits his memories and his imagination, and can only be recaptured through dreams and writing. In order to separate himself completely from the fascist Spain of his present, Rejano must also distance himself from the ideology of a ghostly empire. Thus, as I have said, history is present in Rejano’s work, yet only as something to distance oneself from. Thus when he arrives in Veracruz and sees the mountain of Orizaba he writes:

Yo pensé: la historia se repite. Y volví a pensar: ni más ni menos que como a los conquistadores. Pero lo pensé riendo. Porque, mientras la gallarda silueta que vieron Cortés y sus gentes seguía siendo la misma, los españoles que ahora la contemplaban eran radicalmente otros. Eran los conquistados de antemano por una tierra libre: obra transformadora del tiempo. (34)

Upon his arrival by boat, Rejano immediately turns his thoughts to Hernán Cortés. Rather than going to Mexico with the project of subjugating the land, here Rejano asserts the power of the free land to subjugate him. Thus, while the past allows the writer to understand his present, history ironically changes its course. Paradoxically, the very land that had been violated by Spaniards was now recognized as last bastion for the values which Franco now labeled “anti-Spanish.”
Yet, this “recognition” itself risks becoming a new form of cultural imperialism. In fact, Rejano’s encounter with Mexico has some elements of the recognition process that characterized the descriptions of America that the first explorers and conquerors produced. Indeed, Rejano is excited to see in Veracruz elements of his native Andalusia. The exile has thus somehow come home. Here pre-Franco Spain is directly associated with the innocence of childhood, a lost paradise which the poet hopes to recover in Mexico.

What is striking here is that, unlike the writings of the conquerors who simply transplanted their European imaginary onto the American reality, Rejano recognizes the American elements that were previously brought back to Spain by the Conquest resulting in an opposite movement, which nonetheless resembles the first. Rejano portrays his childhood as defined by this transatlantic connection, using the Mexican space to recover a time that had been lost. Thus, while the new land is associated with a return to innocence it is also a recovery of authenticity and wholeness of the traumatized self. Himself a victim of Spanish aggression in the guise of Franco’s regime, Rejano restitutes his origin at the juncture of Spain and Mexico. Hence, he traces a new connection that is posited as original. It is precisely this reversal, which he terms a “paradoxical influence” that characterizes the political reversals of the time. In order to rediscover a “true Hispanic culture” that lay precisely in a rejection of what was being defined as “essential Spain,” Rejano has to leave his land and find one that was both radically other and oddly familiar. Now the influence comes from Spain, as it rises to the surface of the poet’s memory, forging a personal link to the image of Mexico that he is creating. In fact, the uprooting experience of exile or destierro that leads Rejano’s writings to a decentered and temporally split self also leads to the search for a new center which begins as a movement inward: “Era dentro de nosotros mismos donde tratábamos de percibir un Veracruz, un México, un continente entero” (34).

But, what are the implications of this vision of time and space for the representation of Mexico? The link between Spain and Mexico is
presented as a closed circle that would seem to exclude that which is genuinely Mexican and which is filtered out by a personal Spain that exists in the poet’s mind. Thus, Rejano begins to draw a poetic map of Mexico with coordinates taken from the imagined Andalusia of his past. Just as the Córdoba of his childhood was invested with American elements that pointed to America, here he finds that Mexico points back to his native city in Spain. The idealization of Mexico is built here upon a perceived recognition of another home, another mother, this time chosen by the son. This other Córdoba represents for the poet more than a refuge, it represents a return to his childhood, the possibility to start again, to go back to the innocence of a place unperturbed by adulthood, violence or war. The eyes of the poet in this new land become those of a child discovering the world for the first time, a world that seems to him virginal and transparent.

It is only through its landscape that Mexico acquires for the poet an identity that differentiates itself substantially from Spain. Here he is confronted with a virginal and transparent territory in which it is possible to redeem the self. This is an idealized, utopian space in which the historical Mexico is absent, and to which the poet returns as though to the mother’s womb. Yet, despite his prologue’s apparently ahistorical stance, Rejano cannot completely elude the social reality of his time. Strolling at night in Mexico City, he discovers two opposed realities: that of the wealthy, and that of the homeless many of whom are children. Faced with this reality Rejano is disarmed, and helpless to change the situation. One child in particular draws his attention:

Siente uno que no puede más, y llama repetidas veces al niño, pensando en llevárselo a su casa, a que pueda dormir entre cuatro paredes lejos, de las inclemencias. [. . .] Está entumecido, casi yerto. No despierta acaso no quiere saber nada de nadie. Y uno siente miedo, un miedo cobarde, y nota que la lengua se le paraliza, y no se atreve a gritar, sí a gritar, a clamar contra el cielo y la tierra, contra todos los que duermen y los que están despiertos. Contra todo y contra todos. (125)

Thus, although Rejano perceives serious holes in his idealized maternal image of Mexico, he is unable or unwilling to engage or
explore them further as Buñuel did in a hard-hitting film marked both with realistic and surreal touches.

The symbolism of the mother is also key to the film *Los olvidados* (1950) but the Mexico that Buñuel depicts is historical and rooted in the poverty, social injustices and the precarious conditions in which poor children lived in Mexico City in the 1940’s and 1950’s. One of the central themes of the film is the abandonment of children by their parents who cannot support them, and the relationship that the child vagabond, Pedro, has with his young mother who shows him no affection. The film centers on this child and his fellow elder gang member, Jaibo who has escaped from a detention center at the beginning of the story. Jaibo’s first actions upon his escape are criminal: he steals from an old blind man, and later kills Julián, whom he accuses of being an informant. Pedro witnesses Jaibo’s crimes, a fact which will have terrible consequences for him. Buñuel uses the story of these marginalized children in order to explore society’s complacency before such abandonment. A revelatory moment occurs in Pedro’s dream when he seeks to reconcile with his mother and recover his lost innocence while escaping the solitude of the sordid reality in which he lives. Here we see the difference in the approaches of Rejano and Buñuel, as even in his dream Pedro is unable to achieve this connection with his mother since the bully Jaibo steals the meat that she offers the hungry child. Thus the dream turns into a nightmare, and the loving mother finally abandons Pedro.

If, for Rejano, Mexico was a new (though mysterious) mother, Buñuel’s film appears to be the product of his own disillusionment with

7 Ernesto Acevedo-Muñoz argues that the film reveals the failures of the Mexican Revolution. This atmosphere of disillusionment began to emerge among some intellectuals after Cardenas’ presidency, particularly at the end of the 1940’s (58). As Acevedo-Muñoz rightly suggests, Buñuel’s film also criticizes the official notion of Mexican culture put forth by Mexican cinema of his time (67). In this sense *Los olvidados* reveals a crisis in traditional and commercial cinema of the 1940’s and 50’s.

8 This is one of the surrealist scenes that the film includes. Critics have interpreted its enigmatic content in different ways. Octavio Paz saw in this scene one of the Mexican myths, with the goddess Coatlicue, mother of all the gods: “Quizá sin proponérselo, Buñuel descubre en el sueño de sus héroes las imágenes arquetípicas del pueblo mexicano: Coatlicue y el sacrificio” (1996, 33). As goddess of the earth she is linked with life and death. A mythological interpretation of this scene would point to a sacrificial ritual of a mother that gives life and death to her own children. Peter Evans sees a different meaning of sacrifice in which the mother is offering her “torn vagina” to her children. In other words this would be an oedipal dream (1995, 86). This scene is ultimately a new demonstration of violence that exists throughout the film pointing out to its bloody ending.
a Mexico marked by the failures of the Mexican revolution, rampant capitalism and the conservative governments after Cárdenas. Similarly, Sebastiaan Faber perceives at the core of the film a fundamental contradiction between the “naive revolutionary optimism” of the Mexican state and the fatalistic portrait of the children’s actual lives (238). Although Faber argues that Buñuel did not criticize the Mexican state since the film is set within a larger frame of cities such as New York, Paris or London (the narrator begins the film by situating the problem of poverty in the context of capitalist societies), the Mexican public clearly felt differently – which explains the need for the initial sequence showing other cities, an international frame which is not present at all in the rest of the film. I agree with Faber that Buñuel’s vision of Mexico does not coincide with the idealistic one of some exile poets (such as Luis Cernuda and José Moreno Villa), but I would like to suggest that there is a political commitment in the film that targets the audience and ultimately the complacency of the state.

It is interesting to contrast this film’s criticism of the abuses of capitalism, with the somewhat idealized vision of Mexico as a new mother in Rejano’s La esfinge mestiza. Here, the filmmaker presents a new vision of Mexico as a mother who fails her children. The state in Buñuel’s film is represented by the ineffectual director of the reformatory school (Escuela Granja) where young Pedro ends up when falsely accused of stealing a knife. As Faber has pointed out, the film questions the utopian model of rationalism and progress that the reformatory school is based on: the problem is presented as impossible to solve resulting in fatalism and determinism, thus action is reduced to mere observation. This is present in an emblematic scene in which Pedro throws an egg at the camera when confined in the reformatory school. This image has interested critics for the self-reflexivity of an act which shatters the film’s realism and turning the viewer’s attention back upon filmmaking itself. But in terms of ideology this gesture is also very significant because it symbolizes an attack first against the filmmaker as observer and ultimately against society and the state that watches the misery of others without helping. The violence of this scene is ultimately an invitation to act but also the suggestion that acting is a fruitless enterprise. Thus, the final effect recalls Rejano’s feeling of powerlessness while contemplating the abandoned children in Mexico City. This
impossibility of effective action is the sad realization that both Rejano and Buñuel conclude with.9

I have attempted to show here that exile writing for Juan Rejano provokes a reflection on the self and the concept of origin as it establishes a relation with a new space conceived as a chosen mother. In this way, exile writing can reveal the very fiction of identity in its shifting imagined foundations by the very nature of the way in which the old and new homes are perceived. This journey of the imagination finally leads Rejano to move from his initial position as an outsider observing Mexico to a newly integrated subject who nonetheless finds himself somewhere in between his two nations: “Todo, todo desde aquí lo hemos visto, desde aquí a nuestra sangre se ha incorporado, a nuestro espíritu se ha unido, y no sabemos ya dónde se encuentran nuestras propias raíces” (“La Atalaya,” Elegías mexicanas, 12). Here, losing one’s roots as well as creating new alliances through contact with other people and spaces is linked with a reexamination of identity as origin.

The exiled artist faces a difficult choice: either accept uncritically the new country or exercise the freedom of speech that was denied in his or her own. In the case of Rejano the journey to a new home is made by grappling with the figure of the mother and the innocence of a child. However, as we have seen, Rejano’s chronicle presents the reader with a glimpse of a very different Mexico, a small window from which the viewer might see the forgotten children that Buñuel captured in his film.

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9 In his later poetry Rejano developed a stronger social consciousness towards the country that gave him a new nationality, a clear example is his collection of poems entitled Elegías mexicanas (dedicated to Cárdenas).
WORKS CITED


THE work of Brazilian poet João Cabral de Melo Neto (1920-1999) has been described by critics as rational, rigorous, and unadorned – or in Cabral’s words, “mineral.” Standing in stark contrast to the effusive lyricism associated with the figure of the Romantic poet, Cabral, like the stone he describes in his poem “Pequena ode mineral,” aspires to a tight internal order in which “nada se gasta / mas permanence.” Indeed, in reading Cabral one notes a consistent emphasis on the poetic values of economy, control, and purity of style, and a concurrent rejection of the Romantic values of inspiration and fluidity. As a poet interested in describing concrete objects and spaces, Cabral often situates the poetic qualities he champions in Brazil’s arid northeastern interior, the sertão, which in turn provides him with the setting for some of his best known poems, including “A educação pela pedra” and “Uma faca só lâmina.”

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1 This paper is dedicated to Luiz F. Valente, who introduced me to the poetry of João Cabral de Melo Neto.

2 The description of the stone in “Pequena ode mineral” serves as a helpful definition of the “mineral” in Cabral. See the following stanzas: “Essa presença / que reconheces / não se devora / tudo em que cresce.; / Nem mesmo cresce / pois permanece / fora do tempo / que não a mede.; / pesado sólido / que ao fluido vence, / que sempre ao fundo / das coisas desce” (Obra completa 83). Haroldo de Campos credited Cabral with inaugurating in Brazil “a poetry of construction, rational and objective, over and against a poetry of expression, subjective and irrational” (Campos 69; author’s emphasis). See also Houaiss (218). All translations are my own except where otherwise noted.

3 In English, “nothing is wasted / but remains.”

4 In the first of these poems, Cabral describes a stone that resists fluidity and movement, and that is concrete and economical in design. In the second, he writes of a knife that is “only blade” and that exhibits the poetic virtues of sharpness, precision, and alertness.
While the Pernambuco-born Cabral was intimately involved with the Brazilian northeast, the *sertão* does not constitute the only backdrop for his poetry. As a Brazilian diplomat, Cabral lived intermittently in Spain beginning in 1947, working at consulates in Barcelona, Seville and Cadiz, and traveling extensively within the country. Spain’s landscape and everyday life came to exert a powerful influence on Cabral’s poetry, and Spanish themes began appearing in his work with the collection *Paisagens com figuras* (1954-55). As Luiz Costa Lima and many other critics have argued, Cabral’s inclusion of Spain in his poetry was not merely a function of his travels. In Lima’s estimation, Cabral found in Spain an environment that exhibited similar poetic and existential qualities to those he associated with the *sertão*, namely an “arid nakedness” (Lima 336-37). Indeed, Cabral frequently juxtaposes the two environments, often mixing Spanish and *nordestino* motifs in his poems, and suggesting that the two landscapes have a common character, which, as he writes in “Sevilha em casa,” are “de uma só maçanaria” (638).5

Among Cabral’s Spanish-themed poems there is an important subset dedicated to the Spanish bullfight, the *corrida de toros*.6 As can be concluded from a 1947 letter to fellow Brazilian poet Manuel Bandeira, Cabral’s *afición* for the bullfight was a reality from his first days in Spain, when he worked at the Brazilian consulate in Barcelona. In this letter, Cabral describes his interest in publishing an anthology of Spanish bullfighting poems in translation – a project he never realized. Cabral also references the recent death of the matador Manuel Rodríguez, or “Manolete.” Describing Manolete as “o melhor toureiro que já aparecera até hoje,” Cabral favorably compares Manolete to the French poet and theorist Paul Valéry, writing the following: “Seja dito de passagem que era um camarada fabuloso: vi-o algumas vezes aqui em

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5 See Campos: “The arid Spanish plain and the harsh [Brazilian] northeast are superimposed on each other, in the same optic, and the Spaniard and the *nordestino* are joined in the exemplary meagerness of their destinies” (Campos 73). See also Nunes, who remarks that Cabral’s is not merely a “geographical superimposing [predicated on] [. . .] a common scale of their physical and ecological identities,” but is moreover “a vision of an identical severe [. . .] existence that molds their topography into a single map, with the same prominences and weathering, be these rivers or cities, desert or vegetation” (Nunes 94).

6 These include “Alguns toureiros,” “Diálogo,” “El toro de lidia,” “Touro andaluz,” “A praça de touros de Sevilha,” “A morte de ‘Gallito’” and “A imaginação perigosa,” as well as poems dedicated to various individual matadors, including Manolete.
Barcelona e imaginei que era Paul Valéry toureando” (Süssekind 33-34). In making this comparison, Cabral links the acts of bullfighting and poetic composition, and anticipates the approach he would take in his own bullfighting poems, which he would begin writing in the mid-1950s. In these poems, Cabral elevates Manolete to the status of bullfighting and poetic ideal, and utilizes the corrida to offer a “lição de estética” to the reader. In compositions like “Alguns toureiros,” from Paisagens com figuras, Cabral utilizes the corrida – its structure, its props, its bulls, and especially its bullfighters, to illustrate his approach to literature. It is clear, therefore, that we can describe a Cabralian poetics of bullfighting for these poems.

In “Alguns toureiros,” Cabral describes the fighting styles of six prominent matadors. While he is sympathetic to each, the poet differentiates their respective styles, and establishes a clear preference for Manolete as the “most mineral” of the six, and as the bullfighter he links most closely to his poetic approach. Cabral evaluates the matadors by way of a recurring metaphor of bullfighting as the cultivation of a flower. This choice may seen curious in light of Cabral’s preference for fixed, inorganic, or “mineral” motifs, like the stones described in “Pequena ode mineral” and “A educação pela pedra,” or the knife of “Uma faca só lâmina.” However, Cabral’s championing of a mineral poetic order does not lead him to exclude potentially chaotic or violent manifestations of the organic – namely fluids, plants and animals – from his poetry.

Cabral actively confronts the threat of the organic in two distinct ways. First, he describes a mineral/organic opposition, with the two elements existing in a situation of contingency, and with the success of the___

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7 Flora Süssekind writes in her notes on the letter that Cabral owned a copy of José Maria de Cossío’s anthology, Los toros en la poesía (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1944), and that he kept a collection of “clippings, photos, and publications” on the corrida, and particularly on Manolete (Süsskind 37).
8 Cabral celebrated Valéry in the 1945 poem “Paul Valéry.” Valéry’s influence on Cabral becomes apparent in reading the former’s essays, particularly “Poetry and Abstract Thought,” against Cabral’s poetry. See Luiz Costa Lima’s helpful comparison of Cabral and Valéry (Lima 280).
9 This comment is found in a 1959 letter from Cabral to fellow Brazilian poet Murilo Mendes. Praising Mendes’s recently-published collection Tempo espanhol (1959) at the expense of his own Spanish-themed poems, Cabral judges himself – unfairly, in my opinion – unable to capably treat the bullfight, as a “manifestação, digamos assim, desse lado ‘espiritual’ da Espanha que V. capta tão bem” (Araújo 375).
mineral order predicated on its overcoming or avoiding the threat of the organic. See, for example, the poem “Cemitério pernambucano (Toritama).” This poem describes the cemetery as a mineral space separated by a wall and iron bars from the “defunta paisagem.” Cabral opposes a cemetery that paradoxically preserves the corpses it houses to an outer space described as “outro ossário mais geral.” This outer space, which in the Pernambucan context is likely a cane field, promises a life of grinding rural poverty and consigns its inhabitants to a kind of death in life (Obra completa 155). Further, “Uma faca só lámina” opposes the interior order of a man’s body, mineralized by the presence of a knife (or bullet, or watch) to an exterior space that threatens disintegration. It is important that the knife be “só lámina,” or “only blade,” since the wood of the handle might be corrupted by the liquidity of the exterior environment. In order to preserve the knife outside the man’s body, it must be kept away from the tide and from humidity, in the dry sun and “ar duro” of the sertão, an environment Cabral repeatedly describes, along with the arid Spanish plan, as exceptionally suited to the preservation of organic matter (210).

The second way Cabral affirms the mineral is to critique what Antonio Carlos Secchin terms the “sentimental-evocative” poetic tradition, and what Haroldo de Campos identifies as a “poetics of expression” – that is, a poetics that celebrates the organic. For example, in “Antiode (contra a poesia dita profunda),” Cabral makes subversive use of an organic vocabulary with particular recourse to the flower image. By quite unsentimentally equating the flower with feces, Cabral upends the flower’s normative connotations as an aesthetically pleasing and poetically inspiring object. According to Antonio Houaiss, “Antiode” reveals that for Cabral, “[p]oetry amounts to the need to identify ‘feces’ as ‘feces,’ not as a flower; for Cabral, poetry-as-metaphor seems condemned, and is, in fact, ‘feces’” (Houaiss 218). Secchin furthers Houaiss’s observation, characterizing Cabral’s poem not merely as a denunciation, but moreover as an active intervention against “so-called profound poetry.” In “Antiode,” Cabral “[c]ombats the ‘profound’ [poetic tradition] using its

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10 My reading recalls that of Antonio Houaiss, who argued for the “identidade da vida com a morte” in Cabral’s cemetery poems (Houaiss 226).
11 The words “só lámina” can be translated both as “only blade” and “all blade.” Galway Kinnell translates the title of the poem as “A Knife All Blade.” See anthologies by Kadir, and Bishop and Brasil.
own weapons, showing the other side of its rhetoric” (Secchin 69-70). In this way we can understand Cabral’s engagement with the organic as an attempt to overcome its tendency to “decompose” both language and the mineral order. Here it is instructive to refer to one of Cabral’s most famous poems, “O engenheiro.” Like the poem’s engineer-protagonist, the poet should be a rational builder, and “sonha coisas claras,” rather than serve as a vehicle for unstable poetic inspiration. By means of his labor, the poet absorbs the risk associated with the organic into the body of his text, just as the engineer must take responsibility for the structural integrity of his or her design. This transforms once dangerous or degenerative motifs like the flower into productive mineral objects by their “metamorphosis into written sign” (62, 67-70).

Cabral utilizes both of these strategies in “Alguns toureiros.” The poem opposes a mineral order, associated with the bullfighter and the formal structure of the corrida, to the organic potential for chaos represented by the bull. These exist in a situation of contingency. The bullfight becomes the event in which the matador engages with the organic, confronts the bull, and in “dominating [its] explosion,” absorbs its chaotic potential into the order of the corrida.12 Notably, the poet reproduces the action of the matador at the level of textual production. By confronting the risk of writing the poem, the poet engages and transforms an organic vocabulary, marked by the motifs of the bull and the flower, into a mineral order embodied in the finished text (Obra completa 395-96).13 In “Alguns toureiros,” Cabral writes of cultivating a flower,

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12 In the later poem “El toro de lidia,” Cabral describes the bull as it enters the ring as a raging, flooded river, with the potential to stampede over a man. The bullfight becomes the event in which the matador, in confronting the bull and wearing it down, makes the river navigable (Obra completa 75-76).

13 For a similar description of poetic risk in Cabral, see “O funcionário,” in which the poet, described as an everyday worker, struggles against the “monster” of the unfinished poem until he arrives at “a prosa / procurada, o conforto / da poesia ida” (Obra completa 75-76). See also French autobiographer and theorist Michel Leiris, who advanced a similar conception of poetic risk and linked the functions of bullfighter and autobiographer in “The Autobiographer as Torero,” the 1947 preface to his memoir L’Age d’homme. Leiris ties the “authenticity” achieved by the bullfighter in his strict adherence to a code to “that essential ‘engagement’ one has the right to demand of the writer [. . .] not to misuse the language and therefore to make his words, however he is able to set them down on paper, always tell the truth” (Leiris 140). However, where “truth” for Leiris derives from full, unadorned autobiographical disclosure, for Cabral, interested in objects and forms, risk lies in confronting the unwritten poem, the blank page and chaotic, unformed ideas and words.
though his poetic cultivation does not allow the flower to grow or expand, as we might understand “cultivation” in its normative sense. Far from fostering an organic poetics embodied in the bull, Cabral’s matador-poet kills the bull and “[w]orks” the flower into a productive mineral object.

In his description of the first five bullfighters, spread over the first four of the poem’s eleven quatrains, Cabral offers tempered praise for each. He achieves this through antithesis. In his descriptions of the matadors, Cabral explicitly or implicitly couples a positive mineral poetic value with a negative organic one, and places both values within a floral metaphor. In the first stanza, Cabral states: “Eu vi Manolo González / e Pepe Luís, de Sevilha: / precisão doce de flor, / graciosa, porém precisa” (157). The stanza’s construction leaves ambiguous the question of whether the qualities of being from Seville and of possessing the “sweet precision of a flower” apply to both bullfighters, or only one. In either case, it affirms that González and/or Luís possess this “sweet precision,” “gracious, though precise.” The word “porém” sets a negative poetic quality of graciousness (in the sense of expansiveness) against the virtue of precision, associated with the knife of “Uma faca só lâmina,” or here with the matador’s sword.14

Similarly, Julio Aparicio’s “easy science” suggests fluidity or lack of discipline in that it is “easy,” and a contrasting rigor or rationality associated with the idea of “science.” Likewise, Aparicio is “spontaneous,” again suggestive of an undesirable fluidity or spontaneity, though he is also “precise.”15 Thus Cabral’s praise for Aparicio is tempered in that the positive poetic values of science and precision are coupled with undesirable ease and spontaneity. Cabral’s description of Miguel Báez – “Litri” – utilizes an implied rather than explicit antithesis. Litri “cultivates another flower,” in the special Cabralian sense of transforming something organic and destructive – here a bull “anxious to explode” – into something mineral and productive. While the animal Báez confronts is “anxious to explode,” it has not yet succeeded in doing so. This is

14 In “Diálogo,” also from Paisagens com figuras, Cabral specifically links the matador’s sword to his mineral poetics. Here the sword serves to “afiar / em terrível parceria / no fio agudo de facas / o fio frágil da vida” (Obra completa 162-64).

15 In Portuguese, estrita suggests both precision as well as adherence to a set of rules. This serves to sharpen the distinction between the order conveyed by this word and the disorder associated with espontânea.
because of the matador’s effort to “dominate the explosion.” Litri should be praised for assuming the risk of engaging with the organic, and for keeping it in check thus far. However, this praise is limited in that Litri is not credited with completing the task of killing the bull. This will have to wait for Manolete.

Cabral next describes Antonio Ordóñez, “que cultiva flor antiga: / perfume de renda velha, / de flor em livro dormida.” This image is ambiguous in terms of Cabralian poetics, and implies a more complex coupling of positive and negative poetic qualities than we have seen so far. On the positive side, the “old needlework” and similarly aged book suggest a lasting, resistant quality that recalls the stone in “A educação pela pedra.” Additionally, both objects reproduce the previously described process of organic-to-mineral transformation. Both objects, in being described as “old,” suggest an artisanal mode of production in which organic materials like wool, plant fiber, paper and leather are transformed by human labor into household goods. On the negative side, the image of the flower in a book refers to a nineteenth-century Romantic practice of “[k]eeping floral souvenirs and sentimental personal memorabilia,” and by extension implies the “sentimental-evocative tradition” and “poetry of expression” Cabral opposes. Furthermore, the needlework gives off a “perfume” which Cabral will link in the final quatrain to a misguided, excessively descriptive or emotive poetic approach of “perfuming [the] flower” and “poeticizing the poem.” In sum, the characterization of Ordóñez remains one of tempered praise, with a desirable lasting quality and productive transformation of the organic counterposed to a reference to Romantic custom and an undesirable poetic “perfuming.”

Cabral begins his description of Manolete in the poem’s fifth quatrain: “Mas eu vi Manuel Rodriguez, / Manolete o mais deserto, / o toureiro mais agudo, / mais mineral e desperto.” The conjunction mas marks a distinction, but unlike the previous porém, here Cabral distin-

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16 Notably, Cabral himself practiced this form of artisanal production. While in Barcelona, he published his own poetry, along with translations of Brazilian poets, using his own printing press (Campos 70).

17 From the Encyclopedia Britannica: “The most delicate pressed flowers and foliage have been composed, mounted, and framed as pictures — a practice especially popular with 19th century Romantics, who preserved floral souvenirs as sentimental personal memorabilia.”
guishes between the tempered praise he offered to the previous bullfighters and his forthcoming description of Manolete as a bullfighting and poetic ideal. This quatrain establishes the matador’s claim to preeminence based on his greater proximity to Cabral’s mineral poetics. Relative to the other matadors, Manolete is “the sharpest bullfighter, / the most mineral and alert.” The next four quatrains will continue Cabral’s celebration of Manolete, with the poet alternating between praising the bullfighter relative to his peers, and in absolute terms.

The sixth quatrain builds on Manolete’s mineral characterization, here without reference to the other five bullfighters. In attributing to Manolete “wooden nerves” and “dry wrists of fiber,” Cabral qualifies what might at first appear as an organic description of the matador by describing the wood as “dry wood from the [Brazilian] scrubland,” the caatinga. As described in “Uma faca só lâmina,” this arid environment is ideal for preserving organic matter. The wood and fiber, in deriving from the Brazilian scrubland and in being utilized by Manolete in a similarly arid Spain, are purged of their potentially dangerous organic character and become de facto complementary mineral metaphors.

The seventh and eighth quatrains continue the poet’s praise for Manolete, describing him as, “o que melhor calculava / o fluido aço do da vida, / o que com mais precisão / roçava a morte em sua fímbria.” The seventh quatrain highlights the risk the matador faces when he confronts the bull as a representation of life’s “fluid firewall.” The bullfighter confronts this risk with his sword, and with the poetic virtues of calculation and precision. The eighth quatrain describes a process by which Manolete quantifies various phenomena associated with the organic or sentimental-evocative side of the poetic dialectic. He gives “number” to tragedy, “geometry” to punishment, “decimals to emotion,” and “weight and measure” to shock. This description reproduces a Cabralian poetic strategy not previously discussed, in which the poet subjugates and

18 While I have translated caatinga as the more generic “scrubland,” the word describes a specifically Brazilian environment associated with the serêo.

19 In light of Cabral’s later poem “Lembrando Manolete,” we can read this description of Manolete in “Alguns toureiros,” in which he possesses “wooden nerves” and “dry wrists of fiber,” as reflecting his courage in the face of great danger. In “Lembrando Manolete” Cabral writes that the matador fought, “com o frio / ar de quem não está sobre um fio” (Obra completa 538).
transforms the organic through a process of quantification, which is often spatial in application. By defining the limits of a phenomenon like tragedy, the poet transforms it from a diffuse and chaotic force into a defined and ordered structure, like the “clear things” built by Cabral’s engineer or the verbal “monster” turned finished poem in “O funcionário.”

The ninth quatrain marks a transition between the praise offered to Manolete, here “the most ascetic” bullfighter, and the idea that he sets an example for poets, which is developed in the poem’s final two quatrains. During his career, Manolete “[n]ot only cultivated his flower,” that is, engaged in bullfighting for its own sake, “[b]ut showed the poets: / how to dominate the explosion / with a serene and contained hand, / without letting spill / the flower kept hidden,; / and how, then, to work it; / with a certain hand, little and intensely: / without perfuming his flower, / without poeticizing his poem.” That is, Manolete illustrates the proper Cabralian approach to poetry, privileging solid “work” over the excessive “perfuming” of the sentimental-evocative school (Secchin 158). The tenth quatrain opens with the phrase “dominate the explosion” as a description of the matador’s controlling of the bull. The Portuguese verb domar carries the dual meaning of “dominate” and “domesticate,” which recalls the image from Cabral’s poem “Psicologia da composição” of words rendered productive by “abelhas domesticadas.” Manolete both dominates and domesticates the bull, transforming it through his labor from a manifestation of organic chaos to a productive display of Cabral’s mineral poetics. As Benedito Nunes notes, the matador-poet must undergo a process of education in mineral poetics in order to learn dominação as the dual skill of domination and domestication. Nunes writes: “Only by living with words, only the attention that is concentrated over them, teaches the poet to use them, as ‘domesticated bees,’ that prepare and distil their own honey” (Nunes 53-54). Likewise, in “A educação pela pedra,” Cabral advises that, “to learn from the stone” one must “go to it often.” Thus Manolete’s considerable skill as a “mineral” bullfighter and poetic ideal is learned through experience,

20 I would like to thank my colleague Rachel Rothenberg for alerting me to this aspect of Cabral’s poetry.
21 Here I refer to James Wright’s translation (Kadir 130-31).
by continued exposure to the threat of the organic as embodied in the bull, and by continued use of his sword against this danger. As Cabral observes in the later poem “Lembrando Manolete” (Remembering Manolete), to bullfight is “to live by exposing oneself to the insane scythe” of the bull, and in more general terms, to the threat of the organic. It is only the most experienced and skillful of matadors, like Manolete, who can confront this danger “with the cold air of one who is not walking the tightrope,” and who in doing so can serve Cabral as a poetic example.

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Alguns toureiros

A Antonio Houaiss

Eu vi Manolo González
E Pepe Luís, de Sevilha:
precisão doce de flor,
graciosa, porém precisa.

Vi também Julio Aparicio,
de Madrid, como Parrita:
ciência fácil de flor,
espontânea, porém estrita.

Vi Miguel Báez, Litri,
dos confins da Andaluzia,
que cultiva uma outra flor,
angustiosa de explosiva.

E também Antonio Ordóñez
que cultiva flor antiga:
perfume de renda velha,
de flor em livro dormida.

Mas eu vi Manuel Rodríguez,
Manolete, o mais deserto,
o toureiro mais agudo,
mais mineral e desperto,
o de nervos de madeira,
de punhos secos de fibra,
o de figura de lenha,
lenha seca de caatinga,
o que melhor calculava
o fluido aceiro da vida,
o que com mais precisão
roçava a morte em sua fímbria,
o que à tragédia deu número,
à vertigem, geometria,
decimais à emoção
e ao susto, peso e medida,

Some bullfighters

To Antonio Houaiss

I saw Manolo González
And Pepe Luis, from Sevilla:
the sweet precision of a flower,
gracious, but precise.

I also saw Julio Aparicio,
from Madrid, as Parrita:
the easy science of a flower,
spontaneous, but exact.

I saw Miguel Báez, Litri,
from the frontier of Andaluzia,
who cultivates another flower,
anxious to explode.

And also Antonio Ordóñez,
who cultivates an older flower:
the perfume of old needlework,
of a flower in an old book.

But I saw Manuel Rodríguez,
Manolete, the most desert-like,
the sharpest bullfighter,
the most mineral and alert,
he of wooden nerves,
of dry wrists of fiber,
of a figure of wood,
dry wood from the scrubland,
he who best calculated
the fluid firewall of life,
who with the most precision
let death touch his fringe,
he who to tragedy gave number,
to punishment, geometry,
decimals to emotion
and to shock, weight and measure,
sim, eu vi Manuel Rodríguez,  
Manolete, o mais asceta,
não só cultivar sua flor  
mas demonstrar aos poetas:

como domar a explosão  
com mão serena e contida,  
sem deixar que se derrame  
a flor que traz escondida,

e como, então, trabalhá-la  
com mão certa, pouca e extrema:  
sem perfumar sua flor,  
sem poetizar seu poema.

(Obra Completa 157-8)
Such faithful reworkings of classical themes and ancient sources as Robert Garnier’s *La Troade* – which borrows in some parts from Euripides’ *Trojan Women*, and quite heavily from Seneca’s *Troades* – immediately pose the question of their raison d’être. Is the *Troade* yet another example of slavish Renaissance *imitatio*? The fact that the play was published in 1579, during some of the worst years of the Wars of Religion in France, invites consideration of the play’s historical context. Indeed, in his preface to the Archbishop of Bourges, Renaud de Beaune, Garnier begins by apologizing for this least agreeable of poems that “ne représente que les malheurs lamentables des princes, avec les saccagemens des peuples.” He then goes on to say:

> les passions de tels sujets nous sont ja si ordinaires, que les exemples anciens nous devront doresnavant servir de consolation en nos particuliers et domestiques encombrés. (p. 41)\(^1\)

Thus Garnier begins to suggest that the “argument” of classical tragedy is so “ordinary,” so commonplace, that it can offer some consolation for the problems besetting contemporary France. Furthermore, although the parallel is not initially clear, Garnier means to give courage to the downtrodden, by reminding the archbishop of their common Trojan ancestors on whose ruins “s’est peu bastir, apres le decez de l’orgueilleux Empire

\(^{1}\) All references are to Jean-Dominique Beaudin’s edition of *La Troade*. 
Romain, ceste tres-florissante Monarchie” (p. 42). Thus the reference to the destruction of Troy clearly implies a very grave situation in France. However, the point of the example is that the destruction of Troy was not definitive, but rather foreshadowed a far greater glory than that of the Greeks, one that eventually triumphed over Rome by culminating in a flourishing French monarchy. Despite the fact that this “tres-florissante Monarchie” is now mired in intractable religious conflict, Garnier wants de Baune and his audience to believe that the hardiness of the Trojan stock (as demonstrated in its rebirth in the French monarchy, which traced its origins back to Troy) guarantees a second resurgence.

Again, the play’s plot undermines its author’s professed optimism. Indeed, a pervasive sense of unremitting doom and inevitable destruction leave little place for hope that the characters will be able to influence their destiny in any significant way. Yet Garnier’s tragedy does not seem to say that the characters are entirely controlled by their fates. Indeed, the Troade consistently focuses on how different characters react when confronted with their “fate,” and how they respond to the different forms of authority charged with carrying out that destiny. These questions were, of course, of vital importance during the Wars of Religion. A great deal of thought was devoted by both the Catholic and Huguenot sides in the conflict precisely to defining (or redefining) the relationship between the French king and his subjects and their respective roles in that relationship. If we can accept the idea of analogy (and not allegory) being Garnier’s modus operandi in writing La Troade, it will be useful to examine the interaction between characters and their destiny and then see whether this interaction is congruent with the questions regarding royal authority that arose during the Wars of Religion.

Garnier’s Troade has three literary predecessors: Euripides’ Hecuba and Trojan Women, and Seneca’s Troade. All three plays begin with Hecuba receiving decrees concerning the fate of certain members of her family. In Garnier, the Greek messenger Talthybius arrives, demanding that Cassandra be handed over as Agamemnon’s prize. Hecuba asks him about the fate of her daughter Polyxena, and she is left in uncertainty because “le sort n’est pas jeté” (l. 309). Soon after, at the beginning of

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2 This is doubtless a moment of light flattery, as the myth of the Trojan origins of the French monarchy was largely discredited by the time Garnier was writing – indeed, by the time of Ronsard’s Franciade. See Ménager 284.
Act II, Odysseus arrives and demands of Andromache that Hector’s son Astyanax be sacrificed so that the Greeks can leave without the fear that the Trojans will eventually be avenged. Finally, in Act III, Achilles’s son Pyrrhus argues with Agamemnon over the necessity of the sacrifice of Polyxena to appease Achilles’ shade, with the seer Calchas resolving the dispute by declaring “Le sang d’Astyanax ne suffit pas encore” (l. 1521).

Contrast this with the situation of the models. Each of Euripides’ plays involves the sacrifice of a single Trojan. In Hecuba, Odysseus transmits the demand of the Greek army that Polyxena be sacrificed as a prize of honor for Achilles’s grave; in the Trojan Women, while Cassandra, Polyxena, and Hecuba are to be given away to the victors, the only sacrifice involves Astyanax, and one that is required solely by the will of Odysseus who “got his way” from the Greeks. In Seneca’s Troade, Achilles’ shade appears to Talthybius, demanding Polyxena, and after an argument between Agamemnon and Pyrrhus similar to the scene in Garnier’s Troade, this is confirmed by the seer Calchas. Then Odysseus appears before Andromache to demand Astyanax – not executing a personal agenda as in the Trojan Women, but claiming to be a mere agent of “all the Greeks and their leaders” (l. 526).

Thus the sacrificial situation in Garnier’s Troade is unique in several distinct ways. First of all, in this tragedy, there is a mise en scène of no fewer than three exactions by the Greeks. The sheer number suggests the unpredictable and virtually infinite character of the demands placed by the Greeks on the Trojans. But even more importantly, there is a clear progression in the status of the authority used to justify each exaction. First of all, Cassandra, while technically not a sacrifice, is nonetheless a victim of the simple “rules of war booty” and the caprices of Agamemnon, a selfish king who puts his own interests before those of his subjects. That Cassandra must go first is significant as well; before she is led away, Garnier expands greatly on two sententias from his model Euripides to the effect that “The Trojans have the glory that is loveliest: they died for their own country” (Trojan Women 386-7) and “Though

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3 Cassandra is to be given to Agamemnon as wife, Polyxena is to stand guard over Achilles’s tomb, and Hecuba is to be given as a slave to Odysseus.

4 Contrary to what Erasmus and others had written: “The good prince uses the public interest as a yardstick in every field, otherwise he is no prince. He has not the same rights over men as over cattle” (Erasmus 105).
surely the wise man will forever shrink from war, / yet if war come, the hero’s death will lay a wreath not lustreless on the city” (*Trojan Women* 400-2). Garnier’s Cassandra says:

Toute guerre est cruelle, et personne ne doit L'entreprendre jamais, sinon avecques droit : Mais si pour sa defense et just et necessaire Par les armes il faut repousser l’adversaire, C’est honneur de mourrir la pique dans le poing Pour sa ville, et l’avoir de sa vertu tesmoing. (l. 406-412)

In Act II, the formidable Odysseus arrives to take Astyanax to his death, a measure required not to satisfy the *bon plaisir* of a monarch but rather to insure the safe return of the Greek army, in accordance with the fates’ decree. Seneca’s Odysseus begins his speech apologetically with:

I am only the agent of a cruel lot and beg you first, although these words are spoken by my lips, not to believe them mine: this is the verdict of all the Greeks and their leaders, whom Hector’s child prevents from seeking their long-awaited homes. The fates demand his life. (l. 525-8)

The situation in Garnier is presented quite differently. When he appears, Odysseus pronounces a very short speech that is anything but direct, yet full of ominous intention:

Nos vaisseaux sont tous prests de laisser le rivage, Mais un seul poinct retient des Grecs le navigage. (l. 749-50)

It is therefore up to Andromache to guess what is retaining the Greeks, yet she and the audience know that the outcome cannot be a happy one for her. In a stichomythia between Andromache and Odysseus, she inquires whether there is enough wind for travel, to which Odysseus replies, that the sea is “calme assez” (l. 751); then Andromache wonders whether all the Greek men have been accounted for, to which Odysseus responds that they are already aboard all the ships and ready to row. Doubtless wanting to get to the point, Andromache asks why the Greeks aren’t leaving “ces rivages infames” (l. 754). The answer is elliptically simple: “Nous craignons” (l. 755). Andromache, who had been instructed by Hector’s shade to hide Astyanax, feigns astonishment and asks, “Sont-ce les os de Troye, ou les cendres d’Hector?” Odysseus finally gives an
answer, yet one that is still somewhat oblique: “Nous redoutons sa race” (l. 757). It is almost an expression of feigned reticence, as if he were afraid to spell out the terms of what he must demand, whereas Seneca’s Odysseus’ did not hesitate to be both straightforward and apologetic, presenting himself as the mere ambassador of a divine authority.

Thus the necessity of the sacrifice of Astyanax, presented in Seneca as a divine decree, is in Garnier merely the transposition of the ruler Agamemnon’s capriciousness to the level of the country as a whole: Astyanax must die in order to satisfy the need of an empire to feel totally secure from its already vanquished enemies. Not surprisingly, a few lines later, Andromache scoffs at the seriousness of the threat represented by a young child, which leads Odysseus to explain that the young boy, especially “un enfant heritier / des sceptres et vertus d’un Prince si guerrier” (l. 771-2), would grow up to be a terrible threat, and “en peu d’heures pourra devourer une ville” (l. 786).

But Odysseus’s series of justifications does not end there. A few lines later, he repeats himself by asking Andromache to put aside her maternal feelings and consider the importance of this matter for the Greek nation (l. 803-4). While the underlying principle here is that private interests must be subordinated to the public good, the speciousness of the argument could not be more evident: although Odysseus states hypothetically that he would do the same with his own son, and cites the example of Agamemnon’s Iphigenia, Odysseus has nothing personal at stake, uses the sacrifice of others to forward his cause, and most importantly, he is asking Andromache to sacrifice her son for a foreign, and enemy nation. Whereas Odysseus insists in both Garnier and Seneca that private interests must be subordinated to the public good, Seneca’s hero has a more credible argument: by asserting “It is Telemachus against whom you plan wars” (l. 593), he claims to be acting paternally and patriotically, to save both Telemachus and Greece. However, Garnier’s Greek hero is demanding of the vanquished a quid pro quo whereby first her country, then her son must be sacrificed so that another country and another son may live. In both cases, however, the true purpose of the sacrifice is none other than to assuage fear.5 If indeed the principle of

5 See Seneca: “It is a great thing that alarms the Greeks, a future Hector: free the Greeks from fear; this is the only reason that holds back our ships on the shore, in this our fleet is held fast” (l. 550-3).
subordinating the monarch’s private interests to the public good is a *sine qua non* of sixteenth-century political thought,⁶ as a rule invoked to insure mere political expediency, it has lost its moral weight here.

This point is further emphasized in Garnier because it is only after the lengthy framing of the necessity of killing Astyanax in terms of the Greek national interest that Odysseus finally adds one last consideration, and not the least important of the three, namely that the Gods have decided that the sacrifice is necessary: “le grand prestre Calchas / Nous defend de partir laissant Astyanax” (l. 847-8). In Garnier, the divine decree almost appears to have been added as an afterthought, as though Odysseus, despairing of obtaining the sacrifice of Astyanax with Andromache’s blessing, decided to make one last attempt at persuasion. Indeed, the sense of inescapable authority normally emanating from a divine decree is almost completely undermined because it is announced last, the reverse of the situation in Seneca.

We have thus seen sacrifice justified capriciously at two levels in Garnier: first the wise Cassandra has to be handed over to the Greeks simply because the ruler Agamemnon desired her, and second, Astyanax, the son of Hector, must be sacrificed because the Greeks need to be sure that the Trojans will never be able to seek rightful revenge for such outrageous acts. In the first case (Cassandra, Act I), we recall that it was mainly a question of the *private* whims of a monarch (whose power nonetheless rests on a victory obtained during an international war). In the second (Astyanax, Act II), despite weak references to a divine decree, the main authority being grappled with is that of a whimsical nation as a whole, overcome with fear that it could be held responsible for conducting an invasive war won by fraud and fought for as questionable a motive as recovering an adulteress.

Yet Garnier includes a third case, placed appropriately in Act III. While this debate between Pyrrhus and Agamemnon concerning whether or not to sacrifice Polyxena follows the corresponding scene in Seneca closely, Garnier inverts the order of its appearance and builds on his progression by making it last of three in *La Troade.*⁷ The scene in

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⁶ Christian Lazzeri provides an overview of the debate in the extensive introduction to his edition of Henri de Rohan’s treatise, *De l’intérêt des princes et des États de la chrétienté* (1638).

⁷ It is first of two in Seneca.
which Agamemnon must make the royal decision can be quickly summarized as follows: Pyrrhus is the spokesperson for the dead Achilles, and argues that because of his services rendered to the Greeks, the great Greek hero’s wish for the sacrifice of Polyxena should be satisfied. In a long moral address, Agamemnon teaches the essential humility that victors must possess: the inherent instability of fate and the precariousness of empire are such that Greece could be in Troy’s place (l. 1403-6). Indeed, in a sense picking up where Cassandra left off, Agamemnon insists that victorious soldiers must show clemency towards the vanquished. Perhaps the most significant moment of the address occurs at the end when Agamemnon truly assumes his role as moral arbiter of the Greeks by taking action. The king affirms that insofar as he is responsible for the abuses of his army, he cannot allow the sacrifice to occur (l. 1431-2). He adopts an even higher moral position when he argues fifty lines later that often honor and duty forbid that which the laws do not (l. 1483-4).

The situation is however much less straightforward than it initially appears. First of all, embroiled with Agamemnon for a second time in this scene over the contradiction between condoning Iphigenia’s sacrifice and forbidding Polyxena’s, Pyrrhus calls Agamemnon a “tyrant.” Not only does “tyrant” not appear in the Senecan source which Garnier has been otherwise closely following, but the term of course comes to acquire a heavy political connotation during the wars of religion and particularly in the thought of the monarchomaques. For the author of one of the most famous monarchomaque texts, Théodore de Bèze, a tyrant is one who “orders something manifestly irreligious or unjust”. Thus the term “tyrant” takes on an ironic meaning in this monde à l’envers where the enforcement of rules of justice are paradoxically equated with the tyrannical. Second, Agamemnon becomes entangled in his own moral reasoning, for while acknowledging that he could “refrener l’audace impetueuse / De ce jeune arrogant” (l. 1505-6), he hesitates, arguing that clemency applies to his own men as much as to the enemy. Then, in a coup de théâtre, he decides to make no decision at all: he simply defers to divine will by consulting Calchas, thus relinquishing

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8 See the article “Monarchomaques” in Jouanna 1109-1111.
9 “Mais si on commande quelque chose notoirement irreligieuse ou inique, alors doit auoir lieu ce que cy dessus nous auons dit.” Bèze 7.
his royal moral authority altogether. In refusing to act, then, Agamemnon is in some sense the opposite of a tyrant.

The *Troade* thus demonstrates a failure of moral authority on three levels. First of all, the ruler Agamemnon confuses personal whimsy and public interest in taking Cassandra. Second, this occurs at a national level in the episode of the sacrifice of Astyanax, where Greek paranoia must be appeased through the sacrifice of a helpless child, and justified in terms of an arbitrary invocation of divine authority. Lastly, while Agamemnon has failed in his role as moral arbiter in both of these cases, he does take a stand in Act III, initially opposing the sacrifice of Polyxena, and asserting the supremacy of moral imperative over the legality conferred arbitrarily by hegemony. Yet here again, almost as a *deus ex machina*, divine authority is invoked, royal responsibility recedes, and the horrible sacrifice is permitted.

Correspondingly, there is a moral vacuum at all levels (personal, royal, divine) in the *Troade*. In Garnier’s tragedy, the divinities are notably absent, and all that are left are dead shades that help perpetuate the cycle of violence. Achilles was infantile and capricious in the *Iliad*, putting personal interest before public good, and now his capriciousness, cloaked as a cosmic disorder that affects the entire Greek army, is allowed to dictate public policy. The only sphere left for righteous action is, paradoxically, the personal – not the royal or the divine, which are increasingly governed by the whimsical. As a private individual, Hecuba enacts vengeance on Polymestor for his betrayal of her trust in killing her son Polydorus. Curiously, Polymestor begs Agamemnon to exercise his authority as king to bring justice:

Revengez mon injure, ains la voestre: pourquoi
Si ne faites justice estes-vous esleu Roy? (l. 2609-10)

Yet the Greek monarch refuses, arguing that Hecuba’s revenge is justified by Polymestor’s betrayal of her trust and murder of her son for money. Unfortunately, by refusing to intervene (and thus to exercise his authority), Agamemnon opens the door to an endless cycle of vengeful violence.

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10 Just as when it was invoked to justify the sacrifice of Astyanax in Act II, here too the use of divine authority seems arbitrary.
It is thus not surprising that the play concludes with two tirades invented by Garnier,¹¹ a shorter one by Polymestor, and a longer one by Hecuba, where each invokes the Gods to avenge them – in vain (l. 2662-2666). The only justice possible is through personal action, but it comes at the price of utter chaos. While on the one hand the Troade remains much more respectful of royal authority than monarchomaque texts in that it does not even suggest the possibility of resistance to tyranny, on the other hand it proposes perhaps a more radically undermining worldview: the implication that the moral order can simply no longer be reliably found in the king or divinity, its traditional sources of authority, and that the remaining guarantor of justice, the personal moral order, promises an ever-widening circle of violence and reprisals.

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WORKS CITED


¹¹ See Beaudin’s commentary: “Ces deux tirades, sont, semble-t-il, de l’invention de Garnier” (218).
REFLECTIONS ON TRANSLATING NICOLÁS GUILLÉN’S POETRY INTO ENGLISH

KEITH ELLIS

The art of translating a literary work usually involves a spirit of generosity and goodwill, of wanting to share with a public of one language the treasures produced by a talent that creates in another language. At the same time translation implies a sense of responsibility, a keen awareness of the duty to translate and not to betray, to present to the readers of the language into which the work is being translated its authentic essence. But the theorists have shown that this task is not simple. Throughout the pages of journals such as Babel, one may see the many pitfalls that await the translator and even the opinion that the quest for the satisfactory translation is futile. If there is some indulgence with regard to the translation of prose, the idea that poetry can be effectively translated from one language into another has been known to meet with reservation, skepticism or denial. Many poets have offered their views. For example, the great Nicaraguan poet Rubén Dario placed himself among the demurrers when he wrote:

No creo en la posibilidad de una traducción de poeta que satisfaga. Apenas en prosa se puede dar a entrever el alma de una poesía extranjera. En verso el intento es inútil, así sea el traductor otro poeta y sea hombre de arte y de gusto […]. Lo que el lector obtendrá será una poesía [del traductor] […]. Don Miguel de Cervantes sabía bien lo que se decía con lo del revés de los tapices. (164)

Nevertheless, the impulse to translate poetry is uncontainable. I believe that the impulse to reveal and to share that inspires the translator proceeds from a humanist concept and is evident in the work of the translators of Nicolás Guillén’s poetry.¹

¹ See for example, those of Ellis, Márquez and McMurray.

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All these translators will probably have made a conscious selection of an approach to their task, from among contending approaches, and will have faced the issue of how literal or how free translation should be. Strong arguments have been made in favor of a translation that eschews an approximation of the words and even the sense of the original and aims to capture the intended sentiment perceived by the translator. Walter Benjamin’s essay “The Task of the Translator” makes a spirited contribution to this view. In it he argues that beyond the historical relationship between languages there is a common human will to self-expression which should be given free rein. When he speaks of “fidelity and freedom” (79), he does not have primarily in mind an antinomal relationship between the two. Rather, he understands “fidelity” to be the subjective apprehension of the intention underlying the original work, a concept that allows for considerable license. For instance, he posits the view that the German “brot” is notionally different from the French “pain,” hence the presumed insufficiency of rendering either intention simply as “bread” or “pan” in English or Spanish. Guillén, on the other hand, demonstrates that a word denoting the same object can have different, even antonymic, meanings in the same poem. In the “Elegía a Jesús Menéndez,” for instance, “metal” controlled by the villain of the poem is infected with monstrousness. When it is later controlled by the hero it comes to assume entirely positive meaning. Yet to signal these opposing meanings in any other way than by translating “metal” as metal in both instances would jeopardize the decisive associative power of people. But all this is contingent on the sense that is created by the accumulating contexts of the poem that is the object of translation. Benjamin pays little heed to such matters. For him “translation must in large measure refrain from wanting to communicate something, from rendering the sense. . . For what is meant by freedom” he asks “but that the rendering of the sense is no longer to be regarded as all-important?” (78-79).

The fidelity to the context and sense of the original that guides the translator of Nicolás Guillén’s poetry may lead to difficulties involving the changing connotations of words. For example, in the poem, “Canción filial” of 1929, “fibras de amianto” [asbestos fibers], appear as comforting, helpful agents, an image of the material not readily accepted as of the late twentieth century. Benjamin would surely oppose the literal translation of the words here, advocating a rendering that would represent the original connotation. Nevertheless the literal translation
may be seen as more valuable, because in its acquired contrasting connotation it allows for the perception of the original intention. This is one of the benefits of providing dates of composition of the originals along with the texts.

Benjamin’s theory of translation is really a theory of re-creation. The tangential relationship between the meaning of the translation and the original work is certainly not a model that a translator of Guillén’s work into English, or translators in general, may find to be satisfactory. For example, Pablo Neruda, as translator, yearns for scrupulous faithfulness to his originals. In his “Palabras para una traducción de poesía rumana” he names some of the poets whose works he has translated and adds: “pido perdón por cuanto sus poemas hayan perdido fuerza esencial o gotas de ámbar al cambiarlos de vaso. Pero sabrán, lo creo, que puse mucho amor en el trabajo, siempre inconcluso, de traducir su poesía” (II, 1132). He even thanks friends who checked his translations for faithfulness in verbal meaning. And there is no doubt that this quality prevails in his translation of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*.

In fact, a strong inclination to literalness is essential in the rendering of dramatic poetry into another language. For the dialogic character of this kind of poetry constantly demands an assessment of and a contribution to meaning. A feature of Guillén’s poetry which complements its narrative and lyrical elements is the ubiquitous presence of dialogue, whether the poet addresses one or several characters, present or absent, or whether a character addresses another or characters address each other. There are also instances of interior monologue or mixtures of interior monologue and public address emanating either from the poet as speaker or from a character. This conversational feature necessarily inclines translators to a mode of work that follows closely the threads of the sense, inclining them toward literalness. And there are so many references in his poetry to historical events that notes become useful.

Benjamin quotes approvingly his compatriot Rudolph Pannwitz who indeed made a valuable contribution to translation theory when he opined that elements of the language of the original should be reflected in the language of the translation (81).

Benjamin’s approval no doubt rests in part on the coincidence with his own view that fidelity in conveying the original intention should have broad inclusiveness. My own perception of the usefulness of Pannwitz and Benjamin in this regard derives from the translator’s duty to
preserve the elements in the original poem that lead to the convergence of theme, image and tone. But those theorists fail to give sufficient emphasis to the role music plays in a poem and the need to have this aspect of the original language survive in the language into which the translation is made.

Music has had a special role in Spanish American poetry since the contributions of Rubén Darío (1867-1916), for whom the soul of a poem is intimately linked to its music. Music for him adorns poems and functions coherently with the meaning of poems, intensifying that meaning. Music also provides a transcendental quality beyond the poem’s internal contexts. Impressed by the Pythagorean model of the harmony of different spheres, Darío saw music as a vehicle for reaching the harmonious world he seemed to desire in all his books of poetry. Darío’s translator therefore has to be alert to the various dimensions of music in his poetry and attempt to convey them in the language into which they are translated.

Guillén’s contemporaries (all those that I will mention are, like him, translators of poetry) take up the theme of music in various ways and they stress its importance by including or illustrating this theme in poems that are denominated or function as “Artes poéticas,” those poems that declare and demonstrate at the same time the author’s concept of poetry. Neruda, as a part of his definition of poetry in “Galope muerto,” fixes on “Ese sonido ya tan largo / que cae listando de piedras los caminos” (174). His compatriot, Vicente Huidobro, the Creationist, believes that music is contained in the idea, that it is associated with the image that brings novelty and surprise. The rhythmic units in his poems are the ideas. This emphasis on ideas as music facilitates the task of translation. Huidobro himself took advantage of this facility, writing poems in Spanish which he translated into French, and vice versa, rather than re-creating them in the second language.

The case of Jorge Luis Borges is similar and more intriguing. He professes a belief in the music and in the magic inherent in each word, and it seems that with this belief he doesn’t feel obliged to contribute a structured musicality in his verses, which are wont to convey philosophical and often paradoxical propositions. His use of rhyme is consonant

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2 For an excellent study of this important aspect of Darío’s work, see Raymond Skyrme.
with this paradoxical content. He typically employs conventional consonantal rhyme, but he uses enjambment so insistently that the reader, following the thread of the meaning, hardly notices the presence of rhyme. Enjambment occasions a softening of accentuation, neutralizes rhyme, and makes for a prosaic rhythm. All this causes the musicality of the poems Borges writes in Spanish to be hardly differentiated from that of the poems he writes in the less musical English language. Borges manages this effect even when he uses monorhyme, as for example in his poem “Arte poética” in which he speaks of music.

Music plays a central, comprehensive and transcendental role in Guillén’s poetry. In this respect he and Rubén Dario reign supreme in the modern Hispanic world. His early intuitive attraction to Dario was evident in his initial poems; and the book that places him on his definitive path, Motivos de son, reflects, while socializing it, Dario’s mythical and idealistic belief in the harmonizing and unifying power of music. Guillén wrote his Motivos de son some weeks after having revealed a great discovery in an essay with which he culminates a series of reflections on his preoccupation with bringing about a unified Cuban society. He had found the key to this unity, to this centripetal process, in music, specifically in the son, as the musician Rosendo Ruiz had just shown in his new composition that had moved Guillén to write: “El ritmo africano nos envuelve en su aliento cálido, ancho, que ondula como una boa.” He concludes: “Ésa es nuestra música y ésa es nuestra alma” (Prosa de prisa I, 16). And so the son appears in its contrapuntal function in Motivos de son, suggesting the harmony then latent in Cuban society and which could be realized when divisive and discriminatory practices subsided. Thus when Guillén in his “Arte poética” (1953), alluding to Dario, wrote “Un pájaro principal / me enseñó el múltiple trino,” (Obra poética II, 7), he was referring to several dimensions of music both in Dario’s poetry and in his own.

But the integrative impulse in Guillén creates special obligations for the translator. For example, it is important to notice that what has been called his use of the vernacular in Motivos de son is really a phonetic and not a morphological manifestation. His characters’ pronunciation only appears to distort the grammar, which remains correct. The result is popular speech that is practiced by a broad Cuban sector. Translation into English should retain that breadth and not isolate it from the music of the various classical forms Guillén employs.
The integrative drive also brings into play Pannwitz’s interest in the preservation of aspects of the original language. A fertile source of music in Guillén’s poetry are sounds that evoke Africa. Some of these are speculative, such as his jitanjáforas or the imagined names in poems such as “El apellido.” Others are real names of places, peoples, flora and fauna. Guillén gives all of these freshness and vigor as he incorporates them into his poetic language and into his representation of Cuba. The translator must attempt to preserve their flavor as in the following lines that begin his “Son No. 6” (1942):

Yoruba soy, lloro en yoruba lucumi. Yoruba I am, I weep in Yoruba Lucumi.
Como soy un yoruba de Cuba, Since I am a Yoruba from Cuba,
quiero que hasta Cuba suba mi llanto Yoruba,
que suba el alegre llanto yoruba move up my happy lament in Yoruba
que sale de mi. that goes out from me.

Yoruba soy, I am Yoruba,
cantando voy, singing as I tell,
llorando estoy, weeping as well,
y cuando no soy yoruba, and when I’m not Yoruba,
soy congo, mandinga, carabalí. I’m Congo, Mandinga, Carabalí.

Guillén’s capacity for capturing the music of other lands also requires approximation, as in the first of the “Tres canciones chinas” (1952), which begins:

¿Conoces tú I know it, do you?
las terrenas del arroz y del bambú? the land of rice and of bamboo?
¿No la conoces tú? Don’t you know it too?

Yo vengo de Pekín. I’m coming from Peking.
Pekín Pekín
sin mandarín, with no mandarin
ni palanquin.
Yo vengo de Shanghai: I’m coming from Shanghai:
No hay I shout to the sky
ni un yanqui ya en Shanghai. . . There’s not a single Yankee left in Shanghai. . .

The task of equaling in English the sonorous richness of Guillén’s poetry is daunting if not impossible. A translator may aspire to convey the
tone throughout and match some of the rhythm. One aid in this is the fact that many of Guillén’s poems have been transposed to song by fine musicians, and to sing the translations to those scores is a useful and perhaps pleasant check. And whereas matching his rhymes is a challenge that cannot always be accepted, there are times when it must be attempted, as in those poems in which he speaks of rhyme, such as his “Epístola” (to fellow poet Eliseo Diego) which ends:

*Díx*, buen Eliseo, ya es bastante.  
Perdona alguna rima mal situada  
y tenme por tu amigo el más constante.  
(Tú dirás: —Gracias, viejo. Yo:  
—De nada.) O.P.II, 315-17

I have spoken, good Eliseo, enough said.  
Excuse any misplaced rhyme  
And regard me as your most loyal comrade.  
You will say: “Thanks, old man.” I: “Any time.”

Rhyme is also obligatory in those refrains or songs that appear within his elegies and other long poems, such as this song from his “España: Poema en cuatro angustias y una esperanza” (1937):

_Nada importa morir al cabo,  
pues morir no es tan gran suceso:  
¡malo es ser libre y estar preso,  
malo, estar libre y ser esclavo!_

We do not fear the grave:  
rather than fear, let it be reasoned.  
it is bad to be free and yet imprisoned.  
It is bad to be free and yet a slave!

_Hay quien muere sobre su lecho,  
doce meses agonizando,  
y otros hay que mueren cantando  
con diez balazos sobre el pecho._

There are those who die in their beds,  
after twelve months of agonizing.  
and there are others who die harmonizing.  
Ten bullets in their chests, but with clear heads.

_Todos el camino sabemos:  
están los rifles engrasados:  
están los brazos avivados:  
¡Marchemos! O.P.I, 191_

The road to take, we know;  
our rifles are oiled;  
our fingers are coiled;  
Let’s go!

To translate Guillén’s poetry into English is to present it in a language that does not boast the musical range illustrated by the Argentinian poet-singer-reciter-translator, Leopoldo Díaz, in his sonnet “Nuestro idioma.”3 Guillén adds to this range with his sensitive ear to his Cuban

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3 Perhaps Benjamin encountered a similar limitation in translating Baudelaire’s “Tableaux parisiens” into German and this may account for the sparse attention he gives to musicality in his essay on translation which serves as the introduction to his re-creation.
environment and to others. This musical mastery is an integral part of a sensitive and wise viewing of the world. Thus a translation which tends to literalness that allows license for music, that doesn’t imperil the transmission of courageous truth and which aspires to approximate the tone and the music of the original, is appropriate. The task is always subject to revision in the pursuit of perfection. It is precisely in his essay dealing with translation, “Las versiones homéricas,” that Borges emitted his famous dictum “El concepto de texto definitivo no corresponde sino a la religión o al cansancio” (106).

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WORKS CITED


BLURRING BOUNDARIES BETWEEN ANIMAL AND HUMAN: ANIMALHUMAN RIGHTS IN “JUAN DARIÉN” BY HORACIO QUIROGA

BRIDGETTE W. GUNNELS

The title of this study suggests multiple questions, ontological as well as moral and ethical. Before blurring any boundaries between what has historically and scientifically been a neat, dyadic relationship, I must explore exactly what are the differences between human beings and animals, and at what moments do each of the entities cross over or blend, becoming hybrid beings possessing shared qualities. And moreover, does the manner in which human beings define themselves have a direct relation to the extension of rights? How do we define ourselves, if not in direct comparison to something we are not?

Theorists and philosophers alike from Descartes to Derrida have problematized this ‘question of the animal’ to such degrees that any discussion here would not even begin to scratch the surface of this most storied of topics. In short, by insisting on defining ourselves in terms of what we are not, we have installed a world of dichotomous beings and non-beings, humans and animals, subjects and objects, selves and Others who constantly battle for that coveted 50-yard line seat at the center of all things intellectual: who comes first? Nature or culture? Center or periphery?

This note briefly makes use of the historical conversations between leagues of others before me regarding the essence of human and animal and how these differ. It also uses as a cornerstone the basic conclusions of recent animal rights theorists as well as those ecocritics who would ponder the issues of nature and culture (or, as Donna Haraway puts it, naturecultures). While using the short story “Juan Darién” by Uruguayan author
Horacio Quiroga as a natural-cultural allegory, this essay situates recent thoughts on animal rights with the ideas of ecocritics who seek to destabilize dichotomous relationships (namely that of nature and culture). This note takes on a natural reading of “Juan Darién” by questioning the notion of ’civilization’ on one level, while at the same time presenting readers with serious ethical breaches against a human being (Juan Darién the boy) on another, all leading to the culmination of this macabre tale in which the sacrifice of a tiger/boy leads to the physical, spiritual and emotional death of a village and a loss of innocence on an unprecedented scale.

As I interpret it, both human and animal rights are seriously contravened in Quiroga’s story, and yet this tale offers more than a surface interpretation of animal rights or welfare. It leads readers to question their own humanity as well as animality, blurring the boundaries that have historically differentiated humans from animals. Although this piece could be read as a metaphorical tool that teaches the consequences of colonization and deculturation in Latin American cultures, a simpler (but by the same token more complex) reading of Quiroga’s work shows it as a fictional illustration of how easily the limits that humans draw between themselves and the animal world can be compromised (and questioned) to a point where one being crosses into another, taking on characteristics, both physical and metaphorical, that would belie the ‘true nature’ of each.

Although cursory mention of the conclusions of Derrida, Wittgenstein, Bentham, and Freud are important to the theoretical foundation of this note, ecocritical points of view from Donna Haraway as well as animal rights thinkers Cary Wolfe and Peter Singer, are important for setting the stage of the nature/culture debate and its place in the creation of cultural artifacts (i.e.-literature). First, however, is a brief summary of “Juan Darién” to illustrate why it is such an appropriate vehicle for inspiring a different approach to the way we consider our relationships with animals.

Quiroga tells the story of a young mother who loses her only child to a virus epidemic in the village. She is disconsolate until the night that a baby tiger wanders into her garden. She takes the animal in and gives him shelter and love. She also nurses the baby tiger after feeling the maternal need to cease the grumblings of the little feline’s empty stomach. At this moment, the young mother and the baby tiger’s destinies are
fused — her pain and loneliness are eased as the little tiger is magically turned into a small boy. The mother raises the child with all the love she would have offered her own flesh and blood, and it is her compassion and unconditional love which merit her high honor among the animals of the “Universo” (1). Juan Darién grows up and is the hardest working student in the village school, although the other students don’t care for him because of his strange appearance.

During festival preparations, an inspector arrives at the school for evaluation and suspects that something is wrong with Juan Darién after he hears a strange noise from the little boy — he suspects that he is a savage beast after seeing a green, phosphorescent glow from Juan Darién’s eyes. The inspector tries to trick Juan Darién into admitting that he is actually a tiger and not a boy. The story proceeds from there to include the subsequent torture and stoning of the child of only twelve years — everyone takes turns from the smallest children in the village to the oldest sage. They are all convinced that Juan Darién is no human being, but a savage beast that must be exposed. Finally, a tiger-tamer is called in to violently whip the human flesh from the little boy’s body (thereby exposing his tiger ‘stripes’). Nothing they can do seems to be able to expose the ‘tiger’ within the little boy, so the village decides to burn him with the fireworks that were set to be used later in the evening.

Under the darkness of night, the frail body of the little boy is lit by the fire which burns his flesh until the animal within explodes — and the tiger inside is reborn. Escaping into the forest to try to heal, Juan Darién has time to heal his wounds. Once ready to face the world, he gathers his new group and marches on the city to look for the cruel tiger-trainer. Once he finds him, Juan Darién makes sure that everything that was done to him in the past is revisited on the trainer. In this powerful ending, one life is taken for another as the tiger-trainer is burned to death.

From the start of this tale, the boundaries typically accepted between human beings and animals are tested. The power of love — a mother’s love — is the only measure that can erase the outer, physical evidence of Juan Darién’s ‘true’ nature. Quiroga tells readers that “Ella era aun muy joven, y podría haberse vuelto a casar, si hubiera querido; pero le bastaba el amor entrañable de su hijo, amor que ella devolvía con toda su corazón” (2). The young mother raises Juan Darién to be loving, noble and good. He never lies and is a model student and son. His humanity is seemingly of the highest quality. And yet, when the inspector suspects
Juan Darién’s ‘true’ nature, he immediately determines that “[e]s preciso matar a Juan Darién” (3). Although he was not a “mal hombre,” he was like all other humans as Quiroga puts it and “como todos los hombres que viven muy cerca de la selva, odiaba ciegamente a los tigres” (3). The blind fear and hatred towards the animal species is characteristic of many of the human beings in Quiroga’s tales and the quest for domination of land and nature is a salient factor in the lives of Quiroga’s human protagonists. Often, the very animals of the jungle that the human beings are trying to eradicate are responsible for the destruction or death of the humans. In many cases, the animals are not sympathetic towards their pursuers, and indeed organize rebellions to foil or conquer the plans of the intruders.

Juan Darién is different from most of the animal protagonists in Quiroga in that the character physically morphs from animal to human and back to animal again in the same story. The first transformation is initiated by the expression of love and compassion by the mother, as Quiroga writes “[t]ú corazón de madre te ha permitido salvar una vida del Universo, donde todas las vidas tienen el mismo valor” (1). When speaking of the “Universo” all lives have the same value, no matter if they are human or non-human. Those who would speak out against animal rights would conclude that animal species do not have language nor possess rationality to understand moral conflict, and thus should not be extended rights of their own. Peter Singer, one of the founders of the modern animal-rights movement, expresses in his treatise, Animal Lib- 
eration Movement, that such speciesism (or favoritism towards human beings) is the basis for the unnecessary torture of animals for the advancement of the human race. Although Singer would agree that the idea of absolute equality among the species is unachievable, our benchmark for determining right and wrong in the case of animals should begin with our realization that animal species do have a capacity to suffer, and suffering caused by human beings is morally objectionable. Singer takes his cue from eighteenth-century philosopher Jeremy Ben-
tham, who argues in his treatise An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation (1789) that

the day may come when the rest of the animal creation may acquire those rights which never could have been withheld from them but by the hand of tyranny. [. . .] It may one day come to be recognized that the number of the legs, the villosity of the skin, or the ter-
mination of the *os sacrum*, are reasons equally insufficient for abandoning a sensitive being to the same fate. [..] The question is not, Can they reason? nor, Can they talk; but, Can they suffer? (7)

In Quiroga’s tale, Juan Darién suffers tremendously, and even more, he is made to suffer *while in human form* and totally *without cause*. Furthermore, it is only by the crescendo of violence perpetuated by the village inhabitants (all of them, even the children), or, in anthropocentric terms, by their increasing animality, that the human form of Juan Darién is finally burned away:

¡No, perdón! ¡Yo soy hombre! – tuvo aún tiempo de clamar la infeliz criatura. Y tras un nuevo surco de fuego, se pudo ver que su cuerpo se sacudía convulsivamente; que sus gemidos adquirían un timbre profundo y ronco, y que su cuerpo cambiaba poco a poco de forma. Y la muchedumbre, con un grito salvaje de triunfo, pudo ver surgir por fin, bajo la piel del hombre, las rayas negras y fatales del tigre. (5)

The graphic nature of the burning of the 12-year old boy seems sacrificial and unnecessary. The capacity to suffer, as Bentham has laid out as the litmus test for determining the margin of difference between man and animal, is clearly exposed. Quiroga’s Juan Darién is an “infeliz criatura” who begs for the villagers to quench the fires in which he is put to an agonizing death. Earlier in the story, Juan Darién is also stoned, as the villagers call for his death:

“–¡Fuera de aquí, Juan Darién! ¡Vuelve a la selva, hijo de tigre y corazón de tigre! ¡Fuera, Juan Darién! –”.

Y los que estaban lejos y no podían pegarle, le tiraban piedras. Juan Darién cayó del todo, por fin, tendiendo en busca de apoyo sus pobres manos de niño. Y su cruel destino quiso que una mujer, que estaba parada a la puerta de su casa sosteniendo en los brazos a una inocente criatura, interpretara mal ese ademán de súplica.

“–¡Me ha querido robar a mi hijo! [..] ¡Mátamele en seguida, antes que él mate a nuestros hijos! – (4)”.

The fictional fate of Juan Darién is such that readers not only feel sympathy for him, but we actually come to abhor the actions of the human villagers against the child and thus condone the death of the tiger-turner in the end. Our compassion as readers sits, therefore, on the side of the ‘animals,’ and not the humans. By the end of the story all dichotomies are actually inverted: the humans have exhibited what they themselves
would characterize as animal behavior and the one ‘tigre’ in this case is depicted as the sacrificial ‘lamb’ murdered by the stubborn and fearful stupidity of the human beings in the village. As representatives of ‘culture’ (in other words, civilization), the villagers act savagely against what they view as an intrusion of ‘nature’ (Juan Darién the tiger) into their cultural microcosm. The desire for segregation between humans and animals is clearly outlined, yet this move towards violent separation begins while Juan Darién was still in human form.

As readers, we never witness the animality of Juan Darién until the humanity of the villagers is laid aside in favor of other aspects of their psyche, i.e. fear and the need for domination and superiority. Sigmund Freud dedicates a substantive portion of *The Essentials of Psychoanalysis* (1923) to this very subject – how human beings suppress their alter-ego (the id) because it expressly desires to satisfy more animal or “passionate” (450) impulses. In the context of this study, Juan Darién, in the protagonist role, has the physicality as well as the emotional range of a human being. It is only when he is under the most dire of circumstances and in direct response to the animal-like mentality of the villagers that the tiger within is brought forth. Even then, the animal in Juan Darién does not wreak havoc on the villagers. Freud’s trio of psychological entities (ego, id, superego) offers a vision of both protagonist and antagonist in this short story; Juan Darién and the villagers who burn his human form are all in differing moments of either humanity or animality. The animals and the humans in this story are more aptly viewed as hybrid creatures, or as fusions of nature and culture, animal and human, ego and id.

Just as it is ontologically difficult to distinguish the difference between human and animal in the case of the main character, it is equally difficult to characterize the villagers as human beings in a moral and ethical manner because of their treatment of the tiger/boy Juan. Juan Darién does not recognize his duality while in child form, just as the humans do not consider their actions against the boy as animalistic. All they see is that Juan Darién is different, and this difference is an immediate source of fear. As Derrida would agree, and as Wolfe has also succinctly rephrased, “the outside is always already inside” (in *Zoontologies* 29) and in looking for difference we almost always find that all beings end up in the same boat, so to speak. Derrida concludes that

[w]hat is this non-power at the heart of power? . . . what right should be accorded it? To what extent does it concern us? [. . .] Mortality resides there, as the most
radical means of thinking the finitude that we share with animals, the compas-
sion, to the possibility of sharing the possibility of this non-power, the possibili-
ty of this impossibility, the anguish of this vulnerability and the vulnerability of
this anguish. ("And Say. . ." 130)

Derrida surmises that there would be no power without a subject to exert
power upon. That is to say, that as human beings we could not define
ourselves as different from other species if we did not recognize primari-
ly that the human/animal relationship is a dynamic one. Supposed
human superiority implies responsibility (or compassion, as Derrida
mentions) to those involved in the definition of that superiority. In the
case of Juan Darién, the human beings, in effort to secure domination
and maintain power (exerting their culture over nature), deny basic
rights to Juan Darién the boy and murder his outer human form.

This inversion of traditional roles of human and animal is extremely
important to the theoretical argument of the essay – if human beings are
distinguished from animals by their ability to reason and their language,
then Juan Darién was a human. How would we characterize the actions
of the humans? Derrida states that we only understand animals in as far
as we domesticate or humanize them (in Wolfe, Zoontologies, 123). In
Juan’s case, the humanity was more present than the animality, yet the
village people would not rest until animality was exposed. Does this
mean that we all have animals inside? From the fictional point of view,
the human beings in Quiroga’s jungle are similar to blurred beings. Their
savagery is considered beast-like (from the reader’s perspective) and it is
only when they are faced with a pure form of humanity (in the child
Juan Darién) that these qualities are exposed. All characters in this tale
share moments of humanity and animality, and exhibit both compassion
and savagery.

Another manner in which the boundaries formerly used to distin-
guish human and animal are erased in this tale is found in the fact that
after Juan Darién the boy is sacrificed to reveal the tiger, he retains cer-
tain ‘human’ traits; namely, the use of his hands, the ability to speak,
and the preservation of memory: “Porque había conservado de su forma
recién perdida tres cosas: el recuerdo vivo del pasado, la habilidad de
sus manos, que manejaba como un hombre, y el lenguaje” (5). This
makes Quiroga’s protagonist much more subjective than some of his
other animal characters, because although they speak and act among
themselves, it is very rare to find a character that crosses borders and therefore adopts customs and attributes of human beings, including the ability to communicate. Animal rights leaders as well as philosophers have long suggested that the lack of capacity for language is what distinguishes animals from *homo sapiens*. Ludwig Wittgenstein ascertains in his seminal work *Philosophical Investigations* (1958) that “If a lion could talk, we could not understand him” (213). In his essay entitled “In the Shadow of Wittgenstein’s Lion: Language, Ethics and the Question of the Animal,” Cary Wolfe summarizes the importance of Wittgenstein’s position to present day debate regarding the animal/human question:

Wittgenstein’s conventionalism would appear to more or less permanently unsettle the ontological difference between human and animal, a difference expressed, as it were, in the philosophical tradition by the capacity for language: first, by holding that that ontological difference is itself constituted by a language that cannot ground and master a world of contingency via ‘universals’; and second, by showing how language does not provide an answer to the question ‘What’s the difference between human and animal?’ (*Zoontologies* 58)

Quiroga’s “Juan Darién” delves further in the human and animal question by developing a story around a type of hybrid *animalhuman* that possesses speech, cognition and memory, yet at the end of the narration, lives a life ostracized from human society for crimes not committed. Moreover, one of the more interesting factors in the tale is that Juan Darién can speak not only to humans but to the fellow tigers as well. Of course the dialog written by Quiroga between animals is based on human language (a necessary anthropomorphism, I believe). Derrida remarks in his essay “The Animal Therefore I Am” that philosophers from Aristotle to Lacan, Kant, Heidegger and Levinas all say the same thing: the animal is without language. Or more precisely unable to respond, to respond with a response that could be precisely and rigorously distinguished from a reaction. (400)

In Quiroga’s tale, of course, Juan Darién possesses not only language, but the ability to respond decisively to a full range of situations. Before the death of his mother, Juan Darién was a model student in the village school, performing at high levels. He was an ‘animal’ that was respon-
sive to positive input – the unconditional love of his mother. After her death and the death of his physical form, Juan Darién responds with revenge upon the author of his human death, the tiger tamer. Quiroga’s protagonist provides us with the perfect fictional tool to examine the boundaries that human beings install to distinguish ourselves from the ‘others.’ The moral lesson from this tale lies in the misjudgment on part of the villagers of the true ‘nature’ of Juan Darién and to show that things are not always as cut and dried as human beings would like for them to be. The animals in this story are actually few, but from an objective perspective, they possess more humanistic qualities than any of the humans in the story, save the mother of the protagonist, of course.

Quiroga’s expertise at exposing the frailty of the human condition vis a vis the natural world is his trademark – some of his best works describe the mistakes and trials of pioneer life in the northeastern corner of Argentina, Misiones. However, Quiroga’s work adroitly challenges anthropocentrism by giving life to his animal protagonists and envisioning them as not only sentient members of our world but acting of their own volition and exhibiting a full-range of emotions, thus eroding the neat categories and divisions that previously have formed the boundaries between human being and animal. Science convinces us that animals are different from human beings because they primarily lack rationality, which is an argument that is fortified by the fact that animals ‘lack’ the ability to express themselves linguistically in a manner that is fully comprehensible to us. Although many will accept that animals are capable of reactionary episodes, a responsive reaction is deemed lacking, thus many concede that certain rights cannot be granted to animals.

My question is, and this is related more to Wittgenstein’s quote from earlier, is it possible that animals are just as evolved as human beings? Is their ‘silence’ (i.e.-lack of language) a response to the cacophony created by human beings? Day to day animals teach us to stop, slow down and really listen. It is through this process that human beings can ‘hear’ animals. Donna Haraway suggests a similar argument in The Companion Species Manifesto (2003) when she writes about her relationship with her dog, Ms. Cayenne Pepper:

In layers of history, layers of biology, layers of naturecultures, complexity is the name of our game. We are both the freedom-hungry offspring of conquest, products of white settler colonies, leaping over hurdles and crawling through tunnels on the playing field. I’m
sure our genomes are more alike than they should be. There must be some molecular record of our touch in the codes of living that will leave traces in the world. [. . .] Significantly other to each other, in specific difference, we signify in the flesh a nasty developmental infection called love. This love is an historical aberration and a natural-cultural legacy. (2-3)

Haraway touches the cornerstone of the argument of this note – that maybe humans and animals are not as different as we would like for them to be and that the boundaries that we form serve the purpose of establishing for ourselves that human beings hold a higher place in the natural order. Quiroga, via his work in “Juan Darién,” effectively shows us that these boundaries are not as clear cut as they would seem. Metaphorically speaking, Juan Darién shows us how complexity and hybridity are perhaps more accurate portraits of the natural and cultural worlds that we cross into and out of daily.

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WORKS CITED


Les études sandiennes sont jusqu’ici restées relativement à l’écart d’une des tendances qui ont marqué les recherches sur le roman du XIXᵉ siècle. Dans la foulée du déconstructionnisme s’est développée une critique post-structuraliste qui remet en question les concepts unificateurs appliqués à la littérature réaliste-naturaliste (totalité, harmonie et sens immanents des œuvres) en leur opposant les modalités de l’hétérogénéité textuelle (détail, fragment, dérive sémantique ou stylistique, parodie, ironie). Cette approche a eu pour corollaire une critique génétique tendant à problématiser le statut d’œuvres en conformité apparente avec des projets auctoriaux systématiques, tels La Comédie humaine et Les Rougon-Macquart, en regard d’avant-textes ou de transferts textuels qui démentissent soit le principe de l’œuvre achevée, soit la finalité de la littérature sérieuse, en l’occasion, les ébauches et les projets avortés (Schuerewegen, “Avortements” 307-320), et la résurgence de topoï mélodramatiques, alors que les avant-textes cherchent à en faire l’économie (Pierre-Gnassounou).

Dans le cas de George Sand, l’œuvre a certes fait l’objet d’études génétiques qui infirment la réputation de romancière au “style coulant” forgée par ses détracteurs (Baudelaire 686; Barbey d’Aurevilly 56). La critique sandienne ne commence toutefois qu’aujourd’hui à jauger une écriture qui, malgré sa fluidité apparente, fait par moments l’épreuve de ses achoppements, sinon de ses limites. En témoignent à cet égard la genèse difficile de certains textes remaniés, tel Maître Favilla (Aroldi 857-885), les ébauches et les projets de romans abandonnés comme Mémoires de Jean Paille (Lubin 4-6) ou, encore, les adaptations infructueuses de romans pour la scène, dont la pièce posthume inédite tirée de
Mont-Revêche, laissée inachevée par George Sand et complétée par Paul Meurice.

L’écriture de George Sand connaît aussi ses replis, ses déviations, voire ses dérives, qui contrebalaissent, sinon saperent les codes de lecture sur lesquels elle se fonde a priori au niveau paratextuel. Par exemple, l’exploitation par endroits des procédés feuilletonesques ou mélodramatiques, pourtant condamnés ailleurs au nom des valeurs classiques (Correspondance VII: 99-101; Lucrezia Floriani 681-686; Molière 309-312), problématisé la réception de certains romans, tel La Filleule, qui pousse le paradoxe jusqu’à oscillner entre feuilleton populaire et pastiche ironique (Rambeau 9-10).

Si diverses interprétations féministes ou psychanalytiques ont cerné ponctuellement l’ambivalence respective d’autres textes, jugés plus symptomatiques que d’autres, peu d’études critiques ont par contre confronté systématiquement l’écriture sandienne dans son ensemble avec ses lacunes et ses tensions propres. Sans pour autant rejeter l’usufruit de grands travaux qui ont travaillé à offrir une interprétation globale de l’œuvre suivant ses axes intertextuel et thématique, ne gagnerait-on pas à lire aussi Sand contre Sand (cf. Schuerewegen, Balzac contre Balzac), non par iconoclasme, mais par souci de particulariser l’écriture sandienne dans sa production multiple de sens, au lieu de la synthétiser selon des critères d’univocité réducteurs par essence?

Dans cette perspective, il convient d’envisager les postures scripturales de George Sand sous l’angle de leur relativity intrinsèque, et ce, malgré le protocole de lecture aménagé systématiquement dans certaines circonstances, telle la “Réponse à un ami,” recueillie trois ans avant la mort de George Sand dans Impressions et souvenirs, où la caputatio benevolentia donne à lire l’oeuvre sandienne comme un tout cohérent: “[…] Lisez-moi en entier et ne me jugez pas sur des fragments détachés […] tout être qui n’est pas fou se rattache à une synthèse et je ne crois pas avoir rompu avec la mienne” (Impressions et souvenirs 62). Replacée dans le contexte des débats sociopolitiques et littéraires qui, au lendemain de la Commune, relancent les échanges épistolaires entre George Sand et Flaubert, cette exhortation tardive postule le progressisme fondateur de l’écriture sandienne, que la gauche avait refusé de reconnaître dans le pacifisme de George Sand face à l’insurrection communarde. En dehors de cette conjoncture, elle ne s’applique pas par contre à ce qui travaille au contraire à relativiser l’écriture sandienne,
par-delà ce qui la lie, partant l’uniforme en apparence, dans sa production de sens. Non qu’il faille en contrepartie nier la téléologie progressiste qui rattache Consuelo et d’autres romans exemplaires à l’éthos du romantisme humanitaire; mais il importe de situer aussi cette finalité dans son rapport avec ce qui, à l’inverse, tend empiriquement à l’éprouver, sinon à la contrebancer, comme l’a problématisé jusqu’ici une critique féministe mettant en cause l’adéquation de l’énonciation romantique à ses visées progressistes (Massardier-Kenney, *Gender*) pour mieux en dégager son aménagement polyphonique, en vertu duquel le discours de l’instance narratoriale cède pour laisser la place à des paroles de personnages exprimant des valeurs différentes (Massardier-Kenney, “Construction” 29-38).

La praxis de George Sand induit également à une approche qui ressource l’écriture de chaque roman dans sa négociation avec son intratexte sandien. Un rapprochement entre Malgré tout (1870) et Constance Verrier (1860) qui, à notre connaissance, n’a fait l’objet jusqu’ici que d’une seule étude (Sourian 28-37), s’avère révélateur à cet égard. Comparé à Constance Verrier, Malgré tout laisse à une première lecture une impression de déjà lu, partant d’écriture uniforme, tant les topoï et les thèmes restent de prime abord les mêmes, d’un roman à l’autre: les rapports conflictuels, quoique ambigus, entre trois femmes appartenant à des milieux sociaux différents, mais se disputant le même homme qui, dans les deux romans, porte le prénom ou le surnom\(^1\) d’Abel. Sur cette intrigue, prête à des développements sur ce qui motive, dans le cas de chaque personnage féminin, l’intérêt pour le sexe opposé, s’articule la transformation de l’héroïne (Sarah Owen, Constance Verrier) qui, après avoir découvert l’infidélité de l’être aimé (sur le chemin de Nice, dans le cas de Malgré tout, ou dans cette ville même), finit par la surmonter. Malgré son étroite ressemblance avec Constance Verrier, à quelques variantes près, Malgré tout ressortit pourtant à une praxis qui, à dix ans d’intervalle, aménage un espace de réécriture à des fins de relativisation.

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\(^1\) Au niveau de l’intrigue, ce surnom donné par Constance Verrier à son fiancé, Raoul Mahoult, retardé le moment où elle s’aperçoit qu’il s’agit du Melvil aimé de Sofia Mozzielli et remarqué par la duchesse d’Évereux. Dans le récit où Sofia confie à Constance et à la duchesse son coup de foudre pour Melvil, ce quiproquo se traduit d’entrée de jeu par la mise en abyme dont participe la mention du rôle d’Adalgisa chanté par Sofia (Constance Verrier 156). Dans l’opéra de Bellini, Norma, après avoir recueilli les confidences d’Adalgisa, découvre qu’elles aiment le même homme (Pollione).
Comparé à Constance Verrier, Malgrétout rompt d’entrée de jeu avec le dispositif para- et métatextuel qui assigne un protocole de lecture à Constance Verrier. Le découpage textuel en prévision de la publication en feuilletons de Constance Verrier dans La Presse (21 décembre 1859-18 janvier 1860) avait en effet pour George Sand une incidence sur la réception critique qu’elle anticipait, comme elle le rappelle, par exemple, dans une lettre datée des 15 et 16 décembre 1859 à Émile Aucante, qui lui servait d’intermédiaire auprès du directeur de La Presse, Charles-Edmond:

Cher ami, il est bien convenu, n’est-ce pas, que, non seulement vous ne laisserez pas déranger l’indication de la division de mes chapitres, mais que chaque chapitre formera un feuilleton, sans qu’une partie en soit reportée au feuilleton suivant?2 Ceci est absolument nécessaire. Ce roman est un peu délicat par endroits. J’y fais parler des personnages qui soutiennent leur point de vue, lequel point de vue n’est pas toujours celui de l’auteur, mais pourrait lui être attribué et indisposer le lecteur naïf contre lui, s’il ne trouvait pas, à la fin de son feuilleton du jour, le correctif nécessaire en certains endroits. Je vous prie en grâce de veiller à ce que notre convention soit observée rigoureusement. Certains malentendus nuiraient à l’ouvrage et au journal par conséquent. (Correspondance XV: 609, en italique dans le texte)

Conformément aux précautions prises par George Sand dans sa Correspondance, la division de Constance Verrier en chapitres correspond, non seulement à la répartition des récits respectifs de Sofia (chap. III-VI, XII-XIII), de la duchesse (chap. VII-XIX) et de Constance (chap. X-XI), mais aussi à l’aménagement d’un contexte d’énonciation où les “foyers normatifs” (Hamon) les plus déterminants sont ventilés stratégiquement sur les dernières lignes de chapitres. D’une part, le jugement de Constance sur la première histoire de Sofia (chap. III-VI) est exprimé au terme du chapitre III: “– C’est égal, dit Constance, quel que soit le résultat, je sais gré à la Sofia d’avoir pris cette résolution-là” (Constance Verrier 42), et sollicité entre la fin de l’histoire au chapitre VI et le début du chapitre suivant: “– Résumons-nous, dit la duchesse en s’adressant à Constance; notre chère Sofia est arrivée à l’impuissance du cœur par le chemin de la satiété; est-ce votre avis?” (81). D’autre part, la moralité de Constance est prise en exemple par Sofia à la fin de la première partie

2 Au cours de la publication de Teverino dans La Presse (19 août-3 sept. 1845), George Sand avait déjà eu l’occasion de protester contre le découpage en feuilletons (Correspondance VII: 70-71).
du roman, où s’achève le récit des amours de Constance avec Abel (chap. X-XI): “– Et vous avez bien fait! Répondit la Mozzelli; tout ce que vous faites est bien, d’ailleurs, et je deviendrai bonne si je passais ma vie près de vous! […]” (141). Dans chaque cas, la clausule confère une exemplarité au point de vue moral de Constance, ce que consacrent au reste le titre du roman et la préface auctoriale, à l’adresse des parents de jeunes filles soucieux de l’honnêteté de leurs lectures: d’où un verrouillage monologique des macrostructures (dix-sept chapitres au total, ventilés sur deux parties) au détriment des microstructures (les discours autres que celui de l’héroïne). En outre, l’exhortation à la moralité faite par le père de Constance à Abel, comme la rapporte sa fille à la fin du chapitre X: “Travaille, sois pur, bon et fort, rends-toi digne d’elle et de moi” (129, en italique dans le texte), se répercute dans le code de perfectibilité conjugale auquel Raoul, contrit de son infidélité pendant leurs fiançailles, et Constance soumettent leur mariage à la fin du roman (chap. XVII). Bref, une éthique de la constance amoureuse qui, de par sa fonction conclusive dans le récit, sursigne l’exemplarité du prénom porté par l’héroïne et, a fortiori, le discours qu’elle tient à la charnière des chapitres les plus déterminants du roman. Aussi Constance Verrier s’avère-t-il plus ou moins propice à une relecture susceptible d’en dégager la polysémie, l’effet polyphonique lié à la modalisation des points de vue autres que celui de Constance (celui de la duchesse en particulier) restant subordonné à l’effet monologique inverse.

À partir des mêmes données romanesques, Malgrétout travaille au contraire à désamorcer tout effet monologique, et ce, en un récit au je sous forme de lettres sans réponse, lequel donne à lire un transfert dialogique (Bakhtine) entre les paroles rapportées par la narratrice, Sarah Owen, et son propre discours épistolaire, imprégné dès lors de points de vue autres. Sous cet angle, les clausules respectives des quatre chapitres de Malgrétout ne remplissent pas la fonction régulatrice assignée à ceux dans Constance Verrier; elles jalonnent plutôt un récit au cours duquel le point de vue de Sarah sur Abel et les artistes en général change en vertu des conversations qu’elle rapporte. En témoigne à cet égard la fin du premier chapitre, où, cédant aux instances de sa soeur et de son père, Sarah accepte d’accueillir chez eux Abel et son ami Nouville, malgré son souci des convenances:

Je demandai à mon père et à Adda s’il ne serait pas convenable d’inviter quelqu’un du voisinage […] pour ne paraître si vite favorisés de l’intimité de deux artistes célèbres. A
coup sûr, la seconde vise de M. Abel, si rapprochée de la première, serait remarquée et commentée dès que le bruit de sa présence dans le pays se répondrait avec l’annonce du concert. On pourrait s’en entretenir jusqu’à Paris [. . .]. – Ah! laisse-nous donc tranquilles avec tes scrupules! s’écria ma soeur en riant. [. . .] – Et d’ailleurs, ajouta mon père, la musique ne sanctionne pas seulement, elle sanctifie tout! Je dus céder et mettre tous mes soins à rendre agréable la petite fête que mon père nous avait ménagée. (Malgrêtout 50)

Plutôt que de se figer dans une expression monologique de la respectabilité, le récit de Sarah rapporte ici les discours respectifs de ses proches, lesquels, par glissement dialogique, l’infléchissent en retour: aux préventions contre Abel et Nouville par crainte des on-dit, se substitue dès lors un récit dialogisé, non seulement dans son axe narratif (“Je dus céder et mettre tous mes soins à rendre agréable la petite fête que mon père nous avait ménagée”), mais aussi dans son système normatif, comme le révèle le début du chapitre suivant. Au deuxième chapitre, Sarah rapporte en effet une discussion au cours de laquelle ses réserves sur ce qu’elle considère d’abord comme des “accès de témérité” (51) dans les exécutions musicales d’Abel s’estompent aussitôt que l’opinion de Nouville sur son ami l’amène à reconnaître la sourde influence d’Abel sur sa conception de l’art. L’infléchissement qu’y subit le discours de Sarah: “Malgré moi, j’attachais un sens moral aux paroles de Nouville, et je me sentais un peu effrayée de sa prédiction. Elle s’accomplissait déjà, je le niais en vain” (52), participe dès lors d’un dialogisme en vertu duquel le discours sur/de l’Autre (Abel) relativise le point de vue de Sarah. “– [. . .] Je sais et je vois que vous sentez l’art, miss Owen! Eh bien, quand il voudra, il vous fera penser le contraire de ce que vous croyez être la vérité musicale” (52), lui dit Nouville à propos d’Abel. La fin du dernier chapitre consacre d’ailleurs l’évolution personnelle de Sarah qui relativise elle-même sa vision de la vie en général dans un esprit de tolérance morale:

Je l’aime de toute l’énergie de mon cœur et je serai peut-être très heureuse, j’amasse peut-être des forces pour des chagrins que je ne connaîtrai pas; mais je ne veux pas me faire trop d’illusions, je veux avoir devant Dieu et devant lui le mérite d’accepter tout d’avance, le mal comme le bien. (176, en italique dans le texte)

D’où l’ambivalence homonymique du titre donné par George Sand à son roman: il désigne en un seul mot une montagne décrite dans l’histoire (Malgrêtout), alors que, scindé en deux (malgré tout), il indique la
relativité intrinsèque du récit, à laquelle travaillent les fins “ouvertes” des chapitres.

L’axe de réécriture suivant lequel Malgrétout contrebalance Constance Verrier neutralise en somme la tendance du roman sandien à s’articuler autour du manichéïsme tributaire de l’ethos littéraire qu’oppose George Sand à Flaubert à cette époque (Flaubert et Sand 515-519), et, plus généralement, des conventions morales que respecte le roman-feuilleton, en l’occurrence. Au dispositif para- et métatextuel travaillant à dégager la lecture de Constance Verrier vers un seul décodage et, ipso facto, à limiter le rôle interprétatif du lecteur, Malgrétout substitue une poétique du roman dialogique qui induit au contraire à une lecture plurielle, le discours sur/de l’Autre innervant celui de Sarah, non seulement dans son économie sémantique, mais aussi dans ses couches de signification implicites (Glasgow 29-35; Carver Capasso 29-42).

Malgré son exemplarité en regard d’une certaine éthique des rapports homme-femme chez George Sand, Constance Verrier ne marque pas en conséquence l’aboutissement du questionnement qui, d’Indiana à Jean de la Roche, en passant par Jacques, Mauprat et La Comtesse de Rudolstadt, pose le mariage comme un enjeu éthique. S’il anticipe à cet égard d’autres romans de la constance amoureuse, en particulier Le Marquis de Villederm, Tamaris, Mademoiselle Merquem et Nanon, il ne freine pas pour autant le rendement intratextuel de l’écriture qui, à la même époque, soulève à l’inverse les questions du divorce (Valvèdre) et de l’adultère (Le Dernier amour) selon des modalités propices à leur dialectalisation, la polyphonie (Valvèdre) et la forme épistolaire (Le Dernier amour), en l’occurrence. Sous cet angle, Malgrétout exemplifie la tendance de l’écriture sandienne, non seulement à varier la forme narrative de toponymie, mais aussi à instruire le procès de sa propre poétique romanesque. Autant Constance Verrier emblématise chez George Sand le “texte lisible” (Barthes), autant Malgrétout travaille au contraire à en briser le moule: bref, un Sand contre Sand en vertu duquel l’énonciation sandienne transcende ses contraintes monologiques pour mieux jauger ses potentialités dialogiques, induisant ainsi la critique sandienne à dégager l’oeuvre de son “style coulant, cher aux bourgeois” (Baudelaire 686 en italique dans le texte) au profit de sa pluralité intrinsèque.
OUVRAGES CITÉS

UN VOYAGE DE L’ŒIL À L’AUTRE OU MALDOROR TRAVERSE LE MIROIR. QUELQUES REMARQUES SUR L’IDENTITÉ ET LE FLOU DANS LES CHANTS DE MALDOROR

ÉLOÏSE SUREAU

Les Chants de Maldoror sortent de l’ombre en 1874, quatre ans après la mort encore inexpliquée de l’auteur, Isidore Ducasse dit le comte de Lautréamont. L’ombre, c’est effectivement l’un des thèmes les plus marquants des Chants dont les pages sombres, à peine éclairées de furieux éclairs illuminant des scènes d’une violence rare, entraînent le lecteur vers des « marécages désolés » (Ducasse 123). Dès le titre le lecteur est dérouté : Maldoror est-il l’auteur des Chants ou s’agit-il de chants dont Maldoror serait le sujet ? La préposition « de » présente une ambiguïté pour placer le lecteur d’emblée dans une situation de doute, dans l’ombre, le forçant à se demander dans quel univers il vient subitement d’être projeté. Après avoir montré la place de l’ombre et du flou dans le texte en général, cet essai, qui touche à un domaine encore peu exploré, se penchera en particulier sur Maldoror et la place que l’ombre et le flou occupent dans sa quête d’une d’image et d’une identité.

Ducasse favorise les plaines vides, les paysages montagneux ainsi que les lieux marins. Les contours des paysages sont distants, indiscernables, brumeux, pour que le lecteur sente, ressente, pressente les émotions engendrées par la narration, mais ne soit ni gêné ni aidé par des

1 L’ombre s’étend à l’auteur, Isidore Ducasse, dont le pseudonyme comte de Lautréamont pourrait ne pas avoir été connu de lui, donné après sa mort par son éditeur.
2 Le lecteur est par ailleurs continuellement placé dans une situation de doute ; il ne sait pas quel type de lecteur il est supposé être et les pistes narratives, généralement brouillées, le forcent à changer d’attitude en permanence.

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détails qui troubleraient ses sensations et attireraient son attention sur des éléments qui ne jouent, en fait, qu’un rôle négligeable, et qui permettraient au lecteur de s’orienter. L’aspect onirique du texte ajoute au ton fantastique des Chants, plaçant le lecteur dans un univers où irréel, rêve et réalité s’entremêlent : « Qu’il arrive, ce jour fatal, où je m’endormirai ! Au réveil mon rasoir, se frayant un passage à travers le cou, prouvera que rien n’était, en effet, plus réel » (Ducasse 298). L’accumulation des objets qui s’animent et l’ombre des arbres se transformant sans apparente raison si ce n’est le vent, procurent au texte le ton d’un imaginaire féerique sinistre. Il fait généralement nuit ou il s’agit de la tombée de la nuit, moment de la journée où la vue s’accoutume péniblement à la perte de lumière, où tout est flou, gris, entre chien et loup, ni tout à fait une chose, ni réellement une autre. Les personnages sont également à peine dessinés. Non seulement la majorité des jeunes garçons (Réginald, Falmer, Mario, Lohengrin, Elsseneur . . .) ne reviennent que rarement au cœur de la narration une fois leur strophe achevée, mais chacun des adolescents (dont l’âge et la physionomie sont flous) apparaît enveloppé d’un halo de fumée, à travers un brouillard narratif : Rappelons les noms de ces êtres imaginaires, à la nature d’ange, que ma plume [. . .] a tirés d’un cerveau [. . .]. Ils meurent dès leur naissance, comme ces étincelles dont l’œil a de la peine à suivre l’effacement rapide, sur du papier brûlé. (Ducasse 220)

Ombres furtives, impressions que le narrateur laisse au lecteur, traces sur le papier, les jeunes gens des Chants ne sont que sensations, impressions, brumes. Ils constituent des personnages potentiels, mais ils manquent de fixité. Ils ne procurent en rien un repère rassurant pour le lecteur. L’ombre et le flou sont mis à l’épreuve, brouillant la lecture à tous les niveaux. Ces jeunes garçons semblent collés sur la page, ajoutés au texte, en relief alors que Maldoror cherche une image à plaquer sur son visage vide, nous y reviendrons.

Maldoror glisse le long du texte, à peine visible. Sa présence est plus sentie que vue. Comme les paysages, il laisse derrière lui des impressions, des traces. Il s’apparait au roii des Aulnes, glissant des pro-

3 Le texte des Chants n’a pas encore été placé dans un genre précis ; faute de mieux, on l’a placé dans la lignée des symbolistes. Or, les Chants multiplient les genres. Ils sont pièces de théâtre, traité de philosophie, prose, chants, roman. Ils sont tout, et ils ne sont rien ; un « livre sur rien » comme Madame Bovary.
messes de bonheur à l’oreille des enfants. En confiant au lecteur la tâche de modeler, au milieu de données vagues et souvent contradictoires, un portrait ressemblant de Maldoror, l’imagination participe au flou. Cadavre, spectre de lui-même, dont la voix semble émerger de nulle part, tantôt blond, tantôt brun, aux lèvres de jaspe ou de bronze, il relève de la fantasmagorie. Un large manteau noir recouvre entièrement son être, à l’exception de ses yeux. Maldoror est présenté comme un fantôme, personnage blanc de teint dont le sang a quitté les veines, en quête permanente d’une identité qui demeure impossible à acquérir et reste donc floue.

Un personnage se mirant dans l’eau, ou simplement posant son regard sur l’onde signale le point de départ d’une interrogation sur l’identité. L’image fournit la preuve que le sujet n’est plus unique mais qu’il existe un autre, ni tout à fait lui ni tout à fait différent. Tout au long de la narration des *Chants*, le « je » se cherche. Il tente de se découvrir une identité qui lui est masquée : « Je cherchais une âme qui me ressemblait » (Ducasse 203). Cette âme, il la trouve le temps d’une strophe chez la femelle du requin au fond des eaux (Ducasse 211). Ainsi, la découverte de soi se met en place dans la narration grâce à l’image reflétée.

Étrangement, un des portraits qui se dessine sous les yeux de Maldoror n’est visible que de lui seul. L’océan miroir lui renvoie l’image de l’amphibie auquel il se compare :

> En effet, cet amphibie (puisque amphibie il y a, sans qu’on puisse affirmer le contraire) n’était visible que de moi seul, abstraction faite des poissons et des cétacés. (Ducasse 277)

Ce « on » pourrait en effet affirmer ce que bon lui semble, Maldoror étant le seul témoin de la présence de l’amphibie. Si tout au long des *Chants* le lecteur peine à se faire une idée de l’aspect d’un Maldoror en perpétuelle évolution, le portrait de l’amphibie fait également défaut ; il...
reste dans le domaine du flou. Selon Sabine-Melchior Bonnet « Je suis vu donc je suis. L’identité passe par le paraître, par le rôle, par l’approbation, et conditionne l’accès au statut de sujet » (142). Les paysans présents ne pouvant pas déceler la présence de l’amphibie, ils ne reconnaissent donc pas Maldoror en tant qu’individu, en tant que sujet puisque le reflet, cette marque de l’existence, qui fait défaut aux vampires, est absent. La reconnaissance est donc incomplète. D’un côté l’œil de l’amphibie comme son image dote Maldoror d’une identité nécessaire (il voit et est vu, il reconnaît l’amphibie comme l’image de lui-même que lui renvoie l’eau). Toutefois, d’un autre côté et comme un miroir sans tain, le reflet que les autres ne remarquent pas annule Maldoror en tant que sujet, voire en tant que narrateur, car pas d’image, pas de voix.

Un schéma similaire est reproduit au quatrième chant alors que Maldoror, à la cinquième strophe, rencontre une petite fille au bord d’un lac, occupée à cueillir un lotus. La petite fille pose son regard sur le lac, y rencontre celui de Maldoror qui la fixe, la blesse, la pétrifie et la force à se noyer. Il y a désir de la petite fille et de Maldoror d’entrer en contact visuel, sinon l’échange ne saurait avoir lieu. En effet, pénétrer dans l’espace visuel de l’autre revient à se signaler à sa pensée et à se l’approprier, selon Jean Rousset. C’est ce que Maldoror entreprend avec la fillette. Le lac-miroir symbolise la matrice, le lieu de l’enfantement; il désigne la source, l’enclôt de la découverte et de la connaissance. Pour Lacan, grâce au miroir l’enfant se reconnaît en tant que sujet ; il voit son image et comprend qu’il existe, qu’il est un être à part entière, séparé de la mère. Une fois libéré de l’image maternelle, il acquiert la parole qui le place véritablement en position de sujet. Dans les Chants, le « stade du miroir » tel que Lacan le conçoit ne parvient jamais à terme. La petite fille ne perçoit aucune de ces identifications. En premier lieu, lorsque son œil touche le lac, c’est l’image de Maldoror qu’elle croise et non la sienne. Elle ne peut donc devenir sujet puisque Maldoror lui retire son identité par l’image. Elle ne s’identifie pas en elle, mais en lui. Deuxièmement, n’ayant pu atteindre cette connaissance de soi, elle ne peut parvenir à la parole. C’est cette parole volée qui permet à Maldoror de perdurer dans le rôle de narrateur. Les deux étapes du développement de l’enfant vers la parole ayant échoué, la petite fille se noie, laissant à

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6 L’on note dans cette strophe une évidente subversion du « Lac » de Lamartine, une volonté de s’approprier les thèmes romantiques pour mieux s’en détacher.
Maldoror le soin de lui ravir son identité et sa voix narrative. La notion de « Je suis vu donc je suis » de Sabine Melchior-Bonnet acquiert ici une toute autre signification : Maldoror, en une fraction de seconde, (re)nait dans les yeux de l’enfant, lui permettant ainsi de lui ravir ce qu’il cherche : une identité, une voix. Or, et paradoxalement, la mort de la fillette replonge Maldoror dans son antre de brume. Il lui a volé sa voix en lui volant son image, mais l’image de Maldoror renvoyée par les yeux de la fillette n’est plus là pour confirmer son existence. Il n’est plus vu, il n’existe donc plus. Cela le force ainsi à reprendre sa course vers une autre victime, une autre identité, une autre image, une autre voix.

Grand admirateur de Poe qu’il nomme « le Mameluck-des-Rêves-d’Alcool » dans ses Poésies I (Ducasse 372), Ducasse reprend pour mettre en scène l’image, le miroir et l’écriture floue des thèmes similaires à ceux présentés dans William Wilson. Dans le texte d’Edgar Poe, l’on assiste à la rencontre fortuite entre William Wilson et un personnage surprenant qui non seulement lui ressemble étrangement, mais semble survenir dans la vie du héros à l’heure où se dernier est sur le point de commettre une faute ou un crime, lui murmurant à l’oreille des paroles de sagesse, empêchant malgré lui William Wilson de perpétrer un acte criminel. Comme Maldoror brise le miroir et les adolescents, détruisant la source d’un reflet potentiel, William Wilson excédé en fin de texte provoque son ennemi en duel et le tue. Il supprime l’autre, expiant de fait. L’image donne la mort parce qu’elle évoque la pluralité inadmissible et révèle qu’un des deux reflets est de trop. Les images que Maldoror ou que le narrateur découvre au fil de l’eau ou à travers les miroirs ne représenteraient plus de simples images, mais l’identité, voire les identités multiples et réelles de celui qui se mire. Or, l’abondance des possibilités entrave toute identité définitive. La connaissance de soi s’effectuerait alors grâce à l’œil réfléchi par l’eau ou par le miroir. L’amphibie ou la petite fille, loin de n’être que des illusions sorties de l’imaginaire du narrateur, constitueraient son véritable être, non son paraître. Ils n’existent pas sans lui ni lui sans eux, et, paradoxalement, ils existent en-deçà de lui, indépendamment, de la même manière.

7 Remarquons en outre le paradoxe du sujet : il ne peut exister qu’en étant reconnu par l’autre dont il ne peut supporter la présence. Il l’élimine dont, annulant par-là la seule validation de sa propre existence.
que le double de William Wilson vit séparément du narrateur. Maldoror quant à lui, sans eux, vit à peine.

Le narrateur apparaît en permanence comme un être double, un être sujet à un dédoublement de la personnalité, se parlant à lui-même à la troisième personne. L'on voit ici la mise en place du concept de « doppelgänger » cher aux auteurs gothiques. Le « doppelgänger », de l’allemand « double marcheur », est souvent peint comme un diable, un être nuisible à qui le sujet est confronté. On le retrouve chez E.T.A. Hoffmann, chez Fyodor Dostoyevski et chez Edgar Allan Poe. Dans les Chants, la présence du « doppelgänger » est ambiguë. Il est difficile d’affirmer qui est véritablement le double et qui est le sujet de Maldoror, du narrateur et des divers personnages, comme l’amphibie ou la petite fille. Ils constituent les images d’un Maldoror en quête de son double, déterminé à combler un vide. Les Chants fonctionnent de telle manière qu’il semble que Maldoror soit le double, double du narrateur et double des êtres qu’il croise et annihile sur son passage, tentant, par là même, de passer de l’autre côté du miroir, de changer d’identité et de (re)conquérir son individualité. Maldoror apparaît comme l’ombre de lui-même, voire celle des enfants qu’il hante.

La présence d’une ombre peut constituer la manifestation visuelle de la vie. Dans la nouvelle « A New Year’s Eve Adventure » d’E.T.A. Hoffmann, Peter Schlemihl a vendu son ombre au diable et traverse la narration sans reflet sur le sol. Selon les théories psychanalytiques d’Otto Rank, l’ombre représente l’âme. Peter Schlemihl serait donc dépourvu de son âme. De fait, il n’existe pas. Au contraire dans la nouvelle « L’Ombre » d’Hans Christian Andersen, l’ombre se sépare de son hôte et mène une existence autonome, prenant bientôt le pas sur l’hôte. Il semble que si le statut d’être de Peter Schlemihl a disparu avec son ombre, en revanche chez Andersen l’ombre se forge une identité sans corps. Maldoror se place à la croisée de ces deux nouvelles. Il est l’ombre certes, mais il n’est véritablement ni vivant ni mort. Il cherche dans les adolescents et les enfants qui croisent son chemin le corps qui lui servira d’hôte et qui l’acceperlac comme ombre, ou mieux, qui s’effacera pour lui laisser la place. Il se cherche un visage, une identité qui s’imprimerait, comme une photographie, sur le sien, combiant le manque. Cependant, Maldoror ne souffre pas l’autre et refuse les images qui lui sont offertes, aussi bien celles des adolescents que celles que lui renvoient les miroirs. Comme l’on accepte mal le voisinage d’un autre
soi-même qui gêne notre individualité, le double est souvent flou, une trace plus qu’un être en soi. Dans la littérature française du dix-neuvième siècle, le double prend généralement la forme d’un être fluide. C’est le cas dans les Chants de Maldoror, ou dans les textes de Guy de Maupassant et de Théophile Gautier qui s’écartent d’une œuvre comme Le Double de Fyodor Dostoyevski, dans laquelle le double est doté d’une forme humaine et mène une vie parallèle à celle du personnage principal, doté du même nom pour rendre la lecture difficile et confuse comme dans les Chants, et déstabiliser le lecteur dans son conformisme. Attendu que le double n’est pas accepté en tant qu’entité séparée totalement du sujet, les doubles et les ombres en littérature sont souvent brouillés, vagues, murmurant, flottants, comme c’est le cas avec Maldoror, en perpétuelle quête de soi, figure floue à la recherche d’une identité inaccessible.

Si les motifs du miroir et du double hantent le texte des Chants, l’objet miroir fait cruellement défaut. Lors des rares occasions où il est mentionné, il témoigne de la laideur et Maldoror, qui se voit hideux et scalpé, le fracasse d’une pierre. L’absence de beauté des Chants est liée aux cheveux. Ainsi, l’homme de la potence est pendu par les cheveux (Ducasse 258) et le Créateur laisse derrière lui un cheveu comme témoin de sa dépravation au « lupanar » (Ducasse 237). Si le cheveu selon Baudelaire indique le bonheur, la sensualité, l’amour et la volupté, pour Ducasse en revanche l’image positive du cheveu est renversée et transformée en abjection. En effet, Maldoror se plaît à empoigner les adolescents par les cheveux et à les faire tourner sur eux-mêmes, les amenant vers une image plus proche de celle d’un Maldoror cadavérique, en extase devant ces restes capillaires :

[...] Je le saisis par les cheveux avec un bras de fer, et je le fis tournoyer dans l’air avec une telle vitesse, que la chevelure me resta dans la main, et que son corps, lancé par la force centrifuge, alla cogner contre le tronc d’un chêne. [...] Quand, dans un excès d’aliénation mentale, je cours à travers les champs, en tenant, pressée sur mon cœur, une chose sanglante que je conserve depuis longtemps, comme une relique vénérée [...], les petits enfants et les vieilles femmes qui me poursuivent à coups de pierre, poussent ces gémissements lamentables. (Ducasse 283)

En perpétuelle quête d’images, Maldoror force l’adolescent à le regarder et à lui ressembler. La narration se déplace en mouvement circulaire. Maldoror recherche fiévreusement un reflet qui, une fois découvert, ne
lui convient pas. Il brise alors le miroir, tue l’image et son porteur, pour reprendre sa course éternelle entre recherche et déception; son identité demeurant inlassablement floue. Alors que « l’homme épouvantable » de Baudelaire choisit d’observer son image, Maldoror préfère écarter toute trace de sa monstruosité. S’il ne peut la voir, peut-être n’existe-t-elle plus. L’homme épouvantable admet son droit à l’image alors que Maldoror la refuse. Au nom du bon sens, il a sans doute raison. S’il élimine la fillette, c’est aussi bien pour assouvir ses plaisirs personnels que pour effacer tout reflet éventuel, c’est-à-dire une image de lui que la petite fille lui renverrait. Il brise l’enfant comme il brise le miroir. Il est en quête de la beauté que les adolescents angéliques lui montrent, mais, soit par envie refoulée, par peur, jalousie ou dégoût, il la rejette.

L’aspect fantasmatique de Maldoror parcourant les plaines au grand galop, le corps enveloppé d’un large manteau noir pour cacher sa face de cadavre, des jeunes gens dont le lecteur n’aperçoit généralement que la silhouette se détachant sur un fond de texte sombre, des personnages qui sont plus qu’ils ne font, même s’ils semblent si peu « être », des intempéries créant une atmosphère lugubre, tout ceci participe à la création d’impressions et de taches laissées sur la page et sur un lecteur qui ressent le texte plus qu’il ne lit des actions bien souvent absentes. Rien dans le texte ne pose de contour distinct. Tout se tient à distance. Objets et actions, quand action il y a, sont placés hors de la portée visuelle, généralement dans la pénombre ou dans l’ombre, créant une vision trouble qui s’apparente à la myopie et qui perdurera jusqu’au sixième et dernier chant, alors que le lecteur, frustré et quémandant des explications, ne peut que refaire le chemin inverse, vers le début du texte, pour tenter d’y découvrir ce qui lui a subrepticemment échappé à la première lecture, encouragé par un « allez-y voir vous-mêmes si vous ne voulez pas me croire » (Ducasse 358) éloquent. Le lecteur est interpellé, regardé, forcé de participer et de renvoyer son regard au sujet peint qui ne le quitte pas des yeux ; c’est le cas bien entendu du narrataire omniprésent des Chants, sans cesse apostrophé, qui ne peut décidément pas lire en paix.

8 La ressemblance entre les adolescents des Chants et Georges Dazet, l’ami d’école d’Isidore Ducasse, plus jeune que lui, avec lequel il aurait entretenu une éventuelle relation amoureuse, a souvent été mentionnée. Sur ce sujet, voir le chapitre « La maison de Jean Dazet » suivi de « Le poulpe au regard de soie ». Lefrère, Jean-Jacques. Isidore Ducasse. Auteur des Chants de Maldoror par le comte de Lautréamont.
Que celui qui se repaît de lectures faciles s’abstienne de s’aventurer dans les Chants, ces pages « pleines de poison » (Ducasse 123) n’étant pas pour lui. Plagiat de textes passés, symbolistes avant l’heure, adulés par les surréalistes, les Chants sont un texte limite, flou, passé, présent et futur, d’un genre indistinct, au style changeant. Tout est flou dans les Chants : les identités sont vagues, Maldoror et les personnages sont indiscernables, l’on ne sait qui prend en charge la narration :

Si la mort arrête la maigreur fantastique des deux bras longs de mes épaules, employés à l’écrasement lugubre de mon gypse littéraire, je veux au moins que le lecteur en deuil puisse se dire : « Il faut lui rendre justice. Il m’a beaucoup crétinisé. Que n’aurait-il pas fait, s’il eût pu vivre davantage ! c’est le meilleur professeur d’hypnotisme que je connaisse ! » On grava ces quelques mots touchants sur le marbre de ma tombe, et mes mânes seront satisfaits ! (Ducasse 353)

Tout est jeu linguistique dans les Chants. La critique n’en est qu’à ses débuts. Elle a devant elle un avenir de critique certes, mais surtout un avenir de lecture et de re-lecture à l’infini, une phrase poussant l’autre, pour tenter avec rage de sortir du désordre qu’apporte l’écriture du flou et du brouillard narratif qui, espérons-le, sera toujours effleuré, étudié, digne d’intérêt, mais jamais dissipé.

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9 Les Chants sont réellement un texte-jonction, constitués de plagias des œuvres lues et admirées (ou haïes) par Ducasse et qu’il énumère dans ses Poésies. Les Chants sont également un texte précurseur de mouvements à venir tel le surréalisme, en avance sur son temps mais héritier de ses pairs. Regroupant tous les genres et créant du nouveau, les Chants ne peuvent vraiment être définis que comme « flous. »
TRANSLATING TANGO: SALLY POTTER’S LESSONS

CAROLYN PINET

In the mid nineties Sally Potter, director, writer and dancer, decided to make a film about Argentine tango in which she would play the leading role opposite a well-known tango artist, Pablo Verón. She made two important decisions about the screenplay: the first was that it would be in three languages, Spanish, French and English, the second that the two main characters would be Jewish and exiles who would make a pact and fall in love. The resulting film proved to be an exploration of translation in terms of cultural identity and border-crossings. Sally Potter’s film about the dynamics and process of tango also became a meditation on Argentina and on the politics of exile.

A little over a decade earlier, by 1982, Argentina was emerging painfully from the trauma of a dirty war during which up to twenty thousand persons were killed, tortured or disappeared by a succession of oppressive military rulers. Many of the victims were Jewish. Two famous examples of individuals who were imprisoned and tortured are those of Jacobo Timerman and Alicia Partnoy whose testimonies, written in exile, appeared in the eighties. Argentina, paradoxically, is the Latin American country with the largest Jewish population and also has a long history of recurrent anti-semitism.1 Timerman saw in the dirty war a resurgence of the paranoia and viciousness of the Holo-

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1 Argentina has the largest Jewish population of Latin American of at least 250,000 individuals. History shows us that for a long time Jews remained outsiders in Argentina's Catholic culture and were seen as resistant to assimilation. However, eventually many did prosper and win acceptance during periods of political stability and expansion. But they became scapegoats and second class citizens each time skies darkened and hard times returned to Argentina. During the dirty war Catholic Nationalism, which had originated as a movement in the 20s, reasserted its influence.
caust.2 By 1994 there had been terrorist attacks on the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires and on the Jewish Community Center.

THE TANGO SYNDROME

Tango, from its roots among the African and European immigrants in the port of Buenos Aires, has always been a story of exile and crossing borders. Marta Savigliano in her book, *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion*, discusses the “tango syndrome,” the experience of longing and nostalgia connected to tango for any Argentines living abroad (Savigliano xiii-xiv). Fernando Solanas, the Argentine film director, who fled to Paris during the dirty war confirmed her view when he wrote that in exile “music was the most emotional language” of his nationalism and tango the “soul of his nostalgia.” Speaking of his own films made in that period, he commented, “I have never consumed so many tangos in my life as in those years of exile” (Winn 431).

Solanas set a precedent for Sally Potter with two tango films about Argentines and exile in 1985 and 1988, *Tangos: el exilio de Gardel* and *Sur*. His films helped to launch a renaissance in tango both in Argentina and abroad after the dirty war: tango was danced and rediscovered in London, Paris, and New York; and Argentine tango espectáculos (shows) went on tour abroad from Buenos Aires. Tango became a testament to the resilience and survival of a culture.

Sally Potter tells the story of her seduction by tango in her preface to *The Tango Lesson*. She was working on another screenplay about the fashion industry when she was lured away by tango. As a director behind the camera she became fascinated by the gaze afforded to her by the spectacle of tango. As a dancer/tanguera she would be the object of that gaze. As a writer/director she could control and explore a whole series of relationships between self and other: she could search the tango

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2 Jacobo Timerman, editor of the newspaper *La Opinión*, was attacked in the magazine, *Cabildo*, and organ for right wing Catholic Nationalism, as “a despicable Ukrainian” who “vomited his hate, his ambition and his irreverence on the very roots of the nation that so casually sheltered him.” Articles appeared calling for a national revolution to remove the “Jewish danger.” According to *Cabildo*, the Holocaust is the “Great Fraud of the Century” and Anne Frank’s diary “a jungle of falsehoods.” Zionism, of which Timerman was accused, was seen as pernicious and a danger to Argentina’s security as a nation.
story for shape and meaning in terms of gender, race, colonialism and imperialism, even reach to a place beyond these where tension and conflict might be reconciled. Tango, it seemed, told an old story and, at the same time, proposed a new one. She decided to shoot the film in a series of lessons about “love, and work and creation” (Potter x). For her tango, is “a testament to survival and graceful hope in the face of the ravages of ageing, political repression and the apparent meaningless of daily life” (84). In this respect tango would be her teacher and her method one of enquiry.

TANGO AND BORDERS

Sally Potter’s film moves between London, Paris, Buenos Aires, and Hollywood just as tango has always done. When Sally Potter discovered tango it had already crossed borders many times and had a complex identity.3 She says in her Introduction to The Tango Lesson that she “wanted to show the ‘real’ tango without pretending to come from the culture that produced it” (x). Further commenting on her choice of using three languages, she adds “the film had to become emblematic of the nature of cultural exchange” (xii). This meant that she would not privilege one language over another or use primarily English, the universal language of cultural dominance. Neither would she give into the crass demands of Hollywood for a purely commercial product. This she makes clear in Lesson Six when she figures herself as a movie director in Hollywood meeting with unsympathetic and uncomprehending potential backers for her tango film. Tango had already been to Hollywood (Paramount) in the twenties with Gardel and other tangueros.4 The impact of Hollywood on tango and on Argentina is an important theme of Manuel Puig’s Boquitas pintadas (Heartbreak Tango), a novel that Sally Potter read during the filming of The Tango Lesson.5 Clearly she was aware of the problematic nature of border-crossings for herself and

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3 Tango’s identity in relationship to culture, race, class and gender is discussed at length by Marta Savigliano in her book, Tango and the Political Economy of Passion.
4 Tango’s Golden Age, the age of the Gardel, is documented in Tango! by Simon Collier et al.
5 I discuss cultural bordercrossings for tango and Argentina in my article, “Tangoing the Text: Manuel Puig’s Boquitas pintadas.”
for Argentine tango. Cultural exchange often involved domination or “colonization” by one country over another, so that the challenge for Sally Potter would be to develop a counter-narrative to this tendency. If tango was to illustrate the art of survival, what might that mean for the country of its roots, Argentina? To answer this question she needed to portray tango from “the inside looking out rather than from the outside looking in” (xii). Dabbling in the dance would not be enough; she had to immerse herself in it. Only by doing this could she distinguish between the “kitsch eroticism of the Europeanized public image of the tango” and the “wordless expression of life force” (85) she experienced in Buenos Aires. Her quest became cultural, political, artistic and personal.

**Tango and Gender**

In the personal sense Sally Potter crossed borders and became more herself because for her “tango expresses a kind of desperate extremity that has no voice in English culture” (83). By following tango’s trajectories between countries and across the decades she arrives at its heart. She describes this process in detail in her Postscripts to the screenplay. She discusses gender definitions in her section “On Following.” What does it mean to lead? What does it mean to follow? These questions, political as well as personal, are played out in her tango story. She uses tango as a way to think about power, even about terror. In her film her character, Sally, makes a pact with Pablo Verón. He will teach her to tango and she will put him in a film and make him a star. But who will lead and who will follow in this arrangement? Who will exploit whom? When the two put on a tango performance in Paris, what results is Borges’s famous “war of legs.” Pablo says that Sally cannot relinquish control and follow him. She is furious and hurt because he danced as if she wasn’t there. Julie Taylor writes cogently of tango in her book about its poetics, *Paper Tangos*, and her words give us insight into what Sally Potter is conveying to us on the screen:

The dancers share their loneliness, their loss of contact from each other’s world while they share separation from the onlookers whose gazes provide the criteria for inclusion in or exclusion from still other worlds. The rejections are related: the first feeds off the second. An Argentine couple can enact, within an embrace, the exclusions that the world for which they perform inflicted on them. (Taylor 70)
This exclusion is experienced as a form of violence by the Sally Potter character. This is because, as Taylor says, violences are exclusions, and terror, absolute exclusion. Sally Potter acknowledges the violence present in her film. Her alter ego asks in her Postscript, “Why do you want to kill him at this point? And he you?” (97). Her characters are dealing with the forces of crimes of passion. However, Sally recognizes that she had a lesson to learn: “as someone who leads for much of her working life (as a director), the opportunity to learn what it means to follow was a blessing” (84). Ideally, when two people dance the tango together “each enhances the other’s sense of self and feeling of freedom” (85). In other words, tango is a paradox: it involves tension, conflict, exclusion but also mutuality and harmony. In this sense it is a process and never predetermined.

Jews and Exile

Argentina’s experience of the dirty war had been marked by absence, rupture and violence and the shadow of that past loomed over the terrorist bombings of the nineties. Sally Potter’s pivotal scenes in her film come in Lessons Five and Ten. In Lesson Five, Sally and Pablo meet in Paris as Jewish exiles; they are equally lost and adrift in an alien culture. This is the one thing that unites them besides tango. It is also this fact that reunites them after their bitter quarrel following their tango performance.

During the Fifth Lesson Sally Potter and Pablo Verón share thoughts about their Jewishness. Then the director cuts to each of them separately immersed in a book. While Pablo reads Brando, Sally reads Martin Buber’s I and Thou in which he wrote “. . .modern developments have expunged almost every trace of a life in which human beings confront each other and have meaningful relationships” (Buber 97). His work draws on Judeo-Christian thought and eastern philosophies and is centered on Hasidic teaching and Jewish doctrine. It became popular after the Second World War and the Holocaust for its humanity and its injunction to let go of greed, selfishness, power-grubbing, racism, even murder, in order to enter into a relationship with one’s whole being. This is a lesson Sally and Pablo must take to heart in order to come together again in the church of St. Sulpice in the center of Paris. In this scene
Sally Potter, the director, images a Jewish story, that of Jacob and the angel, inspired by the great painting of Delacroix which hangs in the church. In this painting Jacob and the angel are wrestling and locked in what resembles a tango hold. Sally tells the story to Pablo:

Jacob was alone in a valley, and there he met a stranger. They started to fight. They fought and wrestled through a long, long night. But as dawn broke Jacob realized that he could never defeat the stranger. . . . . . .

. . .Because the stranger was an angel. Or God. Or perhaps all along, Pablo, Jacob had simply been wrestling with himself. (55)

Sally Potter brilliantly evokes the conundrum of “I and other” in this scene. When Pablo appears, he takes up the position of the angel. Sally Potter presses her head against him, like Jacob, and they assume a tango hold, mirroring the painting. To this point in the film Pablo has been the angel and Sally, in following him in tango, Jacob. Now he must consent to follow her if he is to star in her film; their roles will be reversed.

In the Bible story Jacob has betrayed his brother Esau to get his birthright from his father, but is now returning to his homeland and his brother. Eventually the angel blesses Jacob and tells him that henceforth his name shall be called Israel. Jacob continues his journey, having “seen the face of God.” This is a story about recovery from the dark night of the soul and also about those who are lost and in search of home. If Jacob’s name is Israel, where is “home”?

THE JOURNEY “HOME”

Sally and Pablo travel together to Buenos Aires in search of “home.” There they dance in the street to Milonga de mis amores in a downpour of tropical rain and the tension between them is washed away. They meet with two more tangueros, Gustavo and Fabian, and Sally begins to meditate on what it is to lead as a film director and what her gaze means to them. She and Pablo quarrel again about who is following and who is leading in the making of the film. The movement of the film-making goes forwards and backwards, like a tango, and reflects the tension and conflicts inherent in the figures. Sally, Pablo, Gustavo, and Fabian cannot find a place to dance; but at last, in an abandoned department store,
they find a space where all four come together: their “energy, frustra-
tion, competitiveness and exuberance” find form in Piazzolla’s “Liber-
tango,” a dance not of exclusion, but of inclusion with Sally at its center. 
This is the moment of greatest release and freedom in the film, the 
moment in tango that Sally Potter would later describe in her notes as 
one of “alert receptivity” when the dancer is in complete control of her 
body, yet surrenders control of where she is going . . . completely in the 
present (85). As Buber comments, “It’s only from the presence of the 
spirit that significance and joy can flow into all work” (99). This recip-
rocity and joy are, for Sally Potter, the key to tango and by extension to 
all relationships, personal, political, cultural. In this way in her film the 
lost, alien woman director translates tango for the exile, Pablo, and his 
two compatriots, Fabian and Gustavo, and she, in turn, is translated. In 
the Twelfth Lesson, Sally and Pablo gaze at each other’s reflections in a 
mirror as Sally watches over a rehearsal of Fabian and Gustavo. Sally 
Potter, the director, images herself as inside and outside the gaze at the 
same time and we, as spectators, are made more keenly aware of the 
potential problems created by a lack of cultural sensitivity and by cultur-
al exploitation. Perhaps there is no single solution to these problems. 
Sally Potter is inside tango but she is not Argentine.

Julie Taylor quotes a protest sign from 1994 when a massive bomb 
demolished the Jewish Community Center in Buenos Aires two years 
after another bomb left a crater in the Israeli embassy.

Tenemos otros 70 desaparecidos. Todos somos judíos, pero también todos somos Videla. 
Decidámonos. (We have another seventy disappeared. All of us are Jews, but all of us are 
also the Junta. Decide.) (Taylor 81)

Behind the act of terrorism lurks the shadow of antisemitism of the dirty 
war and Argentina’s schizophrenic Jewish and Nazi history. In real life 
Sally Potter is not a Jew, but in her film she figures herself as a Jew. In 
the final lesson Sally and Pablo enter the synagogue of Buenos Aires. 
This is in answer to Pablo’s question, “I want to know why we met” (77). 
Inside the synagogue all is intact: a cantor is singing in his high, wail-
ing, joyous voice. But Pablo remains unconvinced:

Tell me Sally. What does it mean to feel like a Jew? Because, you know, I don’t really feel 
at home in a synagogue. And of course, even less in a church. And . . . I don’t really
belong in France, but I don’t belong here any more either. I am afraid . . . . . . of being someone without roots. I don’t know where I’ve come from or where I’m going. I’m afraid I’ll disappear* without leaving a trace. (78)

* my italics

As Sally Potter adds ruefully in her Postscript, “he has forgotten who he really is” (97). In crossing and re-crossing borders as an exile, he has undergone a fragmentation of his original cultural identity which may well be impossible to reconstruct.

The term “disappear” is loaded in Spanish, especially for Argentines. Julie Taylor quotes the grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo:

We know what it is to search desperately for a son, a husband, a brother who one day left for work and “disappeared”: under the mortal blow of those irrational beings who do not know how to co-exist in peace, who cannot admit disagreement, who cannot stand difference, ideological, cultural, or historical . . . (82)

Through tango Sally Potter, echoing Julie Taylor, confronts doubts involving difference, in negotiating domination, in managing the physical dimension, in dealing with loneliness within an embrace. In the last scene of the film she embraces Pablo because this is the only way she can be sure that neither of them will disappear: tango is the only place which may afford them, if briefly, through “alert receptivity” to each other, the consolation of work, art and love. Sally Potter does not pretend to offer solutions for Argentina’s crisis of identity, but she does propose the possibility of union and pluralism as a counterpoint to the harsher realities of rupture, violence, and loss. While acknowledging the difficulties inherent in any encounter, her tango lessons proscribe open attentiveness and care for the other and suggest the possibility of equilibrium (eje7) and a space where coercion, prejudice and abuse may be

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6 In a recent article in Le Monde (11/06/04), “L’Argentine s’engage à rechercher les enfants d’opposants à la dictature,” it was announced that the President of Argentina, Nestor Kirchner, has created a special commission to locate the children who were “disappeared” (that is, illegally adopted) during the military dictatorship of 1976-83. In other words, in Argentina, the search for the disappeared goes on.

7 Julie Taylor, speaking of the term eje (axis or equilibrium), comments, “The eje . . . is the key to tango. Each partner must maintain his or her independent axis or alignment while dancing. Most important, this allows for the very different steps performed by the two compañeros” (Taylor 85).
relinquished in favor of respectful listening, tolerance and community. In translating tango and crossing borders, Sally Potter shows us, the spectators, that in one sense, as members of the global community, we are all exiles searching for mutuality and “home.”

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WORKS CITED


El objetivo de este trabajo es volver a examinar el lugar que ha ocupado el cuerpo de la mujer en la imaginación occidental y en sus producciones simbólicas. Es innegable que la producción cultural en el mundo occidental ha sido, históricamente, una actividad predominantemente dominada por el hombre, para el hombre y que el cuerpo de la mujer ha sido, durante siglos, terreno colonizado por las prácticas representacionales y las teorizaciones de éste. Particularmente problemático ha sido el significado que se le ha adscrito al desnudo femenino y más específicamente a la representación visual del sexo femenino. Los estudios de Sander L. Gillman apuntan a los significados particulares atribuidos a la genitalia femenina en los discursos médicos, artísticos y culturales del siglo XIX. Estos textos dejan al descubierto los procesos mediante los cuales se construye la sexualidad femenina como monstruosidad, enfermedad y fuente de corrupción. A esta caracterización patológica de la genitalia femenina se le opone su antítesis: el cuerpo y la anatomía sana del hombre. En el campo de los estudios sicoanalíticos – y como ya ha señalado acertadamente Luce Irigaray – las teorías freudiana y lacaniana han permitido la teorización de la mujer en términos de su supuesta castración anatómica y de su exclusión del orden simbólico por medio de la construcción del falo como significante transcendental.

En este trabajo, la discusión de las prácticas representacionales del cuerpo femenino en las artes visuales y la problematización de la relación entre el deseo y la mirada masculina circularán en torno a la colección de poemas Las musas inquietantes de la escritora uruguaya Cristina Peri Rossi. Las musas inquietantes (1999) está compuesta por cuarenta...
y seis poemas que establecen diálogos diversos con cuarenta y seis imágenes canónicas de la tradición pictórica occidental que Peri Rossi incluye al final del propio poemario. El cuadro seleccionado para nuestra discusión es, sin lugar a dudas, el más controvertido: un desnudo de 1866 del pintor Gustave Courbet que representa de manera explícita el sexo femenino. La naturaleza erótica de esta representación, que deja completamente al descubierto la anatomía sexual femenina, la hace idónea para una problematización de la mirada masculina; sobre todo en el contexto del epígrafe de Jacques Lacan que abre la colección: “la mirada es la erección del ojo.”

Este enigmático cuadro de Gustave Courbet (1819-1877) fue encargado por Khalil Bey – diplomático turco y coleccionador de arte. Poco se sabe sobre el desnudo que ha escandalizado por lo que revela de forma explícita: la genitalia femenina ubicada protagónicamente en el centro de la imagen. Patrick Bade ha señalado que una representación tan explícita de la anatomía femenina no sería considerada típica para las artes visuales de ese momento:

Such frankness is all the more remarkable in a work of art created during unprecedented prudery and sexual hypocrisy. . .the Widow of Windsor still ruled over an English Speaking Empire in which Shakespeare was censored and piano legs were decorously draped to avoid provoking lewd thought in gentlemen. (3-4)

Este desnudo con pubis representa un desplazamiento transgresivo del desnudo tradicional o “Venus Púdica” que se cubre modestamente con las manos y que tiene su modelo canónico en la Afrodita de Praxíteles. Aquí, Courbet le obliga prácticamente al espectador a fijar la mirada en el pubis de la mujer desnuda:

What Courbet does not allow the viewer to overlook is the vigorous bush of pubic hair. At a time when women’ s legs were kept mysteriously hidden beneath vast quantities of material swathed over the imprisoning cage-like structure of crinoline, the existence of female pubic hair was a dark and shameful secret, unknown perhaps even to married men. (Bade, 18-19)

Lorraine Day señala que es precisamente lo que se haya ausente del cuadro lo que configura su carácter escandaloso. El desnudo representa

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1 Para un estudio excelente del tratamiento asimétrico del desnudo masculino en oposición al femenino ver el artículo de Nanette Salomon.
el torso de una mujer sin cabeza y por lo tanto sin cara que la individualice, sin cerebro, ojos o boca que le permitan afirmar su subjetividad e independencia, sin brazos o manos para cubrirse o protegerse y sin piernas que le permitan retirarse del espectáculo configurado por su propio cuerpo truncado.  

El carácter enigmático del cuadro se debe fundamentalmente al hecho de que ha sido visto por pocos – no fue exhibido públicamente hasta 1995 en el Museo de Orsay en París – y porque su ubicación hoy día permanece un misterio aunque hay quienes especulan que se halla en manos de Sylvie Bataille ex-esposa de Georges Bataille y de Jacques Lacan. Lo que sí se puede constatar es la existencia de una narración de voyeurismo que se ha erigido en torno al cuadro y que vincula el placer erótico y el deseo privado con la mirada masculina. Su dueño original Khalil Bey mantuvo el cuadro escondido bajo un velo verde y posteriormente hizo construir un panel con la representación de un castillo en la nieve que serviría para tapar el cuadro. En los años posteriores a la Segunda Guerra Mundial, pasó a ser propiedad del sicoanalista Jacques Lacan quien mandó construir una suerte de diptico o doble pintura; un artefacto de madera cuya función era esconder el erótico desnudo de Courbet al sobreponer sobre éste un segundo cuadro que representaba en forma abstracta los elementos del primero. Un sistema secreto permitía al “voyeur” desplazar la tapa protectora de madera para revelar el cuadro de Courbet colocado debajo.  

Debe señalarse que, por su parte, la disciplina de la historia del arte también ha participado y ha sido cómplice en la catalogación del cuadro como obra de naturaleza puramente pornográfica, subordinada exclusivamente al deseo masculino. En uno de los más importantes volúmenes contemporáneos dedicados al estudio de la producción artística de Courbet – Courbet Reconsidered – se categoriza el cuadro de la siguiente manera:

The painting, a small but richly detailed one, representing a women’s torso, her thighs, and a single breast in extreme foreshortening, certainly falls under the rubric of pornography, as that term is generally understood, and was intended as such: a little masterpiece of...  

2 “It is worth thinking about what is not present in Courbet’s painting. L’Origine du monde represents a truncated female torso, without a head (and therefore without a face to individualize her, and without the brain, eyes or mouth which would allow he to assert her subjectivity and independence), without arms and legs (with which to protect or pleasure herself), and without legs (with which to remove herself from the scene)” (218).
Overt sexuality meant for the private delectation of a sophisticated connoisseur…the ultimate object of male desire. (Faunce and Nochlin 176)

El sector de las historiadoras feministas de arte tampoco se ha desviado fundamentalmente de esa comprensión monolítica del cuadro. Linda Nochlin, por ejemplo, condena, a priori, toda representación femenina creada bajo un régimen visual patriarcal. Su práctica de “leer como mujer/reading as a woman” la mantiene atrapada dentro de una rigidez teórica oposicional que no permite recuperación o liberación de una visión exclusivamente colonizadora para la mujer:3

Woman’s bodies have always served as allegorized objects of desire, of hatred, of elevation, of abasement – of everything in short. That is the point; woman’s body has never ‘counted’ in itself, only with what the male artist could fill it with, and that, it seems, has always been himself and his desires. . . The naked woman can inscribe only passive available flesh. In the form of muse or model, mistress or mother, asleep or awake, the nude female can inspire, perhaps reproduce, but cannot produce or create – that is the crucial distinction. . . Reading as a woman, I might well come out with a different answer to these questions if I were reading as a man. (Faunce and Nochlin 32-36)

La posición de Nochlin encuentra su apoyo teórico en un corpus de aproximaciones feministas al estudio de la codificación genérico-sexual inscrita en imágenes visuales occidentales. Estos discursos surgen innegablemente a partir del ya bien conocido libro de John Berger Ways of Seeing y del importante artículo de Laura Mulvey “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.” En ambos casos la discusión está informada por el cine y el psicoanálisis y se centra en las prácticas visuales como procesos gobernados necesariamente por la diferenciación genérico-sexual y regidos en gran medida por una economía libidinal marcadamente masculina. De acuerdo a esta lógica, la distribución de roles pasivos y activos estaría siempre subordinada al marcador de género sexual, de manera que el hombre sería definido inquestionablemente como el portador de la mirada, mientras que la mujer sería reducida y objetivada en cuanto simple imagen.

Según este proyecto ideológico, y como acertadamente ha señalado Michael Fried, la representación de la mujer se encontraría inevitablemente regida y limitada por una lógica maniqueísta:

3 Ver la crítica acertada que le hace Michael Fried en el Postscript que termina su artículo sobre Courbet.
Between man as the bearet and women as the object of the look or gaze; between having the image (at a commanding distance from it, so to speak) and being the image; between activity, including the activity of looking, and passivity as exemplified in merely being seen, and perhaps most important, between man as possessing and women as lacking (or in Lacanian theory being) the phallus. (52-53)

Es importante señalar que a pesar de que el cuadro de Courbet haya sido apropiado más recientemente por el sector de nuevas artistas lesbianas críticas del canon patriarcal, no se ha dado un cambio de esta visión reductora para la mujer. En 1992, Zoe Leonard incluye en su exhibición de fotografías denominada “pussy intervention” pequeñas reproducciones del cuadro de Courbet que inserta entre retratos alemanes del siglo XVIII de damas bien vestidas. Su objetivo es indicar cómo las prácticas artísticas en el mundo occidental han dependido siempre de la representación de la sexualidad femenina: ya sea ésta idealizada, disfrazada o explícita. Así explica Zoe Leonard los objetivos de su exposición:

I requested a suite of four rooms in an old museum at Documenta because I wanted people to walk through what a museum was, and then see my work in relation to what already exists. I’m installing photography amidst all these paintings that are ostensibly mythological or historical. But what they really are is naked women. Putting the pussy shots in that setting is cutting to the chase. They’re totally erotic images for me. (Hirsch 41)

Zoe Leonard activa aquí una estrategia de denuncia que se nutre de la apropiación y recontextualización de imágenes masculinistas. Si bien no se puede negar que Leonard active una mirada crítica a la política sexual que se inscribe en las artes visuales y que determina la construcción de género, por otro lado, esta mirada crítica se limita a documentar y, hasta cierto punto, a reproducir con cierta complicidad la mirada colonizadora.

En última instancia, tanto la historia y la crítica de arte tradicional como la no tradicional – representada por historiadores de arte como Linda Nochlin y artistas como Zoe Leonard – son cómplices en la medida en que no conciben de nuevos espacios de agencia para las prácticas visuales y se limitan a reproducir la mirada colonizadora o a evitarla y desconsiderar los cuerpos colonizados por esta mirada como categorías válidas de análisis.

Sin embargo, desde la perspectiva interpretativa ideológica y estética de Cristina Peri Rossi la imagen de la mujer representada en el
canon masculino es recuperable y no se reduce a una inscripción de pasividad. Al contrario, la lectura que sus poemas hacen de estas imágenes excede los límites de dichas posiciones – y los proyectos ideológicos con los cuales se confunden y que se constituyen a la vez como su efecto y su soporte. Sus musas no son simples modelos de pasividad – como sostendría Nochlin – sino que se constituyen en tanto figuras de agencia; musas que turban e inquietan: por lo tanto inquietantes. En su praxis de lectura no se da un proceso de reducción sino al contrario una apertura en la medida en que convergen los plurales significados del complejo signo mujer; signo que no es llevado a un nivel de abstracción totalizante sino que, al contrario, es constantemente replanteado, cuadro por cuadro, poema por poema, en contextos socio-históricos diferentes.

Como ya ha indicado Lisa Bloom, es irrefutable que desde la conocida proclamación bartriana de “la muerte del autor” el lugar, antes privilegiado, del autor o del artista ha sido desplazado de manera que ahora se privilegia al lector o al espectador (6). En Las musas inquietantes, Cristina Peri Rossi es la espectadora de una tradición visual patriarcal que moviliza su mirada crítica desde su propio punto de vista, como mujer y como lesbiana. Su usurpación del rol del observador, tradicionalmente reservado para la mirada masculinista, le permite apropiarse de estas imágenes y recontextualizarlas desde su propia posición; respondiendo con este acto al imperativo de recuperar el cuerpo femenino como sujeto y divorciándolo, así, de las conceptualizaciones tradicionales de la disciplina y de nociones unitarias y esencialistas de la feminidad.

Peri Rossi pone en práctica lo que bell hooks ha llamado “la mirada oposicional” un proceso que concibe del mirar como gesto de poder y como acto de confrontación: “Even in the worst circumstances of domination the ability to manipulate one’s gaze in the face of structures of domination that would contain it, opens up the possibility of agency” (116).

Peri Rossi provee una nueva lectura liberadora del desnudo de Courbet. Detiene su “mirada oposicional” en primer lugar sobre el título de esta imagen polémica, hasta ahora prácticamente ignorado por la crítica – L’Origine du monde – e insiste en la importancia de pensar o repensar la imagen en términos de la fuerza creadora y procreadora de la mujer, al usarlo como encabezamiento para su propio poema:
El ORIGEN DEL MUNDO (El origen del mundo, Gustave Courbet)
Un sexo de mujer descubierto/(solitario ojo de Dios que todo lo contempla sin inmutarse)/perfecto en su redondez/completo en su esfericidad/impenetrable en la mismidad de su orificio/imposible en la espesura de su pubis/intocable en la turgencia móbida de sus senos/incomparable en su facultad de procrear/sometido desde siempre/(por imposible, por inaccessible)/a todas las metáforas/a todos los deseos/a todos los tormentos/genera partenogenéticamente4 al mundo/que sólo necesita su temblor.

El marco psicoanalítico que informa estas recientes aproximaciones a las artes visuales ha circunscrito a la mujer a un espacio de ausencia – en palabras de Freud al oscuro continente de la sexualidad femenina – y la ha relegado al locus de la objetivización scopofílica y voyeurística. Como ya ha señalado Martin Jay en Downcast Eyes, muchas de las teorías del deseo de Freud tienen una base “oculocéntrica.” Dice Jay al respeto

Sexuality, mastery, and vision were thus intricately intertwined in ways that could produce problematic as well as “healthy” effects. Infantile scopophilia (Schaulust) could result in adult voyeurism or other perverse disorders such as exhibitionism and scopophobia (the fear of being seen). (332)

Es en el contexto de este marco psicoanalítico reduccionista que Peri Rossi erige un espacio de plenitud para la mujer que circula alrededor de una presencia: de la visibilidad del sexo. Un sexo descubierto conceptualizado no como signo de una castración o de una falta, sino reconceptualizado precisamente en tanto sexo completo en su esfericidad – sin principio o final – y autosuficiente en la “mismidad” de su circularidad.

Frente a la posición masculinista y colonizadora inscrita en afirmaciones que siguen la línea de pensamiento de Nochlin al proclamar que “el cuerpo femenino puede inspirar pero no puede crear,” se replantea el cuerpo de la mujer precisamente en torno a su fuerza creadora. Fuerza que no debe ser entendida únicamente en el plano corporal de la procreación y sus múltiples metáforas: – mundo / universo / explosión cósmica – sino que puede ser traducida a nivel de la actividad cultural; la mujer como portadora de la mirada, como espectadora y lectora y en última instancia como creadora textual.

4 La alusión a la naturaleza partenogenética del sistema reproductivo femenino, que no necesita al hombre para la fertilización, es una alusión a la autosuficiencia de algunas especies. También es una proyección hacia el futuro de las posibilidades de autosuficiencia reproductiva que las ciencias puede deparar para la mujer. En otro nivel, puede leerse como una evocación de la virgen; único ejemplo de partenogénesis humano.
Si la mirada crítica de Peri Rossi da cuenta de las prácticas representacionales colonizadoras y de las teorizaciones culturales masculinas que históricamente han sometido a la mujer o a su sexo – sometido desde siempre/(por imposible, por inaccessible)/a todas las metáforas/a todos los deseos/a todos los tormentos – la escritora va más allá de la simple denuncia. Su “práctica oposicional,” en última instancia, tiene por objetivo descolonizar y liberar el cuerpo de la mujer. Su sexo lejos de reducirse a ser objeto de la obsesiva mirada masculinista – obsesiva-mente atormentada puesto que es producto de un deseo que, por definición, es inalcanzable – se instala en tanto posible sujeto del régimen visual. Es “ojo de Dios que todo lo contempla sin inmutarse” y se constituye como sujeto de la auto-representación por medio de la praxis Peri Rossiana: su mirada, su lectura, su creación.

Por lo tanto, la propuesta de Peri Rossi no consiste en desestabilizar un régimen visual de dominación-vía-voyerismo, por medio del establecimiento de una dialéctica binaria alternativa. De lo que se trata es de recuperar el cuerpo de la mujer, liberarla sin temor o resistencia al placer y al espectáculo mediante el establecimiento del potencial y las posibilidades múltiples de la mujer, como participante, inventora y creadora del espectáculo visual.

En palabras de bell hook:

to break with the hegemonic modes of seeing, thinking and being that block our capacity to see ourselves oppositionally, to imagine, describe and invent ourselves in ways that are liberatory. (2)
WORKS CITED