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## SCRIPTA MEDITERRANEA

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# Scripta Mediterranea

Volume XXII, 2001

Special Issue: *Rafael Alberti (1902-99)*

Editors: Pedro Guerrero Ruiz & Anthony Percival

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## Rafael Alberti in the Centenary of His Birth

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*Scripta Mediterranea* could not remain on the sidelines of the celebrations that are taking place in numerous parts of the world to commemorate the birth of the great Spanish poet Rafael Alberti, a symbol of both classical and avantgarde values, a poet belonging to a clear-sighted and exuberant generation, recalling the groups of writers of the Spanish Golden Age in its overwhelming influence on later poetic groups and particularly in its respect for literary tradition and in the break with bombastic forms of writing.

But two poets of this Generation, the so-called Generation of 27, or of this Group, which would be the most appropriate term and of which nobody has yet made up the final roll call, succeeded in making their mark in other cultural and artistic milieux. This is the case of Federico García Lorca and Rafael Alberti, poets, dramatists, painters, essayists..., true creators in a difficult period for both, with the test of the Spanish Cainism of the "Incivil" War about to befall them, one destined to lose his life and the other to accompany the Spanish diaspora. They called each other cousins; and Juan Ramón Jiménez said they were the two great poets of the group, although, in his opinion, Rafael was the more universal.

This is not the place to consider Juan Ramón's valuation but we venture to offer a broad image of Alberti's work: it is not possible to treat lightly a body of poetry that has its centre of gravity in the depiction of Spain, in the poetic tradition that starts with popular poetry (the song and ballad books) and Gil Vicente and extends to the the ultraists and the surrealists, taking in Góngora, Garcilaso, and in a highly creative poetry that deals memorably with the social dimension of experience.

Rafael Alberti represents a century of poetry, a work of splendid ambition and exceptional creative force. His poetry is pictorial, ludic, nostalgic and disturbing; it takes up a position between the carnation and the sword, between memory and invention, centring on love, on chromatic values, and on the portrayal of the deepest states of the human soul. His highly complex poetic personality draws on a broad spectrum of poetic sounds, tones and styles, techniques and metrical forms.

The pages of this issue are testimony of Alberti's poetic vitality and his international appeal. From Cuba the poet's daughter Aitana has sent a searching autobiographical poem and an essay evoking Rafael Alberti



and María Teresa León in their cultural milieu. Cuban writer Angel Augier's brief memoir recounts his meetings with Alberti in Cuba and Spain. Brian Morris of the University of California at Los Angeles revisits and revises his earlier interpretations of *Sobre los Angeles*, a work he had first engaged with forty years before. Nigel Dennis, based at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland argues for the need to give greater weight to *Vida bilingüe de un refugiado español en Francia/Bilingual life of a Spanish Refugee in France* as a portrayal of Alberti's "sensations of displacement". María Guasch, a resident of Ibiza, examines *13 bandas y 48 estrellas* as a new chronicle of America. Norberto Gimelfarb, a Swiss-Argentinean scholar, takes a close look at Rafael Alberti and María Teresa León's translation of Paul Eluard's poetry. Two articles deal with Alberti's deep and abiding interest in painters and painting: Italian scholar Elide Pittarello focusses on Alberti's poetic meditation on Van Gogh and the editors, scholars from Spain and Canada, respectively, combine forces to study the hyperbolic nature of Alberti's ekphrastic approach to Picasso.

It remains to thank the several individuals who have helped us at various stages to bring this special issue to publication: José Martínez, Keith Ellis, Rosinda Raposo, Linda Koch, María Figueredo, Elizabeth Abraham Gómez and Úrsula Rueda Galán.

Pedro Guerrero Ruiz      Anthony Percival  
*University of Murcia*      *University of Toronto*



## Curriculum

*Es la recién nacida alegre de los ríos  
americanos, es la hija de los desastres...*

Rafael Alberti

No en Madrid ni en París  
ni en las amenazadas ondas del océano  
ni en donde Pablo Neruda  
ofreció los racimos tras la nieve  
ni en la Córdoba austral  
para los ojos del dolor pañuelo

Sí a la orilla del río sin orillas  
triste y quieto y dormido de pronto una llanura  
río más bien de cobre o de curtido bronce silencioso  
moreno y largo de cabellos  
dulce peso que siempre llevará consigo

Nacimiento en la paz  
Finalmente la paz y los trabajos que la paz impone  
y aprenderse este nombre cada día  
María Aitana Carmen Margarita  
Carmen y Margarita adónde fueron?  
María Aitana callada  
niña de mil secretos  
en el coloquio absorta huida por un aire de clarísimos bosques  
y en torno a su estatura el breve añil del viento  
Niña de mil secretos  
Aitana nada más

*Para ti, niña Aitana  
remontando los ríos,  
este ramo de agua.*

Y ellos  
los peregrinos  
le donaron su sitio entre las cosas  
un poquito de polvo  
inmenso como el beso nocturno

Qué raro que se llame *agua pequeña*  
montes allende el mar  
perfume del almendro  
La nostalgia de aquello cada día  
aquello que el dolor alzaba en vilo  
paraíso vedado para muchos  
la entera geografía abierta alrededor  
menos ese precioso lugar sobre la tierra

Quién lo diría hermanos  
la vida navegó en un instante los caminos  
y aquel siglo partió  
y ellos también partieron  
dejándola tan sola  
tan sola y triste y sola que no acierta a creerlo  
hoy sábado 17 de marzo del año 2001 antes del mediodía  
en la isla de Cuba que es su predio y su casa  
refugio de todo cuanto tiene y dejó de tener  
y volverá a tener si Dios lo quiere

Alguna vez le llegan raras visitaciones  
eso no significa que de su pluma se alce un rumor de palomas  
apenas son señales ínfimos ecos de los desconocido

Algo más preguntáis?  
Añadiré muy poco  
Dos hijas creció el tiempo y el amor incurable  
por quienes como frutos se vuelcan en los surcos

Sabed esto también  
La sesgada doblez de los tigres ocultos  
el zarpazo que lanzan desde su torpe nido  
no penetran el centro de la aurora  
ni mellan el cristal.

Alta en la muchedumbre  
escribe sobre el agua el nombre que le dieron  
Qué mayor dicha cabe en una gota sola?  
Nacer es resbalar del cosmos al olvido

Aitana Alberti  
*En Pleamar, frente a la Corriente del Golfo*



## Curriculum

*She is the happy newborn of the rivers  
of the Americas, the daughter of disasters...*

Rafael Alberti

Not in Madrid nor in Paris  
nor on the threatened ocean waves  
nor where Pablo Neruda  
offered clusters after the snow  
nor in the southern city of Cordoba  
for the eyes of the aching handkerchief

But at the shore of the shoreless river  
sad and still sleeping suddenly a prairie  
river of copper or beaten bronze silent  
with long dark hair  
sweet burden that she will always carry with her

Born in peace  
Finally peace and the work that peace imposes  
and learning this name every day  
María Aitana Carmen Margarita  
Carmen and Margarita where did they go?  
quiet María Aitana  
child of a thousand secrets  
in the absorbed dialogue lost through a wind of the bright forests  
and the brief indigo of the wind centered on her height  
Child of a thousand secrets  
María Aitana nothing more

*For you, child Aitana  
overcoming the rivers,  
this branch of water.*

And they  
the pilgrims  
gave her their place between things  
a little bit of dust  
as immense as the nighttime kiss

How strange that she is named *little water*  
mountains beyond the sea  
perfume of the almond tree

The nostalgia of that every day  
 the one on which the pain lifted  
 forbidden paradise for many  
 the entire geography open all around  
 except for that precious place on the ground

Who would have said  
 in an instant life navigated the paths  
 and that century separated  
 and they too separated  
 leaving her so alone  
 so alone and sad and lonely that she doesn't manage to believe it  
 today Saturday march 17 of the year 2001 before noon  
 on the island of Cuba that is her land and her house  
 refuge of everything she has and stopped having  
 and will have again God willing

Sometimes she receives strange visitations  
 that doesn't mean the murmur of doves rose from her pen  
 they're just negligible signs echoes of the unknown

Are you asking me something else?  
 I will add very little  
 Time and incurable love raised two daughters  
 for whom they throw themselves like fruit into the furrows

You should know this too  
 The quiet deceitfulness of the hidden tigers  
 the swipe they take from their cumbersome nest  
 do not penetrate the centre of the dawn  
 or damage the glass

High in the crowd  
 over the water she writes the name they gave her  
 What better saying fits in a single drop?  
 To be born is to slide from the cosmos into obscurity

Aitana Alberti  
*In Pleamar, by the Gulf Stream*

Translated by Elizabeth Abraham Gómez

## Aitana Alberti

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### Always in Green Ink (Notes for a book of memoirs)

Each morning you awaken with the dawn, you listen to the radio turned down very softly in order not to wake up your husband, you prepare a big pot of strong coffee, Cuban style, and you drink a large cup with very little milk and saccharin. In the garden the tropical plants, sowed in every sort of flowerpot, faintly shine beneath a lemon-tree and an orange tree. Your garden is your repose. Your garden, located at the edge of an avenue with a central walkway, like that other one, the first you ever had, in the distant south, until some municipal government decided to give way to progress and widened the street. Then the childhood promenade disappeared, and the enormous hardwood trees with their almost black trunks and small yellow flowers became a painful point of reference in the space of the initial memory, the most intense because from it all roads begin.

Havana's *Quinta Avenida*, with its potbellied palms and stone benches, favours a return to a remote past, and *Pleamar* (High Tide), my home, is also the first book of poetry written by my father in Argentina and the name of a domestic publishing house, of unique books made by hand by me with rare paper, dried flowers, stones, shells and sand, gathered lovingly on travels to places made special by the people that inhabited them or by the prestige they attained in the intimate geography that we each invent for ourselves with the passing of time. In this way the thick and dark sands of Isla Negra coexist with the leaves of a poplar-tree that would remind Falla in Alta Gracia of the black poplars of Machado, and a small green stone from the Paraguayan Lake Ipacarai with multicoloured freesias of Palermo Park in Buenos Aires, where we used to ride on bicycles, Gorita, Tonica and I, the three of us daughters of exile, conscious that that park should have been Retiro Park, in the heart of a city unknown to us but so much our own through the telling and retelling about it, yet without a large river and port with ships of every flag. In the Retiro I would see, or had seen already in the teary and intensely blue eyes of my grandmother [doña] Oliva, the last autumn sun cast its light on the windows of a palace from an oriental fable, and in the still pond pitch the small sailing boats crowded together at the shore, like wild geese resting from a very long migratory voyage. A secluded city, suitable for man —mother used to say—; not this infinitude of streets and more streets devoured by the *pampa* with such fury, that in order to finally leave the country the trains have to arm

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themselves with a saintly patience. A courageous city that one, in the years of the Civil War. How happy we were then! And we women used to see the glimmer in the eyes of those who would talk to us every day, because it is difficult not to mention paradise when one has lost it. ¿Paradise a war? Oh, mother, when I read your *Memoria de la melancolía* (*Memory of Melancholy*) I understood so many things, including that strange affirmation that one could find something resembling happiness amidst the bombs.

It is curious. I never thought until recently that such a modest garden as the one on Las Heras Street would suddenly take on such a significant role in this story. I should say, rather, at the end of this story, with this 'coda' or these extra verses into which life after sixty is transformed, when the beloved dead come together in the attics of dreams and in the mirror you watch as the tender and tired image of your mother irretrievably takes possession of your own.

Punta del Este and its sea, the long seaside summer holidays—in fact, all the summers seemed but one, given their awaited and repeated consummation of happiness—blazed always like the indelible metaphor of childhood. The ever vigilant eye of the lighthouse, the small seals, Mansa Beach, the inaccessible Brava Beach, the mystery of Gorriti Island and Isla de los Lobos, the Gallarda—our beautiful house among the pines—, my friend Annette Ugalde, the solitary woods and the dunes... A setting difficult to surpass. And yet, I find that this tiny garden at Pleamar brings to me daily the steps lost by the young girl I was in that distant place, in the shady enclosure of its *Porteño* rival.

Sitting beneath the shade of the lemon-tree I close my eyes. Voices come to me from I don't know where. Are they shadows that return or is it that to my years the past is more present than the present and the present is a dream yet to be?

She sees the photograph, out of focus, of Pablo Neruda standing before his 'ocean comrade.' Mother's lap is warm like Sunday bread. She presses herself against the soft woollen skirt and with one eye barely half-open she looks over the tremulous lines of the waves, the sailor's cap, the sleepy smile of an Araucanian idol. Ricardo Neftalí Reyes, she repeats several times with difficulty, for she does not wish to take her mouth away from her mother's body. Neftalí, Neftalí... what a strange name, mother. Well you can ask him yourself in a while why it was his name before and now he calls himself by another.

Old images, mere trifles, small things still living because my thoughts keep them tied to the present with fragile threads, so easy to weaken in any imperceptible ripple of the river of forgetfulness.

Pablo and Delia del Carril against the light in the garden of Los Guindos, in Santiago, from behind, each one wearing a black Araucanian poncho with white geometric designs. "*La Tata* touched my

shells and that's not right, Rafael." "I didn't touch them." Yes you did touch them, you even changed the position of several of them. I am the great sea shell wizard and I know everything." Tata, Tatita, these shells are very rare and expensive and you should respect the orders of the greatest southern malacologist." "Uncle Pablo has millions of them, and I can't hear the sea?"

Delia, by then alone in Paris, having escaped from the definitive infidelity of Pablo, hands me a book. Its title, *Manifestes*. Editions de la Revue Mondiale, 1925. "It's a gift for you," she says. It is a rustic, yellowish little book. The inscription: "To Delia del Carril, with the esteem of a long friendship. Vicente Huidobro."

Zenobia leaves a copy of the Losada edition of *Platero y yo* at my bedside. I have a high fever. A childhood illness has converted me into a suffering form covered with spots. No scratching, drinking cold water, kissing people secretly, like that small, cordial woman, who dares to stroke my sweaty brow with her hand. "To Aitana, your friend Juan Ramón." With time, the original jacket of the book was substituted by another drawn by my father: the purple profile of a little donkey surrounded by violet flowers. "Platero, in Moguer's sky" ...

Green ink (the ink always in green of Ricardo Neftalí Reyes). "For Aitana Alberti, whom I love since before she was born. Your Uncle Pablo. August 1958." It was for my seventeenth birthday. Now I open the book bound in red. Its pages of India paper retain intact the complete works (until then) of who was and is a presence. Nothing more and nothing less than that: a presence that only the forgetfulness of death will be able to erase.

The walls were covered by paintings, photographs, valuable archeological objects, amusing popular trinkets. Through the six windows, tall and narrow —two per room that together formed the drawing-room— the joy of the Roman sun entered with great extravagance. Mother searched for the umpteenth time for her great golden ring. The one she herself designed, which Belgiorno, the finest goldsmith in Buenos Aires, would mount with grey pearls bought at a mysterious little store from Peking. The two stars with a heart of a diamond and two authentic pearls from the Chinese Sea, that María Teresa would never remove from her left ring finger, had strayed. It was the beginning of the nightmare, but we didn't know it yet. Only now do I realize the extent of the subterfuges that María Teresa León's incredible intelligence put into motion to shield us from the advance of the shadows, until these devoured her completely, with diabolical calm, throughout thirteen years of agony. We had never heard of Alzheimer's disease and although my maternal grandmother, doña Oliva, so beloved by Rafael, was "featherbrained" —they are his words— in the final years of her life — when she took a vow of poverty and would give up her meagre

widow's pension to the nuns of a neighbouring school, and the little she saved she invested in inviting the patrons of a nearby bar to a cognac, inspiring in them profound respect that erect and slovenly old lady, with intense blue eyes, so enchanting and clever, whose husband, Colonel Angel León, had fought in the Cuban War, and she, a young lady from Burgos, had waited for him patiently, gathering the linen of her trousseau in the shade of the famous provincial cathedral, with the constant dread that any day a black-edged envelope and not the bearded and charming figure that would wrap her up in his arms to never leave her abandoned— it seemed impossible to us that this senile delirium could be repeated a thousand times over, because María Teresa León Goyri was the indestructible and sustaining bastion of the brief Alberti family: dad, mom and I, and the poet and the girl felt protected “under the wings of her close embrace”\*, secure that that most beautiful woman, of total integrity and dignity, was immortal. One morning, after much insistence, the plumber finally arrived, assigned to unclog the washbasin in mother's washroom. And there, in the depths of the piping, was the ring. She took me to her room and distractedly removed from the shelf a small book bound in blue that I knew so well. She leafed through it quickly and, almost without looking at it, gave it to me. She was handing me the most important article of love that a young poet from Cadiz gave to her as a gift when they met. A copy of *Marinero en tierra* in which dad had glued the little cut-out heads of each of them together with an image sketched in Indian ink of “Our Lady of Beautiful Love” and in the silhouette of the sailor floating in a blue sea surrounded by simple fish. “Shipwreck and salvation of Rafael Alberti,” he wrote below in rose-coloured wax pencil. And she had gone on pasting small photographs, testimony to their happiness, and others of dear friends, all of them unaware of the relentless dangers of time.

Later, she placed the marvelous ring on my left ring finger. “Take these things with you and anything else you wish, my daughter. God only knows in whose hands they could end up.”

At the edge of the book there appears a tiny photograph of Federico surrounded by youngsters. They have printed “Huerta de San Vicente” over the poet's head. Laurita García Lorca came to Havana and filled our hands with fragile souvenirs of her grandparents' summer home, in what were then the outskirts of Granada. Laurita manages the *Casa-Museo* with moving dedication. This bookmark which indicates the advance in my reading reveals to me a Federico held for all eternity in an informal Cuban street scene. The three children, very young, possess the “Cuban colour” invented by Nicolás Guillén to classify in just manner the subtle range of skin tones that each day surprise me with a new shade. And Federico smiles at me and I would like to know which park the bench belongs to in which he was sitting one afternoon, the place he



would go to think about himself and dad, both so extraordinarily Andalusian, in the short life of one and the very long life of the other, and about how one of those lives would have been without the treacherous assassination, and the other if it had not succumbed to the sirens' song that threaten any traveller on the perilous seas of the frontier.

I would like to say that I was in Buenos Aires when Federico arrived and immediately dazzled the people of that city, lifting them to heights of suspense like a brilliant bullfighter in the square of his greatest achievements; yet that occurred eleven years before my birth and I was only able to hear certain stories according to some witnesses to the party that was the presence of Lorca in my city of the South. Here, in my tropical city, there's no one left to give an eyewitness account of his whirlwind passing through the Island, but there exists a veneration as far as the people are concerned, similar perhaps to that which someone so distinct as that *aficionado* of the bullfights with death, Ernest Hemingway, can arouse.

I was in Granada recently to pay homage to Nicolás Guillén and Rafael Alberti in their centenaries. A Cuban poet and two Cuban musicians accompanied me. The music of the lute and piano nourished the word, creating within the scene a magical circle. Cadiz and Cuba in Federico's Granada, looking for him at the Puerta de Elvira and in the village streets to the cathedral with Luis García Montero; pursuing him in the gardens and patios of the Alhambra while hounded by the first chills of the winter; looking as far as the eye could see across the landscape of the Vega and the incipient whiteness of the Sierra Nevada, taking possession of us with that multiplicity of images that he saw daily, of the angel and of the *duende* (devil), that made him appear to descend, on a par with the great singers of the *cante jondo* (Andalusian gypsy singing), from the very same "*Pharaoh's trunk*".

Rafael did not visit Granada in Federicos' lifetime. For trivial reasons, he never accepted his friend's invitations to spend the summer at Huerta de San Vicente. He made the trip in 1980, three years after his return to Spain, following "so many and such terrible things". How was he to think, when he was a carefree visitor at the Student Residence in Madrid, that they would kill the marvelous pianist, sketch artist and poet Federico García Lorca, his recent friend, like a rabid dog in an unknown ravine, close to the city he loved so well, suddenly turned into hovel, into a hostile and unrecognized place? How could anyone then suspect, Father, that thousands and thousands of Spaniards would have to cross the French border on foot through the shortcuts in the mountains or be poorly heaped in chance transport, to be confined and mistreated in real concentration camps by citizens of the *douce France*, on the shores of the innocent Mediterranean Sea of childhood vacations? How could anyone have guessed during the amusing afternoons

at the Resi, that thousands and thousands of Spaniards would have to learn languages as strange as Russian, Polish, Romanian, Czech, and even Chinese? How could those brilliant young people, each in his own way, that literary books group under the common denominator of the Group of 27, imagine themselves in other lands, exiled from their country and their bread, as living symbols of an infamy perpetrated against an entire nation?

For the young Rafael, Granada would always be available, at the end of a few hours on a train (of that train that departs from Atocha station, the last soil in Madrid tread upon by the assassinated poet), and his friend Federico García Lorca would wait for him perhaps with Concha, his older sister, then girlfriend of the one in 1936, eight days before the glorious military rising who would take up the post of socialist mayor of Granada and would be killed by the fascists against the mud walls of the cemetery. Perhaps Manolo Ángeles Ortiz, extraordinary painter and another brother to Federico, would also be there, and dad sees them pass by the train window, that has slowed its march as it enters the station, and they run ahead to reach it, laughing and waving their hands in signs of welcome. Meanwhile Dad takes his suitcase down from the luggage-rack. He brings his Granadian friends some copies of *Marinero en tierra*, just released from the presses of *El Adelantado* in Segovia. Federico's impatience has caused him to jump into the compartment and now embraces and jostles him as if her were a child.

Dad, you will go and meet that childhood that was so long-lasting that in a near future your friend will declare you having had it. You will see the Alhambra, the Generalife, the Albaycin, the Sacromonte, the Darro, the Genil, the tomb of the Catholic Monarchs and the Polinario Café. You will visit Fuentevaqueros and you will traverse the meadow at sunset, when still dense smoke rises from the earth and the dry plains (*secaderos*) of tobacco leaves recall certain Cuban landscapes.

In the garden of Las Heras Street shadows have been falling. One can no longer distinguish the scarlet flowers of the poinsettias, that my paternal grandmother in El Puerto de Santa María called the Easter tree. You have read me poems by Federico, among others one dedicated to Isabel, mother of my friend Lina, granddaughter of Manolo Ángeles Ortiz. You have told me about an imaginary Granada, that I will visit before you, remembering you in each step with tearfilled eyes, for there is still much, much time to go, before the 24th of February of 1980, when finally, by municipal order, they bestowed you the keys to Granada. Exactly thirty years.

## Remembering Rafael Alberti

Rafael Alberti passed away just short of seven weeks before his ninety-seventh birthday. It's normal that one is always moved by the inevitable presence of death, and even more deeply when it's the definitive absence of an exceptional being who has enriched the spiritual heritage and social direction of his contemporaries thanks to a body of poetry characterized by a vigorous human authenticity, written in an exquisite artistic fashion, and with the example of the way he led his life.

But independently of the natural levels of grief that this significant absence provoked, according to the ties that bound us to this great poet, it's clear that in cases like Rafael Alberti's, the joy of having had the privilege of living a long and generous life, of nearly a hundred years, should prevail over the sadness felt on his passing away. It has been a fortunate situation that he not only allowed us to enjoy more of the fruits of his genius, but also that he received during his last years signs of love and acknowledgment from his hometown, after having suffered a distressing exile that lasted four long decades.

It was a long life that he was able to lead joyfully and conscientiously, with tenderness and beauty; he made an extraordinary contribution to the vast heritage of the Iberian culture, as well as to the culture of the world and to the human spirit of the past century and for future centuries. Rafael Alberti's life and work allow him to stay alive forever in the memory of humankind.

In this the first year of the twenty-first century, which places us on the threshold of the centennial of his birth —December 16, 1902—, I wish to briefly remember Rafael Alberti on the first and last occasions that we were together, not only for the selfish pleasure of remembering him, but also to offer a small testimony of his values and some details of his actions and concerns, which are covered more extensively in my book *Rafael Alberti en Cuba (Rafael Alberti in Cuba)*.

In mid-April of 1935, amid a critical political situation in Cuba in which I was involved, I received an important political and literary assignment. Hardly a month before, a forceful general revolutionary strike against the regime, that had been installed by the United States in January of the previous year, had failed. This became the excuse for the beginning of the repressive and terrible period of the first stage of tyranny under Fulgencio Batista. I was assigned the difficult task of

looking after Rafael Alberti and his wife María Teresa León, on their first visit to Cuba. They arrived on April 16 at the port of Havana on board the steamer the Siboney from New York.

It was an assignment that had been suggested by my friend Juan Marinello, the eminent revolutionary intellectual, who was then unjustly in jail, on account of his editorial work on behalf of the Anti-Imperialist League of Cuba, and with whom I collaborated on the newspaper *La Palabra* (*The Word*) under his direction; it was closed down by the tyrannical regime after the general strike had failed in March.

The young poet and journalist that I was then was very pleased and honoured by the assignment, for I was aware of the stature of the author of *Marinero en tierra* (*Sailor on Land*) within the new Spanish poetry and of his recent political affiliation with the Communists, even though I had not read much of his poetry. Nevertheless, I approached the distinguished couple—that was staying at the old Saratoga Hotel—under the supposition that I was going to meet two classic intellectuals, that is, possessed of a distant air of superiority and hard to please. But instead, I met a young charming couple, whom I have already described on more than one occasion: María Teresa was graceful, beautiful, loquacious; Rafael, dashing, affable and smartly dressed, his Andalusian flair clear from his easygoing smile. And any difference of age and social standing was erased when we addressed each other with the familiar *tú* form.

It must be remembered that as of 1931, during the heart of the struggle against the Monarchy and for the Republic in Spain, Alberti took a decisive stand in his life, which he wrote about at the beginning of the first edition of his journal *Cruz y Raya* (*Cross and Stripe*), entitled *Poesía 1924-1930* (*Poetry 1924-1930*): “As of 1931, my work and my life are at the service of the Spanish Revolution and of the International proletariat.”

Even though I was aware of his stance, I did not know that his trip to the United States and the Caribbean fulfilled a mission on behalf of the International Red Cross for the Asturian miners, who were being brutally repressed. It's to be expected that both Spanish writers had been warned of the serious political situation in Cuba at the time, which explains their status as passengers in transit to Mexico on the Siboney, which periodically covered the New York-Havana-Veracruz route. Still, it was a risky mission, but I proudly and decisively resolved to take it on.

Fortunately, Rafael's literary fame, and his friendship from Madrid with a former member of the Cuban legation in Spain, the scholar José María Chacón y Calvo, the then Director of Culture for the regime, allowed the several weeks' stay to be relatively normal. Lectures given by the both of them and readings by Alberti were made possible in the main cultural institutions, as well as interviews and words of tribute in and from important press organizations.



But apart from the literary activities and the inevitable dealings with a certain snobbish bourgeoisie, the spirited couple did not forego the pleasure of meeting the people that most interested them. The first contact they made was at a clandestine meeting with a group of left-wing intellectuals in a room at the Teacher's College, which was then temporarily set up in a hospital that was under construction.

About twenty writers, artists, and professors attended with the natural precaution that was required in those days of harsh political persecution. Alberti spoke to us about the critical situation in Europe caused by the aggressive fascist policies of Hitler and Mussolini, and about the need to confront ideologically that advance of regimes that were threatening the progress and culture of the world. He spoke of the actions already undertaken by French and Spanish writers and artists in defence of the arts, and he urged the creation in Cuba of a similar organization linked to the European bodies; with that same objective in mind he and María Teresa continued their trip on to Mexico.

There was a lively conversation amongst the members of the group, in which the guest informed us of the reactionary crisis of that sombre period for the young Spanish Republic, which was not very different from that which many Latin American countries were suffering. At a particular point, Alberti asked if the poet Nicolás Guillén was in attendance. I told him that he wasn't there for empty precautionary measures, on account of his having simply been an employee of an official department of the regime that had been deposed in 1933, but it was clear that his books of poetry *Sóngoro cosongo* and *West Indies Ltd.* (1931 and 1934, respectively) were of a revolutionary nature. Alberti agreed with me and warmly praised what he knew of Guillén's writing. The next day I had the pleasure of taking Guillén, who had been a friend of mine from the year before, to meet Alberti and to thus begin a close and long friendship with Rafael and María Teresa. And as of that moment, our poet maintained ties with the far left of the Cuban cultural community.

Their visits to "political prisoners" were amongst other "subversive" activities undertaken by the Spanish couple that, however, did not overshadow the publicity they received for the readings and lectures. On account of being a writer, Alberti was able to have an interview with the imprisoned writers Juan Marinello and José Manuel Valdés Rodríguez in the Castillo del Príncipe jail, where they were serving an arbitrary six-month sentence along with the poet Regino Pedroso (ill at that time) and some other fellow writers, for having been members of the editorial board of the journal *Masas* (*Masses*), an organ of the Anti-Imperialist League of Cuba, (which has already been mentioned). Further-more, both Rafael and María Teresa also visited the "female political prisoners" (intellectuals and workers) in the Women's Penitentiary in Guanabacoa; the women were accused of participating in the recent general revolutionary strike.

On several occasions I took Rafael and María Teresa through Old Havana's narrow streets, which have retained a Spanish colonial atmosphere and they frequently expressed their delight at standing in places that reminded them of places in Cadiz; they were also excited about meeting the black population of Havana, their music, their joy, their particular way of speaking Spanish; María Teresa was especially delighted by the black children.

Even though there weren't many occasions to talk about literature when I was accompanying them, I remember one time that I asked Rafael what poets had influenced his poetry the most. He replied that more than anyone else, it had been Gil Vicente, and he went on to give a warm biographical sketch of the Luso-Spanish poet, whom I did not know about at that time; he also mentioned, naturally, Garcilaso, Góngora, Juan Ramón. Alberti wrote a poem about the day he left Havana;

...

The sky was behind me on the Caribbean sea  
 The strong and pure voice of Juan Marinello,  
 The unknown voice of Pedroso and the  
 Wet memory of José Manuel.  
 It was the 10th of May when the "Siboney"  
 Left the Cuban palm tree for the maguey  
 That the Mexican shores called on me to come,  
 The open daggers, gently, to wound me.

On that date in 1935, therefore, Rafael and María Teresa left the port of Havana for Mexico, and we wrote to each other, especially with María Teresa, who was always so graceful and enthusiastic. A year after their departure, on May 20, 1936, the charismatic poet and publisher, Manuel Altolaguirre, published out of his press on 73 Viriato Street in Madrid, Alberti's dramatic and suggestive book of poetry, entitled *13 bandas y 48 estrellas. Poema del mar Caribe*. (*13 Stripes and 48 Stars. Poem of the Caribbean Sea*). It is dedicated, as you will recall, "To Juan Marinello and all the anti-imperialist writers of America", and includes as an inscription a well intentioned line written by Rubén Darío: "¿Tantos millones de hombres hablaremos inglés?" ("Will so many millions of us speak English?").

That dramatic experience of a historical oppressive reality on the American continent, that includes the United States, Cuba, Mexico, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Venezuela, Martinique, etc. is one of Alberti's most impressive books of poetry. This book is crowned by the poem "Yo también canto América" ("I also sing America"), which is inscribed with the title of Langston Hughes's poem "I, too, sing America". It is a pity that he was not able to see what he yearned for in the following stanza: "It's going to explode, to explode, I want to

see it,/I want to hear it, touch it, be its catalyst,/ that shake up that destroys/ the armed intervention made by those carrying dollars. ("Va a sonar, va a sonar, yo quiero verlo,/ quiero oírlo, tocarlo, ser su impulso,/ ese sacudimiento que destruya/la intervención armada de los dólares").

This poetry of condemnation and combat underlines not only the tragedy of our countries colonized by the dollar, but also the difficulties faced by Rafael and María Teresa vis-à-vis the pro-American tyrannical regimes of this hemisphere, in that disastrous period, that with the outstanding exception of Cuba, differs relatively little from what we are presently experiencing.

But Rafael and María Teresa, the great Spanish poet and the great Spanish novelist, were then far away from the enormous tragedy that was awaiting the heroic Spanish nation as of July 1936. The savagery, forseen by the Congresses for the Defense of the Arts, was unleashed by the monstrous Francoist-Falangist aggression that was supported by the Nazis and that caused the deaths, imprisonment or exile of millions of human beings. That criminal fascist aggression was nothing more than the first act of an even more catastrophic tragedy: the Second World War.

The life and poetry of Rafael Alberti are marked by almost four decades in exile, in the same way that our lives in Cuba, in the Caribbean were marked by many years of constant battles against an unsustainable reality, that was erased in Cuba by the triumphant Revolution of 1959. In 1960, Rafael and María Teresa were guests of Cuba for the second time, but in what a different manner. Their extensive programme of honours and visits, as well as my duties and responsibilities only allowed for a short reunion full of memories. When, however, Rafael returned to Havana in 1991, María Teresa had already passed away, we were able to share a friendly discussion on several occasions.

Of our unforgettable friendship there remained our correspondence and indelible memory of those two exemplary and unmistakable human beings, of an exceptional sensibility and talent, fighting for a better world, who never lost their enthusiasm and hope, nor their will to fight.

Skipping over the years and leaving out other occasions and reunions with Rafael like the one in Segovia in 1994, during the International Conference of Leonese, Hispanic American and Portuguese Writers, where I presented him with the diploma as Honorary Member of the Nicolás Guillén Foundation —, we came upon our last reunion. It took place in his beautiful hometown, the Puerto de Santa María, part of the impressive bay of Cadiz in July of 1996. The Rafael Alberti Foundation, under the direction of his second wife, María Asunción

Mateo, periodically holds poetry reunions, and that year (the third edition), six of us Cuban writers were invited to participate: Fina García Marruz and Mary Cruz in the section “La voz de siempre: Rubén Darío” (“The Everlasting Voice: Rubén Darío”) and Cintio Vitier, Nancy Morejón, José Pérez Olivares and Ángel Augier in the section “Poesía de la otra orilla de nuestra lengua: Cuba” (“Poetry from the Other Shore of Our Language: Cuba”).

The day after our arrival, María Asunción kindly invited my wife Mary and me – the closest to Rafael – to visit him, but when I told her that all of the Cuban guests had arrived, she extended the invitation, which gave us an unforgettable afternoon with the customary good humour and surprising memory of this great Spanish and universal poet from Cadiz. And there, seeing his usual smile, I remembered that that was one of his personality traits that most impressed me in 1935, this last time with a slight melancholic twinge, but it was never an empty smile, rather the transparent smile of kindness, of the awareness of having fulfilled one’s duty, in a life dedicated to writing poetry and to the poetry of his actions.

That is why, when he died on October 28, 1999, I believed that his passing away could not be sad, and I wrote this sonnet that I dedicated to his daughter Aitana Alberti León, who by living in Cuba extends the love that her parents always felt for our country, and receives from Cuba the love that our country will always feel for them, and for the marvellous contribution they made to human awareness and world culture:

A BROTHERLY FAREWELL TO RAFAEL ALBERTI

Rafael, I never forget your smile,  
 Since the restless light of Havana  
 Embraced you along with María Teresa  
 And kissed you with the magic of her breeze.

Because you are a presence that does not disappear,  
 You bid farewell without sorrow or in a hurry,  
 And at a distance I make out your smile  
 Trying not to forget sadness.

What you gave was beautiful, noble, and honourable:  
 That enormous treasure that you leave us.  
 Your farewell cannot be sad.  
 In your life you fought for the joy  
 Of humanity. And though you are already leaving,  
 You remain forever in your poetry.

*University of Havana*

Translated by José N. Martínez



C. Brian Morris

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## The “Impregnable Syllables” of Alberti’s *Sobre los angeles*

*Your impregnable syllables need no prop to stand.*

Emily Dickinson to Susan Dickinson (c.1881)

At the end of *Auto de fe*, the vitriolic lampoon that Alberti penned in March 1930, Fernando Vela is attacked, partly eaten, and killed by a parrot with the cry of “¡Mueran las dictaduras mercenarias, los censores del tres al cuatro!” “Death to mercenary dictatorships, to contemptible censors!” With Vela’s grisly death, together with the disdainful epitaph uttered by El Maestro, that is, Ortega y Gasset —“¡Un simple corrector de pruebas!” “A mere corrector of proofs!” (Alberti 1998, 152)—, Alberti fulfilled the vow he made in a letter to José María Cossío in August 1928 to take revenge on Vela for having returned to him four poems the latter had requested for the *Revista de Occidente*. Alberti’s emphasis signals his indignation at Vela’s reason for rejecting them: “Dice que, como las que publiqué en *Carmen*, no le gustan, que no se parecen en nada a mis cosas anteriores (¡!), etc. Un verdadero asco. ¿Para qué hablar?” “He says that, like those I published in *Carmen*, he doesn’t like them, they are nothing like my previous things. Really disgusting. Why go on?” (Alberti 1998, 34). Even though two of the four poems Vela returned to him were to be published in the September issue of *Revista de Occidente*, and three more from *Sobre los ángeles Concerning the Angels* would appear in the January 1929 number,<sup>1</sup> Alberti nursed his grudge against Vela, so incensed, and perhaps frustrated, was he by the latter’s repudiation—and implicit indictment—of poems on the grounds of their difference.

The path that Alberti had followed from *Marinero en tierra Sailor on Land to Cal y canto Quicklime and Song* had, it appeared, led him to a

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<sup>1</sup> According to Alberti, Vela returned to him “Paraiso perdido” “Paradise Lost”. “Los ángeles de la prisa,” “The Angels of Haste,” “5”, and “Invitación al aire” “Invitation to Air.” The first two were published in the September 1928 issue (no. LXIII) of *Revista de Occidente* along with “Los ángeles mudos” “The Mute Angels,” “Ascensión” “Ascension,” and “Invitación al arpa” “Invitation to the Harp.” The three poems that were published in the January 1929 issue (no. LXVII) are “Los ángeles muertos” “The Dead Angels,” “Castigos” “Punishments,” and “El ángel falso” “The False Angel.”

dead end; by its very difference, *Sobre los ángeles* concludes a vertiginous stage of Alberti's career, evoked perhaps in "Los ángeles de la prisa," implicitly comments on it, and diverges from it. *Sobre los ángeles* also constitutes a poetic record of an impasse in words that evoke entry—"Entrada" "Entrance" is the explanatory announcement of and definition of the prefatory poem—, a journey—"¿Para qué seguir andando?" "Why keep on going?" he asks in "El ángel falso" "The False Angel"—, and a new beginning. The work is very different from the charming but slight *La amante*, or from the multiple virtuoso performances of *Cal y canto*; its complexity validates Jorge Luis Borges's contention that no book is exhaustible and that the dialogue it undertakes with its readers is "infinito" "infinite" (Borges 747), a contention that is in turn proved by the difference between my second published essay on *Sobre los ángeles* of over forty years ago, in which I tried to show that the work is a chronicle of Alberti's apostasy (Morris 1960), and a recent article, in which I argued —against myself— that no single biographical experience can explain the work, that to begin to understand its complexity one must go "más allá de la autobiografía" "beyond autobiography" (Morris 1999)— even when Alberti presents us with the oft quoted inventory of circumstances and emotions he compiled in *La arboleda perdida*, *The Lost Grove*.

Interesting as that list is, we should bear in mind that the poems preceded it by some thirty years, and that the comments are more likely to be a gloss on rather than an explanation of the poems. The comments certainly lack the confessional contemporaneity that gives piquancy to Evelyn Waugh's remark about *Brideshead Revisited* in a letter to his wife that "Sexual repression is making mag. op. rather smutty" (Waugh 184). More than the chronicle of a life visualized from threatened infancy to disenchanting adulthood, *Sobre los ángeles* is the story of a mind that uses retrospection as a tool, adducing the past to confirm the present, compressing past, present, and —implicitly— the future into a timeless capsule where the poet evokes both the many problems that threaten to silence him and offers, in the very act of writing about them, the only viable solution to those problems. The Alberti we find in *Sobre los ángeles* is, according to Baudelaire's "L'Irremédiable," "un cœur devenu son miroir" (Baudelaire 80): a poet looking at himself looking at himself. More than the story of a life or a career, the work is the record of a vocation, of a gifted poet's ability to reaffirm himself by reconstructing his way of writing poetry. The work illustrates brilliantly, yet disturbingly, the redemptive power of words, and if that phrase sounds religious, it is consonant with, and justified by, the religious frame of reference Alberti devises for his work, clearly heralded in the title of the first poem, "Paraíso perdido" "Paradise Lost." which is an elegy to everything he had lost: light, hope, heaven,

the "pórtico verde" "green pathway," and —crucial for a poet— contact with others.

The consequence of that compound loss is "Sólo nieblas": neither light nor darkness, but an intermediate stage between two extremes which relates him to John Milton's Satan, Espronceda's Poeta in *El diablo mundo* *The Devil World*, who states "Densa niebla / cubre el cielo" "Dense fog/covers the sky" (Espronceda170), and, more tightly, Bécquer, whose diagnostic phrase "Huésped de las nieblas" "Guest of the Mists" will resound as the title of the three principal sections of *Sobre los ángeles* as a bleak reminder of Alberti's apparently futile stumbling through his emotional and spiritual maze. *Sobre los ángeles* is, of course, a triumphant paradox: a work that dwells on the fall, on loss and disintegration, and evokes Judgement Day is also one that offers hope through its very existence as it demonstrates the power of words and the determination of a poet to keep using them even when he suspects they may confound, disconcert, even deter, his readers, as they did Fernando Vela. Over one half of the poems of the work allude to the voice and to words, both spoken and written; several poems deal with the complementary topic of silence and with the dreadful loss of articulation and communication.

Alberti's allusions to the voice and to words are unremittingly negative: they reveal a disenchantment with the very fabric of a writer's craft as deep and bitter as that expressed repeatedly by T. S. Eliot, who in *Four Quartets* captures —with paradoxical eloquence— the elusive brittleness of words:

Words strain,  
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,  
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,  
Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,  
Will not stay still. (Eliot 121)

To imagine "Las primeras palabras" "The First Words" (in "Muerte y juicio" "Death and Judgement") as "devoradas por el mar y ocultas hoy en un hoyo sin viento. / Muertas..." "devoured by the sea and hidden today in a windless hole. / Dead" (Alberti 1984, 135), is to see them as fragile and transitory; to imagine (in "Castigos" "Punishments") that "Un relámpago baraja las lenguas y trastorna las palabras" "A flash of lightning jumbles up languages and mixes up words" (Alberti 1984, 148) is to highlight their vulnerability. If the edenic state Alberti evokes in "Tres recuerdos del cielo" "Three Memories of Heaven" was "anterior al arpa, a la lluvia y a las palabras" "before the harp, before the rain and words" (Alberti 1984, 126), then man's words are part of his fall from grace. The power he attributes to them in *Sobre los ángeles* is invariably malevolent: the associations they evoke in him are consistently

hostile. "Silbadoras hachas" "Whistling axes" propel the tongue of the *ángel envidioso* (Alberti 1984, 108). A "mala palabra" "bad word" is what the speaker will "pinchar sobre las tierras que se derriten" "prod the melting lands" as part of his farewell in "Los ángeles feos" (Alberti 1984, 157). And in the last poem of the collection, "El ángel superviviente" "The Surviving Angel," the cataclysmic events of "aquel día" "that day" elicited from a man a last word that "ensangrentó el viento" "stained the wind with blood" (Alberti 1984, 158).

The speaker's discovery in "El ángel de las bodegas" "The Angel of the Wine Cellars" that "hay puertas al mar que se abren con palabras" "there are doors to the sea that are opened with words" (Alberti 1984, 131) imputes to words a power whose insidiousness the poet had already associated with "miel y palabras" "honey and words" in the lament of the victim of the *ángel mentiroso lying angel* (Alberti 184, 86). One of the complaints Alberti makes consistently about words is that they do not clarify or communicate: voices are "veladas" "muffled" in "Juicio" "Judgement" (Alberti 1984, 82), have a sound like "el fleco de la lluvia / cortado por un hacha" "the fringe of the rain / cut by the axe" in "Los ángeles mohosos" "The Mouldy Angels" (Alberti 1984, 188). In "El ángel del misterio" "The Angel of Mystery" the voices that inhabit "los pozos" "wells" are "frías" "cold" (Alberti 1984, 113), while those that inhabit ruins (in "Los ángeles de las ruinas" "The Angels of Ruins") are "abandonadas" "abandoned" (Alberti 1984, 153).

However, when words do communicate they are guilty of deception: the charge uttered by the *ángel mentiroso lying angel* that "miel y palabras" "honey and words" are weapons of defeat and deceit (Alberti 1984, 86) point to the timeless battle between guile and gullibility, whose most celebrated adversaries are Eve and the serpent in the Garden of Eden. The despondent admission of being defeated by honeyed words matches one of the visionary experiences of St. John the Divine, who "took the little book out of the angel's hand, and ate it up; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey; and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter" (Revelations 10:10). To judge from his reminiscences in *La arboleda perdida*, Alberti knew the suffering caused by "El amor imposible, el golpeado y traicionado en las mejores horas de entrega y confianza" "Impossible love, love promised and betrayed in the finest hours of surrender and confidence" (Alberti 1959, 268). To judge from "Engaño" "Deceit," he knew how to evoke deceit and treachery in terms as blunt as the Biblical tirade against liars: "Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips" (Romans 3:13). Just as lethal as this "poison of asps" are the mendacious words that, seen as blinkers in the initial synaesthetic metaphor "tapándote los ojos con palabras," "covering yor eyes with words" entice the gullible victim into "un túnel

de oro" "golden tunnel," whose false promise, underlined by the poet's definition of words as "vidrios falsos" "false panes of glass" and "espejos malos" "deceitful mirrors" will leave him buried alive:

Ciega, por un túnel de oro, de espejos malos, con la muerte darás en un subterráneo.	Blindly, down a golden tunnel of deceitful mirrors you'll bump into death somewhere underground.
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Tú allí sola, con la muerte, en un subterráneo.	You there all alone with death underground.*
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(Alberti 1984, 104)

It is tempting to see in "Ciega" "Blind[ly]" and "sola" "alone" clues to the shadowy presence of a woman in *Sobre los ángeles*. Although valid, such an interpretation narrows the focus when the victim could be less a person than an abstract value such as truth or hope. What Alberti—faithful to his calling as a "poète visuel" (Vivès 4)—has done is to create settings and situations that illustrate and dramatize deceit and, in "El ángel desengañado" "The Disillusioned Angel," the consequences of the refusal to be deceived:

Quemando los fríos, tu voz prendió en mí: ven a mi país. Te esperan ciudades, sin vivos ni muertos, Para coronarte.	Burning through cold, your vice kindled a spark in me: Come to my country. Cities, free of the living and dead, await you with a crown.
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—Me duermo. No me espera nadie.	I'm falling asleep. No one waits for me,
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(Alberti 1984, 85)

Although weary, the speaker is also wary, recognizing the literal trap of the promise; his/her response shows that words are inherently suspect and that the consequence of caution is, literally, *des-engaño disil-lutionment*: the solitude that Alberti presents as a depressing constant from the first poem, "Paraíso perdido" "Paradise Lost."

Throughout *Sobre los ángeles*, Alberti explores a terrible dilemma: rather than a welcome relief from words that are shown to be suspect, treacherous, and wounding, silence is shown to be a state to be feared. As the common denominator of "Paraíso perdido" "Paradise Lost,"

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\*The translation of these lines is by José A. Elgorriaga & Martin Paul (*The Other Shore*: 100 poems by Rafael Alberti & A. Kosrof Chantikan, Trans. José A. Elgorriaga & Martin Paul Sabo, Gabriel Berns. San Francisco:Kosmos, 1981, -58-59



"Los ángeles mudos" "The Mute Angels" and "Novela" "Novel," silence is depicted by Alberti as a curse, an affliction, and a callous form of punishment, one of the grim consequences of the loss of paradise and fall from grace that constitute the message of the grim preface to *Sobre los ángeles*. The allusions to lost light and lost soul are to be expected in a poem that deals with the loss of paradise; more surprising, perhaps, is Alberti's emphasis on the loss of communication evoked in the deathly silence that enfolds him, which is signaled explicitly by questions and exclamations, reminiscent in their urgency of those that encrust San Juan de la Cruz's "Canciones entre el alma y el esposo" "Songs between the Soul and the Husband":

¿Adónde el Paraíso,  
sombra, tú que has estado?  
Pregunta con silencio.

Where is that Paradise  
Shadow, lately your home?  
Ask it in silence.

Ciudades sin respuesta,  
ríos sin habla, cumbres  
sin ecos, mares mudos.

Unanswering cities,  
mute rivers, peaks  
of no echo, inarticulate seas.

Nadie lo dice. Hombres  
fijos, de pie, a la orilla  
parada de las tumbas,

Nobody knows. Men  
tranced and upright on the beaches  
at the stilled grave's verge,

me ignoran. Aves tristes,  
cantos petrificados,  
en éxtasis el rumbo,

with no thought for my presence. Wan birds  
in a petrified singing, blind,  
in their raptuous way,

ciegas. No saben nada.  
Sin sol, vientos antiguos,  
Inertes, en las leguas

knowing nothing.  
Sunless and stopped  
old winds make their circuit

por andar, levantándose  
calcinados, cayéndose  
de espaldas, poco dicen.

of leagues, lift up the ash  
of their passing and rain down  
on our shoulders, having little to say.\*

(Alberti 1984, 65-66)

Against the inquisitive speaker, cities, birds, rivers, seas, and winds form an alliance in a campaign whose strategy is silence and whose sole weapon is the muteness that Alberti attributes —tautologically— to silence in "El ángel de la ira" "The Angel of Wrath" and —paradoxically— to snow in the opening lines of "Nieve viva" "Living Snow": "Sin mentir, ¡qué mentira de nieve anduvo muda por mi sueño!" "Without

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\*These lines are translated by Ben Belitt (Rafael Alberti, *Selected Poems*. Edited and translated by Ben Belitt. Introduction by Luis Monguio. Berkely and Los Angeles: University of Berkely Press, 1966, 68-69).

lying, what snow-like lying moved mutely through my dream!" (Alberti 1984, 143). Muteness as a condition that divides people, disrupts human relationships, is what Alberti dramatizes in "Los ángeles mudos" "Mute Angels," where he articulates the one question and the two commands that men and women would utter if they were not dumb:

Inmóviles, clavadas, mudas mujeres de los zaguanes  
y hombres sin voz, lentos, de las bodegas,  
quieren, quisieran, querrían preguntarme:

—¿Cómo tú por aquí y en otra parte?

Unmoving, stock still, mute women of the hallways  
and voiceless, slow men, of the wine cellars,  
want, would like, would like to ask me:

— How is it that you are around here and elsewhere?

(Alberti 1984, 115)

Curiously, while these men and women appear to be the victims of muteness, it is the speaker who remains isolated: if others cannot address him he does not have the chance to answer their questions or commands; he is left to solve his own problems and to live with his own bizarre individuality, cocooned in silence as if he too had lost the power of speech, unless, of course, he talks to himself, which is what he does to perform the stunning paradox of *Sobre los ángeles*: that a work that questions the value of words should be such a brilliant demonstration of their power.

This paradox underlines and drives "Novela," which is a perfect example of words relating the demise of words. The title points to a literary frame of reference for the poem, which Alberti invites us to read as a narrative in three parts, or chapters, corresponding to night, dawn, and day, whose theme— unspecified crime and specific execution — may remind us of *Crime and Punishment*. Alberti may have had in mind the particular crime and execution narrated in the *Heraldo de Madrid* in November 1924 in a series of reports that may have provided him with the cold language he would emulate in his own narrative. A group of *sindicalistas*, led by one Bonifacio Manzanedo, fired on the Civil Guard in Vera de Bidasoa; two were tried expeditiously by a military court and executed, as the newspaper tersely recounted: "A las siete y cuarto de la mañana fue ejecutado en el patio de la cuarta galería... el condenado José Llacer, y a las siete y cuarenta Juan Montejo" "At a quarter past seven in the morning José Llacer, and at seven forty Juan Montejo, both condemned to death, were executed in the yard of the Fourth Gallery" (Anon 1924a). Manzanedo, whose leg had to be amputated, tore off his

bandage and bled to death, gaining an unlikely immortality in the "lento suicida de noviembre" "slow suicide of November" whom Alberti mentions in the third stanza of the poem (Anon 1924b). Unlike Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov, the speaker in the poem is guilty of no offense other than that of using words; it is Alberti himself who resorts to *lex talionensis* to devise for a writer a punishment as appropriate as that Quevedo imagined for booksellers in *Sueño del infierno Dream of Hell*, who are tormented by a devil "con humazos de hojas de sus libros" "with clouds of smoke from the pages of his books" (Quevedo 374-375): he is entombed in a book:

En la noche de aquella luna 24,  
llovieron en mi cama hojas de cielos marchitos.  
A mi alma desprevenida le robaron las palabras.  
Su cuerpo fue enterrado a sus pies en un libro.  
Era la orden de un monarca.

On the night of that moon 24,  
leaves of withered heavens rained on my bed  
They robbed he words from my unready soul,  
his body was buried at his feet in a book.  
It was the order of a monarch.

En el alba de aquella luna 24,  
la justicia del frío le cedió el aire de un árbol.  
A su sombra, los trineos perdidos  
adivinaban rastros de suspiros,  
de lloros extraviados.  
En su sombra se oía el silencio de los castillos.

In the dawn of that moon 24  
the justice of the cold handed him the air of a tree  
In its shadow, the lost sleighs  
were guessing at traces of sighs  
in its shadow could be heard the silence of castles.

En el día de aquella luna 24,  
fue ajusticiada mi alma por la niebla  
que un suicida lento de noviembre  
había olvidado en mi estancia.  
Era la última voluntad de un monarca.

On the day of that moon 24  
my soul was executed by the fog  
that a slow suicide of November  
had forgotten in my abode.  
It was the last will of a monarch.

One of Alberti's evocations of paradisiac innocence in "Tres recuerdos del cielo" "Three Memories of Heaven" is of a time before "el rey" decreed "que la violeta se enterrara en un libro" "That he violet be buried in a book" (Alberti 1984, 127). And evidence of the *ángeles muertos* *dead angels* is to be found in "la gota de cera que sepulta la palabra de un libro" "a drop of wax that buries the word of a book" (Alberti 1984, 155). In every case a book serves as a grave. As it moves inexorably from persecution to execution, "Novela" creates an impression of finality that is illusory: for us to accept the illusion of the poem, we have to believe that the speaker's voice comes from beyond the grave, reciting the kind of eerie voice-over that validated and controlled the flashback of the Oscar-winning film *American Beauty*.

The frame of reference for "Novela" is death: of "cielos," of body, of soul, of the "suicida lento de noviembre" "slow suicide of November." The "noche de aquella luna 24" "night of that 24 moon" is certainly grim in its associations; with his poem Alberti endorses Larra's confession that "El número 24 me es fatal" "Number 24 is ill-fated for me" (Larra 267), seeing in it a cipher of misfortune rather than a feature of the wondrous vision experienced by St. John the Divine, who saw twenty-four seats around the throne and twenty-four elders sitting on them (Revelations 4: 4). What that suicidal fellow sufferer left behind —*niebla* *fog*— is as lethal as the book/coffin in the first stanza: it is a constant presence in *Sobre los ángeles*, hovering over each section in the title "Huésped de las nieblas" "Guest of the mists," which condemns the poet not only to confusion but, even worse, to awareness of that confusion. In that state words are both the symptoms and the cure; as they create the maze that is *Sobre los ángeles*, they are also the only exit from it. Although obtuse, the difference adduced by Fernando Vela as grounds for rejecting poems that were to be a part of *Sobre los ángeles* did signal, however unwittingly, the bewilderment inspired in many readers by a work that appears to be a composite enigma. If, as a critic has suggested, "Riddles and enigmas offer the spectator the lures and pleasures if decipherment, while demanding active participation and work in creating the text's meaning" (Mulvey 138), the spectator—or reader—has much to puzzle over, to enjoy, and to create in the poems of *Sobre los ángeles*, three of which are presented as riddles as Alberti indulges in a systematic game of redefining and renaming. The first of them, "Canción del ángel sin suerte" "Song of the Luckless Angel," heralds the definitions in the first line of each of the three stanzas—"Tú eres lo que va" "You are what goes," "Lo que va y no vuelve" "What goes and does not return," and "Lo que nadie sabe" "What nobody knows"—followed by a colon. The definitions all point to the fluid, restless nature of the *tú* *you*, who is evoked as "agua" "water," "viento" "wind," and—most disdainful and perilous of all—"tierra movediza que no habla

con nadie" "moving earth that speaks with nobody" (Alberti 1984, 85). Even more negative are the definitions that Alberti proposes for the *ángeles mohosos mouldy angels*, a category that remains an unresolved enigma when we read on to find that he defines not the angels but light, voice, body, blood, and soul:

Hubo luz que traje por hueso una almendra amarga.	A light gone wry, like a stone in an almond.
Voz que por sonido, el fleco de la lluvia cortado por un hacha.	A voice, not sound's, but the storms fringe shorn by the ax.
Alma que por cuerpo, la funda de aire de una doble espada.	Not bodily soul, but a double rapier blade in a scabbard of air.
Venas que por sangre, yel de mirra y de retama.	Nor veins to let blood, but wormwood of bracken and myrh.
Cuerpo que por alma, el vacío, nada.	And the soul of that body: vacancy, void.*

(Alberti 1984, 88)

If Alberti felt the need to define, the new definitions do not elucidate: the problem is merely displaced to a new set of words, a new terminology that restates, rather than resolves, the problem in a systematic manner that imposes order on emptiness. In her fascinating book on chaos, N. Katherine Hayles contends that "The desire to control chaos is evident in the search for ways to rationalize it" (Hayles 193); she could have had in mind Alberti's endeavours in *Sobre los ángeles* in general and in these three poems in particular. Equally systematic—and self-defeating—is the renaming he attributes to the eloquent and imaginative dawn in "El alba denominadora" "The Denominating Dawn," which essays six critical, negative metaphors only to trump them with an even more critical seventh, one that commits the name to the fate of snow melting in water:

A embestidas suaves y rosas, la madrugada te iba poniendo nombres:  
Sueño equivocado, Ángel sin salida, Mentira de lluvia en bosque.

With gentle rose-tinted charges, dawn was slowly giving you names:  
Mistaken dream, Angel with no way out, rainy Lie in a forest.

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\*This poem is translated by Ben Belitt, pp.78-79. All other lines of verse and prose fragments are translated by the editorial staff, excluding verse translations by José A. Elgorriaga & MartinPaul. Eds.



Al lindero de mi alma que recuerda los ríos,  
 indecisa, dudó, inmóvil:  
 ¿Vertida estrella, Confusa luz en llanto, Cristal sin voces?

On the edge of my soul that recalls the rivers,  
 Indecisive, it had doubts, unmoving:  
 Spiked star, Confused weeping light, voiceless Glass?

No.  
 Error de nieve en agua, tu nombre.

No.  
 Snow in water error, your name

(Alberti 1984, 129)

Here Alberti demonstrates the inexhaustible power of words to restate, redefine, rename, and, in the process, reaffirm the poet's vocation, his refusal to accept silence as a way out of his problems. The fear of muteness is one that Alberti articulates most eloquently in *Sobre los ángeles*: writing is a denial of silence, and *Sobre los ángeles* is a work of triumphant creativity that, in the context of Alberti's undoubted personal problems, is a liberation, and, in the context of his poetic trajectory, is a rebirth, an exultant display of the difference that so confounded Vela.

*Sobre los ángeles* is a glorious paradox: what appears to be a work born of despair is, through its very existence, a beacon of hope, for it stands as proof of the power of the human mind, the strength of a poetic vocation, and the durability of words. Through Alberti's poems the voices of such poets as San Juan de la Cruz, Quevedo, Bécquer, and Dante live on, as much survivors as the *ángel superviviente surviving angel*. If we identify the latter as the poet himself who emerges from the labyrinth and ends his own *vía dolorosa* "herido, alicortado" "wounded with my wings clipped" (Alberti 1984, 158), then we also have to celebrate as a resilient survivor the creative process that generated the "impregnable syllables" of *Sobre los ángeles*.

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**Rafael Alberti and the Grammar of Exile**

*(Vida bilingüe de un refugiado español en Francia  
Bilingual Life of a Spanish Refugee in France)*

To view Rafael Alberti as, above all else, a poet of exile is not to diminish in any way his work from before 1939. The subject of banishment (from the sea, from his childhood and family, from his social class, from paradise) is, in any case, already present in his poetry throughout the twenties and thirties. The epithet simply acknowledges the fact that a substantial portion of his life was spent outside Spain and that as a writer he consistently found creative inspiration in the range of feelings the experience of geographical displacement gave rise to, from mournful nostalgia to militant, politically motivated indignation. There has been a tendency to view this long period of physical absence from Spain—a total of almost 40 years—as being divided up into two distinct though complementary stages: the years spent in Argentina (1940-1963) and those spent in Italy (1963-1977). Similarly, there seems to be a tacit critical agreement that *Entre el clavel y la espada Between the Carnation and the Sword* (1941) signals the true starting point for his so-called “exile poetry”.

There is little that is radically wrong with this version of Alberti’s post-war career up to 1977, the date of his return to Spain. However, in my view it has one significant drawback in that it overlooks, or at least underestimates, the importance of his very first exposure to life as a refugee writer following his flight from his homeland at the end of the Civil War. I refer specifically to the period of time he spent in France between March 1939 and February 1940. Surprisingly little is known about those months even though for him, as for dozens of other Spanish refugee intellectuals, they must have constituted an unforgettable beginning to the long, emotional trauma of post-war exile. Curiously, Alberti himself glosses over this period in his autobiography in a few brief pages.<sup>1</sup> María Teresa León, in her own memoirs, *Memoria de la melancolía Memory of Melancholy*, adds little, beyond anecdotal detail, to his account of their stay in the French capital.<sup>2</sup> She, at least, complains

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<sup>1</sup>See *La arboleda perdida*, 2, pp. 127-32.

<sup>2</sup>*Memoria de la melancolía*, pp. 390-99. Subsequent references will be incorporated directly into the text with the page number indicated parenthetically.

about how little had been written concerning the immediate aftermath of the fall of the Republic: “¡Qué poco hemos escrito sobre ese mar de angustia!” “How little we have written on that sea of anguish” (*Memoria*, 393).<sup>3</sup> From a critical point of view, the scant importance attached to those months has had the effect of pushing to the sidelines the collection of poems which express the first faltering steps Alberti took in exile: *Vida bilingüe de un refugiado español en Francia*.<sup>4</sup> Long eclipsed by *Entre el clavel y la espada*, which dates from the same time period but establishes a more effective link with his life in Buenos Aires, *Vida bilingüe* is worth pulling back into focus as the expression of Alberti’s very first attempt to register the sensations of displacement and to devise, in order to do so, what I have chosen to call here a “grammar of exile”.<sup>5</sup> The book offers a raw poetic testimony of that period of persecution and marginalisation during which Alberti, like his fellow refugees, had to come to terms with a double defeat: the defeat of the Republic at the hands of Franco’s troops, and the defeat by virtue of the harassment or indifference shown by the French authorities and the population at large.<sup>6</sup>

It is worth recalling, as a preamble to my comments on *Vida bilingüe*, that already in 1938 Alberti had coined the memorable phrase “esta

<sup>3</sup>Her complaint has been recently reiterated by other critics who have acknowledged the need to document and examine more closely the time spent in Paris after the Civil War by Alberti and, indeed, by many other writers. Pascual Gálvez Ramírez, for example, asks bluntly in a recent essay: “¿Qué sabemos de la etapa parisina de Alberti, siempre anulada por los 38 años de exilio en Argentina y Roma?”, “What do they know of Alberti’s Parisian period, always nullified by his 38 years of exile in Argentina and Rome?” “La poesía producida por los exiliados en Francia” “The Poetry produced by the Exiles in France,” p. 492. Gálvez Ramírez gives a long list of Spaniards who spent significant amounts of time in exile in France.

<sup>4</sup>Few critics have dwelt on this book (hereafter referred to as *Vida bilingüe*) in any detail. Barbara Dale May, for example, devotes only three pages to it and all her remarks are superficial. Concha Argente del Castillo dispatches it with even greater economy, failing to go beyond descriptive summary. Catherine Bellver, a more alert and better informed reader of Alberti’s poetry, intercalates good observations on *Vida bilingüe* in her wide-ranging study of his post-1939 work. Gálvez Ramírez’s essay is about the only intelligently focused critical discussion of the book, though it should be read alongside Serge Salaün’s brilliant though polemical essay “La poesía española en el exilio o la continuidad (1938-1955)” “Spanish Poetry in Exile or Continuity (1938-1955)”.

<sup>5</sup>Both *Vida bilingüe* and *Entre el clavel y la espada* are officially dated “1939-1940”. The latter, however, was first published in 1941 and the former, a year later.

<sup>6</sup>Alberti uses the following conversational fragment to express the indifference of the French to Spanish affairs: “—Las cuestiones de España / no interesan, monsieur” “— Spanish question don’t interest anybody, monsieur” (poem 3, p. 41). All references to *Vida bilingüe* are to the second volume, entitled *Poesía 1939-1963*, of the 1988 edition of Alberti’s *Obras completas Complete Works*, prepared by Luis García Montero. Future references will be indicated parenthetically: poem number followed by page number. The same phrase, with minor variations, recurs like a bitterly ironic refrain in the pages María Teresa León devotes in *Memoria* to the months spent in Paris..

urgente gramática necesaria" "this urgent necessary grammar" to define the cobative rhetoric that characterised so much writing, especially poetry, during the war years. The particular poem in which this phrase appeared has a somewhat ambiguous status since although it was first published in October 1938 in the journal *Hora de España*, under the title "Para luego" "For afterwards", it was subsequently located under the new title "De ayer para hoy" "From Yesterday for Today", at the beginning of *Entre el clavel y la espada*. Consequently, it is usually read slightly out of context and conventionally considered to represent what Luis García Montero calls a "pórtico de una nueva etapa literaria" "gateway to a new literary stage":<sup>7</sup> the point at which Alberti is able to recover the serene creative drive interrupted by the war. Whatever title it carries, and in whatever collection it is placed, it remains a powerful, haunting poem. In it, Alberti expresses very effectively the notion that given the circumstances of armed conflict, poetry has no option but to make hurried, improvised concessions to immediate pressures and to postpone to some later, unspecified time its genuine, transcendental mission, "el inédito asombro de crear":

Después de este desorden impuesto, de esta prisa,  
de esta urgente gramática necesaria en que vivo,  
vuelva a mí toda virgen la palabra precisa,  
virgen el verbo exacto con el justo adjetivo.

After this imposed disorder, this haste,  
this urgent necessary grammar in which I live,  
the precise word comes back to me all virginal  
all virginal the exact verb with the right adjective.

Que cuando califique de verde al monte, al prado,  
repiteándole al cielo su azul como a la mar,  
mi corazón se sienta recién inaugurado  
y mi lengua el inédito asombro de crear.<sup>8</sup>

When it qualifies the mountain, the meadow as green  
repeating its blue in the sky as well as the sea,  
my heart feels recently inaugurated  
and my language the new astonishment of creating.

The idea of postponement here implicitly picks up one of the bleakest features of the "urgent grammar" of Alberti's Civil War poetry, namely that in the final analysis, words are impotent in the face of

<sup>7</sup>In his introduction to his edition of Alberti's *Obras completas Complete Works*, p. cxv.

<sup>8</sup>I quote from the 1961 edition of Alberti's *Poesías completas Complete Poetry*, p. 445. The poem is explicitly presented as one of the book's two "prólogos".



weapons. Although the pen can be said to be mightier than the sword and although poems can be wielded figuratively as arms, lending their rhetorical strength to a political cause, the brutal fact was that they were powerless to alter the outcome of the Civil War or even to fix in any meaningful way the immense human suffering it caused. Alberti acknowledged this limitation in a sombre poem entitled "Nocturno" "Nocturne", also from 1938 and equally well known:

Cuando tanto se sufre sin sueño y por la sangre  
se escucha que transita solamente la rabia,  
que en los tuétanos tiembla despabilado el odio  
y en las médulas arde continua la venganza,  
las palabras entonces no sirven: son palabras.

Balas. Balas.

When you suffer so much from no sleep and in the blood  
you listen to the flowing of only rage,  
to hate troubling alertly in the narrow  
and in the inner core vengeance burning continually,  
words then do not serve: they are words.

Bullets. Bullets.

Manifiestos, artículos, comentarios, discursos,  
humaredas perdidas, neblinas estampadas,  
¡qué dolor de papeles que ha de barrer el viento,  
qué tristeza de tinta que ha de borrar el agua!

Balas. Balas.

Manifiestos, articles, commentaries, speeches,  
lost clouds of smoke, printed mists,  
what a suffering of papers that the wind is to sweep away  
what a sadness of ink that water is to wipe out!

Bullets. Bullets.

Ahora sufro lo pobre, lo mezquino, lo triste,  
lo desgraciado y muerto que tiene una garganta  
cuando desde el abismo de su idioma quisiera  
gritar lo que no puede por imposible, y calla.

Balas. Balas.

Siento esta noche heridas de muerte las palabras.<sup>9</sup>

Now I suffer all a throat has that is  
is poor, small-minded, sad, wretched

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<sup>9</sup>*Poesías completas*, p. 420. The poem forms part of *Capital de la gloria*.

when from the abyss of its language it would like  
to shout out what it can't because it's impossible, and is silent

Bullets. Bullets.

I feel tonight that words are mortally wounded.

Words are simply hollow, fleeting signs, disconnected from the stark realities they are supposed to represent. The poet can only gesture vaguely towards the destruction and violence of war, recognising that he has been dispossessed of the means to express them. The true victim of war, as the poem's last line suggests, is language itself. The poet can only retreat into silence.

These twin notions—that exceptional circumstances may bring into being a new poetic “grammar” and that language struggles, sometimes in vain, to register adequately the sense of those circumstances—form the backdrop against which *Vida bilingüe* can most fruitfully be read. In this collection language is pushed to new extremes in order to come to reflect in a compelling way the condition the poet has assumed, that of dazed and defeated political refugee in a hostile, alien environment.

The personal and historical context in which the poems of *Vida bilingüe* were written can be easily summarised. Having fled Spain and following a brief stay in Oran, Alberti and his wife made their way to Marseilles and subsequently to Paris. There they were given hospitality by Pablo Neruda and Delia del Carril who helped them obtain work as newsreaders for Radio-Paris Mondiale. They remained in the French capital until pressure from the Nationalist authorities—now the official representatives of Spain abroad—together with the conditions in war-torn France itself, obliged them to think of moving on and they gained passage on a boat bound for South America.<sup>10</sup> Despite the long hours spent in the radio studio, in the basement of the Ministry of Telecommunications, the job of newsreader was not especially demanding and Alberti was not idle during the eleven months he lived in Paris. He had never allowed himself, even during the most desperate times of the Civil War, to be overwhelmed by his circumstances to the degree that he was reduced to silence, and while in Paris, by continuing to write, he

<sup>10</sup>According to María Teresa León, the person who actually cost them their jobs in Paris and was ultimately responsible for obliging them to leave France was none other than Marshall Philippe Pétain, French Ambassador in Madrid in 1939-40 and an ardent admirer of Franco, particularly of his military prowess. She reports a conversation with the Director of French National Radio: “Ayer el *maréchal* Pétain ha hecho una intervención en el Parlamento hablando de ... Bueno, ya saben ustedes que es el embajador de Francia en Madrid [...] Y citó el nombre de ustedes diciendo que enemigos del régimen franquista hablan por la radio de Francia” “Yesterday Marshall Pétain spoke in Parliament of...Well, you know that he's the French Ambassador in Madrid [...] And he quoted your names remarking that enemies of the Francoist regime were speaking on French radio”, pp. 397-98.

reaffirmed his conviction that “life” and “poetry” were inextricably linked, the latter feeding constantly off the former.<sup>11</sup> However, in the comments he devotes to those months in his autobiography he refers only to the way he combined work on a translation of Racine’s *Britannicus*, undertaken somewhat whimsically, with poems that would ultimately form part of *Entre el clavel*: “Aquella traducción yo la alternaba con algunos poemas para un nuevo libro, que lo terminaría en Buenos Aires, titulándolo al fin *Entre el clavel y la espada*” “I alternated that translation with some poems for a new book, which I was to finish in Buenos Aires, finally giving it the title *Between the Carnation and the Sword*” (*La arboleda perdida* *The Lost Grove*, 2, 129). He makes no mention either of *La arboleda perdida*, begun in Madrid and continued in Paris, or of *Vida bilingüe*, even though these latter poems were clearly composed at the same time.<sup>12</sup>

The fact that Alberti attached only a qualified importance to *Vida bilingüe* may reflect the poet’s own view that, like so much of the poetry he wrote during the war, it is a book that is emphatically rooted in the circumstantial immediacy of events and experiences in Paris and represents an attempt to reproduce that directly, with the minimum of mediation. In an interview with Benjamín Prado, following the award of the Cervantes prize in 1983, in answer to a question concerning how his contacts with the language of the new communities he encountered in exile enriched his own writing, Alberti commented on *Vida bilingüe* in the following terms:

En este libro yo quería un poco reproducir el estado de ánimo de aquellos primeros días franceses, la confusión de no saber, en realidad, muy bien dónde íbamos a ir, qué iba a ser de nosotros. Pero quería contar esos momentos tal como eran, sin demasiada literatura, digamos, reproduciendo las palabras, las pocas palabras de francés que repetían continuamente los atemorizados españoles, siempre a punto de ser enviados a un campo de concentración o, lo que era peor, devueltos a la España franquista. Bueno, pues ese lenguaje atemorizado de los emigrantes y nuestro desorden es lo que se recoge en *Vida bilingüe de un refugiado español en Francia*.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>María Teresa León herself draws attention to this when she remarks on their state of mind on arriving in France: “Habíamos conseguido reponernos, trabajar, escribir” (*Memoria*, 390). She also describes how in 1939, despite the circumstances, she managed to complete her novel *Contra viento y marea*, published the following year (390-91). In an interview with Benjamín Prado, Alberti described his entire poetic work as “episodios de mi vida”, “Rafael Alberti, entre el clavel y la espada”, p. 97.

<sup>12</sup>In their sub-titles, both *Vida bilingüe* and *Entre el clavel y la espada* are signalled as dating from the same years (1939-1940).

<sup>13</sup>In the interview referred to in note 11, p. 95.

In this book I wanted to try to reproduce my state of mind in those first days in France, the confusion that came in fact from not knowing very clearly where we were going to go, what was going to happen to us. But I wanted to recount those moments as they were, without being too literary, let's say, by reproducing the words of French continually repeated by the frightened Spaniards, always on the point of being sent to a concentration camp or, even worse, returned to Francoist Spain. Well then, that frightened language of the emigrants and our disorder, is what is gathered in *Bilingual Life of a Spanish Refugee in France*.

This is a fair but incomplete description of the book. It is true that several poems express the fear Alberti mentions here and all of them incorporate snippets of French as signals of the alien and threatening environment in which he and his fellow refugees were living at the time; but there is much more to the book than that. The writer gave a fuller account of the context in which the poems were written and the range of emotions they sought to accommodate in the introductory note, dated 1968, that the 1988 edition of his *Poesía 1939-1963* carries:

Despertar, de pronto, en París, después de más de dos años en Madrid, nuestra invencible, hasta ser traicionada, capital de la gloria. Había comenzado la España peregrina, la amargura sin fin del "español del éxodo y del llanto", que diría León Felipe. Rebosaban los campos de concentración franceses, muriendo a miles nuestros soldados —nuestro pueblo—, anhelando que algunas buenas manos amigas los liberasen de aquellos nuevos infiernos.

Con esta mezcla de dolor y angustia, con el terror y la persecución policial, con el espanto de la segunda gran guerra ya empezada, con la agonía de no saber nuestro destino ante las tropas nazi en avance hacia París, con la burla mordiente al comprobar la indiferencia y el miedo de tantos, escribí estos poemas biográficos, salpicados de aquellas palabras francesas —verdaderas espinas algunas— tan repetidas entonces entre los refugiados españoles. (35)

To wake up, suddenly, in Paris, after more than two years in Madrid, our invincible, till it was betrayed, capital of glory. Pilgrim Spain had begun, the endless bitterness felt by the "Spaniard of exodus and weeping" as León Felipe put it. French concentration camps were overflowing causing the death of thousands of our soldiers — our people— yearning for some friendly helping hands to free us from those new hells.

With this mixture of pain and anguish, with police terror and persecution with the fright of the Second Great War already underway, with the agony of not knowing our fate in the face of Nazi troops advancing on Paris, with the mordant joke of confirming the indifference and fear of so many people, I wrote these biographical poems, spattered with these French words —some of them real thorns— which were repeated so often then among the Spanish refugees.

Everything that Alberti says here is entirely accurate and understandable. I would even say that from a thematic and biographical point of view, it is unavoidable and predictable, and therefore requires little commentary. What is new and intriguing about these poems, on the other hand, are the strategies of expression that the writer uses in order to convey the sense of that particular moment of his own personal history and the history of Pilgrim Spain.

The first point worth making is that there is a clearly discernible overlap with the combative rhetoric of the war. Conditions in France were clearly as harrowing in their own way as those in Spain had been; the "desorden" he refers to in 1983 when talking about Paris in the spring of 1939 echoes the allusion to the "desorden impuesto" "imposed disorder" of the war years, evoked in the 1938 poem "Para luego", already quoted. And since the events were still acutely present in the poet's experience, it is understandable that he falls back on occasions to the "urgente gramática necesaria" of earlier writing. *Vida bilingüe* contains expressions of the pride the speaker feels at his association with the popular struggle and his active participation in it:

Yo tenía un fusil, yo tenía	I had a rifle, I had
por gloria un batallón de infantería,	for glory an infantry battalion
por casa una trinchera. (1, 37)	for a house a trench.

It also offers descriptions of the horrors of war and the human sacrifice it exacted:

Tenía sol, tenía  
libros, libros y libros  
que daban a la luz cuando se abrían.  
Flores,  
en medio de explosiones.  
Geranios y rosales que estallaban  
lo mismo que la sangre de los niños,  
niños descabezados que volaban  
hasta quedar asidos de los árboles  
y las rotas canales  
de los últimos pisos. (2, 39)

I had sun, I had  
books, books and books  
that looked out on to the lights when they were opened.  
Flowers,  
in the midst of explosions.  
Geraniums and rose trees that exploded  
just like the blood of the children,  
beheaded children who flew



till they were taken hold of in the trees  
and the broken pipes  
of the top apartments.

There are evocations of the heroic resistance of Madrid's population as it overcomes the deprivations of the war to reassert to the entire world the exemplary nature of its defence of freedom:

Madrid vencía y resistía  
con un poco de pan  
amasado por los soldados,  
y bajo un cielo continuo de granadas  
dormía y trabajaba  
asombrando hasta a las raíces de la tierra,  
conquistando hora a hora y dolor a dolor  
el ser la capital del honor  
y las libertades del mundo.  
(Madrid soñaba esto  
y diariamente lo escribía,  
mientras que turbias manos  
lo mataban y lo vendían.) (3, 41)

Madrid was overcoming and resisting  
with a little bread  
kneaded by the soldiers  
and beneath a continual sky of grenades  
it slept and worked  
astonishing even the roots of the earth,  
winning hour after hour and suffering after suffering  
the title of capital of honour  
and the liberties of the world.  
(Madrid was dreaming this  
and daily writing it,  
whilst muddy hands  
were killing it and selling it.)

What all these examples have in common, beyond the echoes they contain of the poetry of war, with its praise of courage and its denunciation of the savagery of fascism, is the use of the imperfect tense: entirely apposite for the description of realities and experiences that lie in the past. There is, after all, a grammar of nostalgia as there is a rhetoric of battle. But given the proximity of that past and the way it still haunts and hounds the poet's sensibility, this grammatical coherence is sometimes upset. The immediate past spills over into the present, blurring these temporal distinctions. This is reflected in the combinations of past and present tenses in lines like the following:

Allí vive Madrid, allí vivía ... (2, 40) There lives Madrid, there it lived  
 Arde Madrid. Ardía Madrid burns. It was burning  
 por sus cuatro costados ... (4, 42) on all four sides...

This fusion of “then” and “now” —the simultaneous experience on an emotional level of both past and present— is also conveyed in the typographical layout of the poems. Verses of unequal length are set alternately on different sides of the page, suggesting this oscillation between different times and places. Consider the way poem 5 is presented:

<p>La Closserie des Lilas.</p> <p>Madrid, Madrid morado y violeta pálido. ¡De la Casa de Campo! Por la Casa de Campo.</p> <p>No, no son explosiones ni son tampoco balas. Lilas de cuerpo lila era lo que estallaba.</p> <p>¡Ay, cúrame esta herida con agua! Mejor con hojas, mejor con agua sola. No. Con hojas y con agua, mejor.</p> <p>Que por el Luxemburgo no pasa nada, nada.</p> <p>No pasa nadie, ¡ay!</p> <p>... mejor con agua y hojas, Manzanares.</p>	<p>La Closserie des Lilas.</p> <p>Madrid, purple and pale, violet Madrid of the Casa de Campo. Around the casa de Campo.</p> <p>No, they are not explosions nor are they bullets either. Lilacs of lilac body were what was exploding.</p> <p>Oh, cure me this wound with water! Better with leaves, better with water alone. No. With leaves and with water, better.</p> <p>Along the Luxemburg nothing, nothing is happening.</p> <p>No one is passing, alas!</p> <p>...better with water and leaves, Manzanares.</p>
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The speaker’s consciousness shifts from one location to another, drifting from Paris to Madrid and back again, confronting one reality with another, experiencing them in one confused and muddled “now”. It is interesting to see how an observation in one context —“Que por el Luxemburgo / no pasa nada, nada” “Along the Luxemburg / nothing, nothing is happening.”— leads him, by association, to another where the same word, in this case the verb “pasar” “to pass by”, is charged with a different meaning.

What these texts point to is the poet's reluctance to relinquish a past in order to embrace the present. Whereas he felt defined and fulfilled by the past, he is unnerved by his equivocal status in the present. In the opening poem of the book, the plaintive lines "Yo fui, yo fui, yo era / al principio del Quinto Regimiento" "I was, I was, I was at the beginning one of the Fifth Regiment" (1, 37) register both an emphatic attachment to an ennobling past and an uncertainty as to the current status of that past, hesitatingly relegated to an unrecoverable time. What is difficult for the speaker, as this poem goes on to suggest, is to make sense of the relationship between "then" and "now", to see clearly exactly where he finds himself in the "now" and to accept it:

Pensaba en ti, Lolita, mirando los tejados de Madrid. Pero ahora ...	I was thinking of you, Lolita, looking at the roofs of Madrid. But now...
Este viento, esta arena en los ojos, esta arena ...	This wind, this dust in my eyes this dust...
	(Argelés! Saint-Cyprien!) (1, 37)

The enigmatic allusion to the unidentified "Lolita" is positively charged but it immediately collides with the painful associations of the present that blind the speaker, forcing him to acknowledge, albeit in liminal brackets, the desolate realities of the concentration camps on the beaches of southern France.

The fragment above, with its unfinished sentences, parenthetical asides and bare exclamations is a reminder that, just as in the trauma of war, so in the initial immersion in exile, language itself falters, becomes fatigued, uncertain, fractured. This breakdown of language provides, paradoxically, the most effective means of conveying the speaker's own sense of disorientation and confusion. This is to say that these sensations are enacted textually, in the very substance of the poems. This effect is partly achieved, as the book's title suggests, by the simultaneous use of two languages, and occasionally three, since the odd word of English is slipped in too.<sup>14</sup> The mixture of languages serves to represent what the book's opening poem laconically refers to as "la vida de la emigración" "the life of emigration" (1, 38). The flow of the speaker's native Spanish – the language of his feelings and memories – is constantly interrupted by the intrusion of the alien language of his hosts. The two languages, inhabiting the same space and time, sometimes awkwardly coexist as when a question in one —"Quelle heure est-il monsieur?"— is answered in the other: "Hora de reunirse en Comité /

<sup>14</sup>In poem 8 the leavetaking is done trilingually: "Au revoir! / Good bye! / ¡Salud!" (8, 49).

para seguir salvando a la cultura / de esta ola de basura ..." "Time for a Committee meeting / to go on saving culture from this wave of garbage..." (2, 40). The two can be artificially fused to produce hybrid phrases like "la Francia de la liberté" (1, 37) or "la Francia des Actualités" (1, 38) or to combine the private thought with the words that others use in public: "De 'quelque part' muy pronto saldrá un barco" "From 'quelque part' very soon a boat will come". (8, 47)

But the French that the speaker overhears or incorporates into his own reflections is often splintered and meaningless: contradictory, as in the repeated lines "Mais oui, monsieur. – Mais non ...", or absurdly ironic, as in the empty rhetoric of the official French revolutionary tradition: "Vive la Garde Républicaine! / Aux armes, citoyen!" (3, 42). What lodge themselves in his mind are fragments of French poems – "Il pleut / – pardon – / sur mon coeur" (4, 43) – that are manifestly incongruous given his current circumstances, or else arbitrary items glimpsed on a French menu: "Des pommes de terre. / Entrecôte" (3, 41) or mechanically repeated from an advertisement: "DUBO DUBON DUBONNET" (3, 41). The overwhelmed, disorientated consciousness of the speaker can only register vague, uncertain sensations, articulating in one-word sentences, telegraphic affirmations of time and space, half in French and half in Spanish:

Minuit.  
Porte de Charenton o Porte de la Chapelle.  
Un hotel.  
Paris. (1, 38)

Midnight.  
Porte de Charenton or porte de la Chapelle.  
An hotel.  
Paris.

But there is more to the disruption and breakdown of language than this. Elsewhere, outside the "bilingual" context in which the speaker finds himself, the syntax becomes severely truncated, reduced to an absolute minimum necessary for communication. As in the fragment cited above, a single word is often all that he can manage: "Andar" "Walk" (3, 41), "Terror" (4, 43) or "Motores" "Motors" (4, 43). Each carries such a heavy and complex emotional charge that elaboration is either impossible or pointless. The same could be said of the names that appear in the poems; they are simply enunciated and nothing more. Either language no longer has the resources to handle the sensations that crowd in on the speaker, or the speaker himself cannot rise to the challenge of offering even a semblance of narrative or description to gloss them: "El mar, ya. / Un abismo" "The sea, already / An abyss" (8, 48); "Azoteas. Terrados" "Flat roofs, terraces (9, 49).

In such a situation, words tend to become merely arbitrary sounds and sentences are strung together in hollow, confused patterns devoid of meaning. Consider poem 7 which begins with the following curious statement:

Pis. Sigo estando en París. (7, 46)	Pis. I go on being in Paris.
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Here there is at least confirmation, albeit from an unlikely source, of the speaker's location; but the statement leads on whimsically as the association is mechanically and senselessly developed, as if in some pointless language exercise where the plural is required to follow the singular and the individual must be made to lead on to the universal:

El perro se hace pis, los perros se hacen pis, todos los perros se hacen pis. (7, 46)	The dog pisses, the dogs piss, all dogs piss.
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Words and phrases follow on from each other in meaningless incantations. Then the speaker's mind is led, almost by chance it seems, to a diatribe against the French, their hypocrisy, the farce of the whole organization of a corrupt and reactionary Europe:

Pis a la puerta del Printemps, pis al pie de la estatua de Danton, pis sobre la Revolución y los Derechos del Hombre. Pis reaccionario, pis burgués, pis de pacto de Munich, maniqués. (7, 46)	Piss at the door of the Printemps piss at the foot of the statue of Danton piss on the Revolution and the Rights of Man. Reactionary piss, bourgeois piss Pact of Munich piss, mannequins.
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In such a state communication can only be disjointed and illogical, though it can still be unexpectedly and dramatically focused by the realization that the destinies of all the inhabitants of Paris are bound together:

El Sena – ¡por Dios! –, pis, y pis la Tour Eiffel.	The Seine -for God's sake-, piss and piss the Eiffel Tower.
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Señora:

Madame:

¿ha dado usted a luz un perro? Pis. ¿Se salvará París? (7, 46)	have you given birth to a dog? Piss. Will Paris be saved?
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This failure and destabilization of language are transmitted in other ways too. Sentences repeatedly trail off into silence, unfinished or perhaps unfinishable. Scenes are punctuated with bracketed, marginalised comments, disconnected from the rest of the text. These can sometimes be immediate, distracted perceptions, poignant in their stark, lyrical intensity: “(Las gaviotas)” “The Seagulls” (8, 49); at other times, they are fragments of overheard, parallel conversations unrelated to what is going through the speaker’s mind: “(¡Jí, jí! / ¡Jí, jí! / C’est gai.)” “Hee, hee! / Hee, hee! / C’est gai.” (4, 43). Words are repeated, chanted emptily or despairingly, as if the simple act of repetition could endow them with the full meaning the speaker wishes to assign to them:

El Prado.	The Prado.
El Prado.	The Prado.
El Prado. (4, 42)	The Prado.
Cabrón,	Bastard,
cabrón,	bastard,
cabrón. (2, 39)	bastard.

Questions are framed in the same way: “¿Qué, qué, qué?” (1, 38) but left unanswered, perhaps because any attempt to answer would be futile. The questions themselves can be so absurd, engendered by fear, that they do not even require an answer:

¿Neptuno es alemán, es hitleriano y ataca en submarino? (9, 51)	Is Neptune German, Hitlarian and does he attack in a submarine?
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\* \* \*

Towards the end of the first poem, the speaker asks a pointed question:

¿Es que llegamos al final del fin o algo nuevo comienza? (1, 38)	Here we reached the end of the ending or is something new beginning?
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Although no answer is given in the text, an appropriate response to both parts of the question would be a resounding “yes”. The question is significant because it aptly frames the hybrid nature of *Vida bilingüe*. Situated at that point where one set of experiences merges into another, it describes how the confusion and uncertainty of the present (alien, hostile, contemptible) mingles with the vestiges of a past that is still fresh in the speaker’s mind and played out vividly within it. The poems depict a decentred speaker struggling to make sense of his oscillating emotions in his current surroundings. Forced to recognise that he is now “elsewhere” and “unhoused”, his self-assurance and self-definition falters. He flounders in a shifting, untrustworthy present that only engages him intermittently, and then only produces fear or contempt.



The final poem ends with a resolution, a firm imperative stemming from the realization that in order to restore harmony and to eliminate these stuttering ambiguities, he has to move forward and away: "Miremos a otro lado que no resuene a sangre" "Let's look the other so it doesn't echo with blood" (9, 53). This is accompanied by an equally firm conviction that such a move will disencumber the present and open up a less confused future, albeit on a different continent: "Bajo la Cruz del Sur / cambiará nuestra suerte" "Under the Southern Cross / our luck will change" (9, 53). The book ends, almost defiantly, on a note of hope and expectation, anticipating renewal:

América.  
 Por caminos de plata hacia ti voy  
 a darte lo que hoy  
 un poeta español puede ofrecerte. (9, 53)

America.  
 Along silver ways I am going towards you  
 to give you what today  
 a Spanish poet can offer you.

It is on the other side of the Atlantic that Alberti will recover a more stable language of lyrical self-expression and regain access to words that are still intact and whose sense has been restored. Meanwhile, *Vida bilingüe*, with its chaotic uncertainties and unsettled grammar, records the harrowing moment of transition from the Old World to the New, the passage from the past to a future as yet only imagined.

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**Alberti and the New Chronicle of America:  
A Study of *13 bandas y 48 estrellas***

"Every meeting," Rafael Alberti tells us, "implies a journey" and "every journey ... carries within it a story."<sup>1</sup> Thus, his book of 1935 *13 bandas y 48 estrellas* (*13 Stripes and 48 Stars*) is the story, the chronicle, of the long journey that Alberti undertook in 1935 through several countries in the Americas, from the United States to South America. The initial purpose of his trip, to inform of the situation of the Asturian miners, became a personal adventure, an encounter of "a travelling poet, friend of justice,"<sup>2</sup> with America, with its lands and its peoples, with its literature and with the kinds of discourse that had been written about this continent throughout the course of history. In this chronicle the journey acts as the structural element of the book: the main thread linking the different poems that comprise the book is the itinerary of the speaker, whose different destinations mark the structure and the rhythm of the work.

The visitor's external vision implies a distance between the observing subject and the otherness of what is observed, and thus, as is the case in the chronicles of the "discovery" and conquest, the representation of the Other and the relationship of the chronicler with that Other acquire special importance in this book. Through its treatment of that otherness Alberti's book can be situated between the Spanish chronicle and Spanish American anti-imperialist traditions, both of them being intertextually present in the book. For this reason the work is to be understood as engaging in a direct and dynamic dialogue with the discourse that both traditions had generated about the Americas, and the journey through these countries is also a journey through Hispanic literature and ideology.

As a new American chronicle the book implies a displacement of the colonialist relationship characteristic of the discourse of the chroni-

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<sup>1</sup>"Todo encuentro supone ya un viaje ... [t]odo viaje ... lleva dentro un relato." Rafael Alberti, "Encuentro en la Nueva España con Bernal Díaz del Castillo," *Prosas encontradas* (1924-1942) Ed. Robert Marrast (Madrid: Ayuso, 1970) 130. All translations of Alberti's texts are by Keith Ellis.

<sup>2</sup>"poeta viajero, amigo de justicias." *Ibid.* 141.

cles that understood the difference of the Other to be inferiority, and therefore, a justification for any kind of treatment that the "discoverer" wished to impose. The speaker of these poems, by contrast, seeks to understand difference and thus reduce the distance that separates him from the Other.

The book begins by emphasizing this attempt at closeness, revealed in the speaker's insistence on his ability to perceive more than the eyes can see, to "see" what is hidden by the morning mist that hovers over the arrival of his boat at the New York port in the poem "New York":

Alguien se despertaba pensando que la niebla  
ponía un especial cuidado en ocultar el crimen<sup>3</sup>

Someone awoke thinking that the fog  
was being especially careful to hide the crime.

The speaker identifies himself with that "someone" and expresses repeatedly his ability to uncover the hidden crime with the anaphoric repetition "Y era yo entre la niebla quien oía, quien veía mucho más y todo esto" (46) 'And I was the one in the fog who was hearing, who was seeing much more and all this', and the crime he is uncovering is the exploitation of Latin America, which underlies the wealth and power of Wall Street, presented as the epitome of U.S. capitalism. Thus, in its metaphoric dimension the fog may be identified with the official discourse of the United States about itself and Latin America, a discourse that is intended to hide and distort its actions on the continent. The knowledge of the crime is not expressed in terms of visual perception, but rather of a combination of perceptions that include smell and hearing. Thus, the metaphor that expresses the persistence of imperialism is "el enloquecedor vaho de petróleo," (45) 'the maddening whiff of petroleum' that engulfs everything "en un abrasador contagio de petróleo, / en una inabarcable marea de petróleo," (45) 'in a scorching contagion of petroleum, / in an uncontainable tide of petroleum' and is complemented by the sounds of exploitation ("un crujido de huesos sin reposo," (44) 'a ceaseless groaning of bones', "la voz de la propuesta de robos calculados," (44) 'the voice of the proposal for planned robberies'. On the other hand, the resistance to imperialism is perceived through a different sound, the voices "de agónicas naciones que me gritan / con mi mismo lenguaje entre la niebla," (46) ('of nations in agony that cry out to me / in my own language amid the fog'), voices that allow for the possibility to invert the situation, a possibility expressed through the inversion of the previous metaphor: the oppressive "enloquecedor vaho de petróleo," (45) 'maddening whiff of petroleum' will become "...

<sup>3</sup>Rafael Alberti, *13 bandas y 48 estrellas* (1935; Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1985) 43.

una justa / libertadora llama de petróleo," (47) '... a just / liberating flame of petroleum'.

This ability to see synaesthetically expressed in the first poem, this confluence of perceptions that helps the speaker to "see" what the eyes alone cannot perceive, makes it clear that the book's vision of the Americas is not the result of a casual contact with the continent, but rather it is a result of a combination of the poet's experience during his journey and his previous knowledge. This knowledge comes not from the nebulous and deceptive official discourse of the U.S. government, but from the voices that cry out to him, the anti-imperialist voices of the Latin American writers who reveal to him the human, social, economic and cultural American reality.

Thus the homage to those voices in the book, that is dedicated "A Juan Marinello y a todos los escritores antiimperialistas de América" (39) 'To Juan Marinello and to all the anti-imperialists writers in the Americas' and contains in the poem "Casi son" 'Almost son' a clear homage to Nicolás Guillén. To this gallery of Latin American names is added a U.S. writer, Langston Hughes, who denounced another manifestation of U.S. imperialism, the social relations with its domestic Other (the epigraph of the poem "Yo también canto a América" 'I too sing America' is a line from the Prelude to *The Weary Blues*, "I, too, sing America").

It is difficult, therefore, to agree with the opinion that "in the course of *13 bandas y 48 estrellas* we witness a discovery of America," as Aurora de Albornoz has suggested.<sup>4</sup> The speaker does not "discover" America; his journey does not present him with an unknown Other that would prompt him to improvise a representation, as the chronicles of the "discovery" and conquest had done. We have here a speaker who already knows and recognizes as valid the representations that the Other has made of themselves, in contrast to the ancient Spanish chroniclers who limited themselves to silencing the Other and speaking in their name. The book in this way associates itself with the American anti-imperialist tradition, although it substitutes with a song of solidarity the collective song of, for example, José Martí, Rubén Darío, Nicolás Guillén and, later, Pablo Neruda, in which the individual voices are made more powerful by the fact that they become spokespersons for "nuestra" ('our') América. The speaker, in his song of solidarity, joins his voice to that "we," as is shown in the poem "El Salvador" in which, by alternating between third-person plural and first-person plural, the speaker offers his participation in the song and in the struggle, transforming the initial "they" into a "we" of powerful resonance:

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<sup>4</sup>Aurora de Albornoz, "Estudio preliminar," *13 bandas y 48 estrellas*, de Rafael Alberti (1935; Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1985) 11. (My translation).

Presidente: amarillo te verán, te veremos.  
Doce mil, quince mil hombres desenterrados,  
de pie los esqueletos, rígidos, fusilados,  
te colgarán la vida. Mejor: te colgaremos.

Quién es el salvador de El Salvador sabremos.  
Sabrán. Y por los pueblos y por los despoblados,  
que tú volviste rojos ríos desamarrados,  
rojas banderas altas sembrarán, sembraremos. (79)<sup>5</sup>

President: you will seem yellow to them, to us.  
Twelve thousand, fifteen thousand disinterred men,  
their skeletons standing, rigid, shot,  
will hang life out of you. Rather: we will hang you.

We shall know who is the saviour of El Salvador.  
They will know. And along towns and deserted places,  
that you turn into red swollen rivers,  
they will, we will, plant soaring red flags.

Solidarity discourse in its highest form of expression results from the incorporation of some key elements of anti-imperialist literature as for example in the idea of Latin American unity. In "Yo también canto a América" the poem is sung to all the American peoples, who are all united in a liberating project:

Que desde el golfo mexicano suene  
de árbol a mar, de mar a hombres y fieras,  
como oriente de negros y mulatos,  
de mestizos, de indios y criollos.

Suene este canto, no como el vencido  
letargo de las quenas moribundas,  
sino como una voz que estalle uniendo  
dispersa conciencia de las olas.

Tu venidera órbita asegures  
con la expulsión total de tu presente.  
Aire libre, mar libre, tierra libre.  
Yo también canto América futura. (114)

That from the Mexican gulf it should sound  
from tree to sea, from sea to men and animals,

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<sup>5</sup>Neruda later uses the same device in his poetic homage to Alberti in the *Canto general* *General Song* to express his own solidarity with the exiled poet: "Y a ti sí que te deben, y es una patria: espera. / Volverás, volveremos..." ('And you, certainly, are owed something, which is a homeland: wait. / You will return, we will return...') Pablo Neruda, "A Rafael Alberti (Puerto de Santa María, España)," *Canto general* (1950; Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1982)371. (Translation by Keith Ellis.)



orienting blacks and mulattoes,  
mestizos, indians and creoles.

Let this song sound, not like the conquered  
lethargic ones of the moribund flutes,  
but like the voice that explodes uniting  
the dispersed consciousness of the waves.

You assure your future orbit  
with the total expulsion of your present.  
Open air, open sea, open land.  
I too sing the future America.

The defence of Latin American unity, in which the voices of José Martí, Rubén Darío and so many others resound, is also manifested in the organization of the book. The journey as a structural element in this book gives it an organic unity that emphasizes the unity of the Spanish-speaking continent and the necessary confluence of its destiny in its struggle against the economic and cultural dominance of the U.S. In the face of that basic unity, nevertheless, there is a recognition of the local differences; they are expressed by the thematic, formal, and metrical diversity of the different parts of the whole, that are made to adapt to the specific nature of the different areas (a diversity that displays splendidly Alberti's exceptional formal versatility).

The treatment in the book of these American discourses about America carries with it a re-evaluation of another type of representation, of an external kind, which comes mainly from Spanish colonialist discourse. In "Cuba dentro de un piano (1900)" 'Cuba within a piano (1900)' the speaker, while recalling his family in the context of Cadiz at the end of the nineteenth century, also alludes to the national sorrow over the loss of the last of the colonies, a loss that had aggravated the crisis in a country that for centuries had thought of itself as an empire:

Mi tío Antonio volvía con aire de insurrecto.  
La Cabaña y el Príncipe sonaban por los patios de El Puerto.  
(Ya no brilla la Perla azul del mar de las Antillas,  
Ya se apagó, se nos ha muerto).

*Me encontré con la bella Trinidad...*

Cuba se había perdido y ahora era de verdad.  
Era verdad,  
no era mentira,  
un cañonero huido llegó cantándolo en guajira.

*La Habana ya se perdió.  
Tuvo la culpa el dinero...*

Calló,  
Cayó el cañonero. (63-64)

My uncle returned with an air of insurrection about him.  
La Cabaña and el Príncipe were heard along the patios of El  
Puerto.  
(The blue Pearl of the sea of the Antilles no longer sparkles.  
Its light has gone out, it has died on us).

*I found the beautiful Trinidad...*

Cuba had been lost and now it was truly so.  
It was true,  
it wasn't a lie.  
A fleeing gunboat came singing of it in peasant style.

*Havana is already lost.  
Money was to blame...*

The gunboat was silent.  
It sank.

The superficial knowledge of Cuba and its reality (an example of colonial ignorance and indifference) is expressed by reducing Cuba to nothing more than its popular music, certain fragments of which are inserted in the poem. The speaker shows in the final lines the need to rise above colonial lament and superficial quaint knowledge in order to be able to see the true impact of 1898, that meant for Cuba the beginning of imperial domination:

Pero después, pero ¡ah!, después  
fue cuando al Sí  
lo hicieron YES. (64)

But afterwards, but, oh!, afterwards  
came the time when they turned *Sí*  
into YES.

In their interpretation of this poem critics have traditionally placed more emphasis on the autobiographic element of nostalgia, the expression of memories of stories and songs Alberti heard in his childhood.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>For example, Antonio Jiménez Millán states: "Lo que sobresale en este poema no es tanto el alegato contra el imperialismo expresado al final de forma irónica..., sino el componente biográfico, centrado en el recurso de las narraciones que escuchaba el poeta, en su niñez y adolescencia, acerca de la guerra de Cuba." 'What stands out in this poem isn't so much a case against imperialism, expressed at the end in ironic form... but the autobiographical component, centred on the recollection of the narrations that the poet heard, in his childhood and adolescence, about the Cuban war.' *La poesía de Rafael Alberti (1930-1939)* (Jerez de la Frontera: Diputación Provincial de Cádiz, 1984) 143. (My translation.)

But they have failed to emphasize the function of these elements within the whole poem, in which the speaker moves from gathering the collective voice of lament to being the individual voice of historical reevaluation that corrects the collective perception and distances himself from it by his superior understanding of the Other. This displacement is expressed through the different treatment of music in the two parts of the poem. In the first part the inclusion of lines of popular songs in a collage format, that is not really integrated in the rest of the poem but instead acts as a counterpart, reflects the abyss that separates both groups of humans:

Cuando mi madre llevaba un sorbete de fresa por sombrero  
y el humo de los barcos aún era humo de habanero.

*Mulata vueltabajera...*

Cádiz se adormecía entre fandangos y habaneras  
y un lorito quería hacer de tenor.

*... dime dónde está la flor  
que el hombre tanto venera. (63)*

When my mother wore a strawberry sherbet as a hat  
and the smoke from the ships was still Havana smoke.

*Mulatta turned upside down...*

Cadiz used to go to sleep among fandangos and habaneras  
and a parrot on the piano wanted to be a tenor.

*... tell me where is the flower  
that a man so worships.*

In the second part the interest of the speaker to reduce the abyss is shown not only in that reference to the change from Spanish colonialism to U.S. imperialism, but also in the integration of popular music into the lines of the poem, which takes on a *son* rhythm that resembles some of Guillén's verses:

Pero después, pero, ¡ah!, después  
fue cuando al Sí  
lo hicieron YES. (63)

"Cuba dentro de un piano (1900)" introduces another element that pervades the whole book: the interpretation of the exotic and the picturesque as a colonial manifestation by which idealized representations distort and trivialize the reality of the Other. In "20 minutos en la Martinique (Port de France)" '20 minutes in Martinique (Port de France)' the poet emphasizes this inadequacy of exoticism as a means of

representing the Other, by using as a basis the contrast between his memories of rum in his recollections of Cadiz and in his American experience:

Calor de ron pasado por suaves maderas,  
 esperando las bajas bodegas de los barcos  
 junto a los cobertizos sucios de la aduana.  
 Volvéis de pronto a mí, ahora en el trópico,  
 gaditano perfume de barriles,  
 alboreando toneles por los embarcaderos tendidos a los pies de las  
 pescaderías  
 saliendo de la noche. (107)

The heat of rum passed through gentle woods,  
 waiting for the cellars of the boats  
 next to the dirty customs sheds.  
 You return suddenly to me, now in the Tropics,  
 the perfume of barrels from Cadiz,  
 kegs that appear on the piers stretched out at the feet of the fish  
 markets  
 coming out of the night.

That memory contrasts with the observation of rum in its real social context, which breaks with the idealization of the past (“Pero no eres el mismo, / calor triste de ron que subes mareando las palmeras,” (107) ‘But you aren’t the same / sad heat of rum that rises dizzying the palm trees’) for now rum is understood in relation to the circumstances of exploitation of those who work to produce it. This precludes any distorting idealization:

Calor duro de ron,  
 sudor de negro,  
 clamor sordo de negro,  
 llanto oculto de negro,  
 alba negra de negro despertando. (108)

Hard heat of rum,  
 sweat of the black man,  
 deaf shout of the black man,  
 hidden weeping of the black man,  
 black dawn of the awakening black man.

The exploitation is expressed through the “sudor de negro” ‘sweat of the black man,’ which pervades a “clamor” ‘shout’ and a “llanto” ‘weeping’ that are respectively “sordo” ‘deaf’ and “oculto” ‘hidden,’ that is to say, kept unknown by the effect of idealization, but which once heard help to awaken an awareness of exploitation and injustice: “alba negra de negro despertando” ‘black dawn of the awakening black man.’

In “Islas y puertos del Caribe” ‘Islands and ports of the Caribbean’ the idyllic visions of yesterday are also contrasted with a present reali-

ty of misery and exploitation; but in this case a more complex network of allusions enriches the texture of the poem. In the first part, the speaker wonders about the local population in terms that bring to mind the representations written about them in the chronicles. The colonial discourse of chroniclers constructed the colonized peoples as being so inferior, that they were even considered to be on the margins of what is human. This was as much an expression of their difficulty in dealing with human otherness as an attempt to justify their intervention (conquest, assimilation and, in the final instance, at times, destruction):

¿Son hombres de rodillas sobre el mar,  
perros, terribles monos sentados sobre el mar,  
movidos por dos hojas de madera,  
gritando, aullando, limándose los dientes  
contra el filo movable de las olas que se mella en las quillas ...? (103)

Are they men kneeling upon the sea,  
dogs, terrible monkeys sitting on the sea,  
moved by two wooden leaves,  
shouting, moaning, filing their teeth  
with the movable file of the waves that damages itself on the keels ...?

The speaker, by way of contrast, emphasizes the living conditions caused by exploitation in order to inquire into the desolation he is witnessing:

o es el hambre desnuda, el hambre negra,  
la ruina nadando, la despoblada esclavitud hundiéndose,  
marineando, desnucándose desde las cuerdas flojas de los puentes  
contra el aguaje sucio que rodea los límites anclados de los barcos  
que pasan? (103)

or is it naked hunger, black hunger,  
swimming ruin, depopulated slavery sinking,  
taking to the sea, breaking its neck from the weak cords of the bridges  
against the dirty current that surrounds the anchored limits of the  
passing boats?

The question “¿Qué es? / ¿Qué es esto?” (103) ‘What is it? / What is this?’ functions as a link to the second part of the poem in which the observed reality is contrasted with images and dreams of the past:

¿El hallazgo quizá del mundo imaginado desde los aburridos pupitres  
del colegio  
de las islas misteriosas con gargantas de imán,  
voces perdidas, costas cambiables desorientando a los marinos,  
países imposibles situados en mares fijos,

sin color y sin aves de las lluvias,  
regidos por estrellas y soles petrificados? (103-104)

The discovery perhaps of the imagined world from the boring desks of  
primary school  
of mysterious islands with magnetised throats,  
lost voices, changeable coasts disorienting sailors,  
impossible countries situated in fixed seas,  
colourless and without birds of the rain,  
guided by stars and petrified suns?

The poem's construction on the basis of questions intensifies the contrast between those childhood dreams and what is being perceived by the speaker, whose discomfort is summed up in the final question "¿Es que al fin era esto la invitación al viaje?" (104) 'Was this really the invitation to the journey?'. And so the central question of the poem ("¿Qué es? / ¿Qué es esto?" (103) 'What is it? / What is this?') is not a question about the perceived reality, but rather about the repeated and unsatisfactory representation of that reality, based on the idealization of exoticism and on the adverse effect of colonialist discourse. Both of these factors derive from the observation of difference and they share the same capacity to distance the Other and distort his reality.

Alberti thus underlines the need to abandon this kind of idealized vision, which is the product, in many cases, of European ethnocentric fantasy. Such visions are especially harmful, as is shown in the poems "México: El indio" 'Mexico: The Indian' and "Casi son" 'Almost *son*' when they are used to define Latin America and the diverse human elements that comprise it, still in terms of the colonial relationship between Spaniards and indigenous people.

In the two poems that make up "México: El indio," exoticism is considered with regard to indigenous participation in the historical process of Mexico. In the first poem the indigenous population is identified with the natural elements, thus emphasizing their ties to the land. This opens the way to the reference to Spanish colonialism and U.S. imperialism, that have come to sever the connection of the indigenous people to the land and, by extension, of all the inhabitants of colonized Iberoamerica (as is expressed also in "New York" and "Yo también canto América"):

Todavía más fino, más fino, más fino,  
casi desvaneciéndose de pura transparencia,  
de pura delgadez como el aire del Valle.

Es como el aire.  
De pronto, suena a hojas,  
suena a seco silencio, a terrible protesta de árboles,  
de ramas que prevén los aguaceros.



Es como los aguaceros.

Se apaga como ojo de lagarto que sueña,  
garra dulce de tigre que se volviera hoja,  
lumbre débil de fósforo al abrirse la puerta.

Es como lumbre.

Lava antigua volcánica rodando,  
color de hoyo con ramas que se queman,  
tierra impasible al temblor de la tierra.

Es como tierra. (73-74)

He is still finer, finer, finer,  
almost disappearing from pure transparency,  
from pure thinness, like the air of the Valley.

He is like air.

Suddenly, he sounds like leaves,  
he sounds like dry silence, like a terrible protest of trees,  
of branches that foresee heavy showers.

He is like heavy showers.

He fades away like the eye of a dreamy lizard,  
sweet claw of a tiger becoming a leaf,  
weak light of a match when a door opens.

He is like light.

Ancient volcanic lava on the roll,  
color of a hole with burning branches,  
impassible land when the earth quakes.

He is like earth.

The second poem calls on the indigenous people to fight against those foreign representations that relegate them to the picturesque and the exotic, as a result of their idealization, which negates them as a relevant historical element. The speaker urges them to do this by reestablishing their connection to the land as well as to their past:

Contra el gringo que compra en tu retrato  
tu parada belleza ya en escombros,  
prepara tu fusil. No te resignes  
a ser postal de un álbum sin objeto.

...

Eres México antiguo, horror de cumbres  
que se asombran abatidas por pirámides,  
trueno oscuro de selvas observadas  
por cien mil ojos lentos de serpientes. (75-76)

Prepare your gun against the gringo  
 who buys in your portrait your halted beauty  
 that is now in ruins. Don't resign yourself  
 to being a postcard in a purposeless album.

...

You are ancient México, horror of peaks  
 that are surprised and subdued by pyramids,  
 dark thunder of forests observed  
 by a hundred thousand slow serpent eyes.

That connection will allow the indigenous people to make a valuable contribution to Mexican identity through miscegenation, the interrelation of indigenous and Spanish elements that requires overcoming their previous colonial relationship:

Contra los gachupines que alambican  
 residuos coloniales por sus venas,  
 prepara tu fusil. Tú eres el indio  
 poblador de la sangre del criollo.

Si él y tú sois ya México, ninguno,  
 ninguno duerma, trabaje, llore y se despierte  
 sin saber que una mano lo estrangula,  
 dividiendo su tierra en dos mitades. (76)

Prepare your gun against the Spanish settlers  
 who distil colonial residues in their veins.  
 You are the Indian, you people  
 the blood of the Creole.

If he and you are already Mexico, let neither  
 of you sleep, work, weep and awaken  
 without knowing that a hand is strangling you  
 dividing your land in two halves.

In turn, in the poem "Casi son" the rejection of the ethnocentric fantasy is shown in the context of *negrista* poetry, a frame of reference established by the contrast between a homage to Nicolás Guillén in the poem and an epigraph taken from Lope de Vega. The poem takes the form and rhythm of the "mulatto" poems of Guillén and also follows his formulation of Cuban cultural identity as the fusion of Hispanic and African elements, with an exhortation to react in a united fashion against the situation deriving from U.S. predominance:

Negro, da la mano al blanco,  
 dála ya,  
 dáselo ya.

Blanco, da la mano al negro,  
dala ya,  
dásela ya.  
Y al yanqui que viene y va,  
negro, dale ya,  
blanco, dale ya  
negro y blanco, dadle ya.

Mano a mano,  
contra el norteamericano.

Negro, mano a mano,  
blanco, mano a mano,  
negro y blanco, mano a mano,  
mano a mano,  
mano a mano. (68-69)

Black man, give your hand to the white man,  
give it now,  
give it to him now.  
White man, give your hand to the black man,  
give it now,  
give it to him now.  
To the Yankee who comes and goes,  
black man, attack him,  
white man, attack him,  
black man and white man, attack him.

Hands together,  
against the U.S. man.  
Black man, hands together,  
white man, hands together,  
black man and white man, hands together,  
hands together,  
hands together.

The epigraph from Lope de Vega, "... negro tienen muerto" '... they have killed a black man,' underscores the importance of the homage to Guillén, who went beyond the *negrista* tradition by giving his poetry a new political dimension of profound exploration of the black contribution to national life, and by moving away from the picturesque which, from the origins of the *negrista* tradition in the Spanish Golden Age had been an integral part of this tradition.

As we have seen in *13 bandas y 48 estrellas* Alberti distances himself considerably from the attitude of Spain to America that was prevalent at the time when he wrote this book of poetry. An example of this attitude is the rhetoric with which reactionary Spanish thinking invoked,

well into the 1930s, the continuation of the colonial influence of Spain in America through the concept of *hispanidad*, that had been advanced by Ramiro de Maeztu. He proposed that Spain exercise spiritual direction over the Spanish American countries. And, as is well known, that attitude would be institutionalized in the regime that emerged from the civil war.

Alberti's rejection of this concept is linked to an act of solidarity with those Latin American writers and thinkers who had dedicated themselves to developing their own formulation of the reality of the Americas, far from the influence of Spanish colonialism and U.S. imperialism. This act of solidarity would be reciprocated soon afterwards during the Spanish Civil War when several great poets of the Americas, Pablo Neruda, César Vallejo, Nicolás Guillén and Langston Hughes among them, travelled to Spain to devote themselves to defending the same idea of Spain that Alberti had defended and that was consistent with his vision of the Americas. Guillén, for example, in his *España: Poema en cuatro angustias y una esperanza* (1937) '*Spain: Poem in Four Anguishes and One Hope*' included his self-definition as a "esclavo ayer de matorrales blancos dueños de látigos, / hoy esclavo de rojos yanquis azucareros y voraces,"<sup>7</sup> 'a slave yesterday of white overseers and their coleric whips, / today a slave of red, sugary, and voracious yankees,'. And in basing his own vision of Spain on his links with the working and exploited class of that country and not with Cortés nor with Pizarro, his book beautifully reciprocates Alberti's *13 bandas y 48 estrellas*.

*Ibiza, Spain*

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<sup>7</sup>Nicolás Guillén, "La voz esperanzada" *Obra poética* (La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1985) 189. (Translation by Keith Ellis.)

### Rafael Alberti et María Teresa León, traducteurs de Paul Éluard

#### 1. D'un jeune homme découvrant les avant-gardes et le surréalisme

Un jeune homme qui n'a pas encore quinze ans se procure en 1957, à Buenos Aires, une anthologie de l'oeuvre de Paul Éluard, sous le titre de *Poemas. 1917-1952*, due à Rafael Alberti et María Teresa León, publiée chez Lautaro (une maison d'éditions liée au Parti Communiste d'Argentine)<sup>1</sup>. Ce jeune homme venait presque de découvrir la poésie d'Éluard, grâce à des traductions publiées dans une étrange revue au format oblong allongé, 47 cm sur 16,3 cm, dont le nom est *A Partir de Cero*, datée du mois de décembre de 1952 et dirigée par Enrique Molina. Il sait déjà que Molina est un poète, car un ami de celui-ci, le Dr Aldo Pellegrini, médecin — tout comme le père du jeune homme —, poète, essayiste, critique d'art, lui a fourni et la revue et bon nombre de conseils de lecture et d'orientations dans le domaine de la culture. Un domaine, aux yeux du jeune homme en question, assez labyrinthique.

Les traductions qu'il a lues dans *A Partir de Cero* sont de Pellegrini et de Molina, tous deux poètes autant que traducteurs, tous deux passionnément surréalistes. Il a déjà lu un autre texte traduit par Molina: un texte d'Henri Michaux, extrait de *Plume*, dans une petite édition confidentielle. Ah, ce texte de Michaux l'a frappé, il lui a rappelé *Le procès* de Kafka, qu'il a déjà lu — en traduction espagnole bien sûr. Mais, pour l'instant, c'est Éluard qui l'attire le plus et voici que Pellegrini lui annonce la parution de l'anthologie d'Alberti-León. Il sait qu'Alberti est un poète espagnol prestigieux, mais il ne l'a pas lu. Il ignore tout de María Teresa León.

Ce jeune homme de quinze ans doit donc au couple Alberti-León le plaisir d'accéder à un large choix de textes éluardiens. C'était le temps, pour le jeune homme, lecteur passionné de cette anthologie, de la découverte d'une série d'écrivains qui ont été décisifs dans ces choix esthétiques et vitaux. Ce sera, ici, avant que de comparer quelques traductions castillanes de poèmes d'Éluard, le lieu d'un brin d'histoire d'un moment de la vie culturelle de l'Argentine et de Buenos Aires.

Ce jeune homme prenait, très au sérieux du haut de ses 15 ans, les prises de positions des surréalistes français et argentins. Or, il se trouve

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<sup>1</sup>*Poemas. 1917-1952*, Buenos Aires, Editorial Lautaro, 1957.

qu'il aurait fallu les prendre avec force grains de sel. Je lisais, car ce jeune homme n'est que l'avatar adolescent de l'auteur de ces lignes, les quelques revues à circulation confidentielle publiées alors par les groupes littéraires et artistiques d'avant-garde, dont celles suscitées par Aldo Pellegrini<sup>2</sup>, le fondateur, en 1926, du premier groupe surréaliste d'Argentine (et d'Amérique Latine): *Ciclo*, *Letra y Línea*, *A Partir de Cero*. Dans un numéro de *Letra y Línea*, j'avais lu une attaque en règle contre la lourdeur et l'ennui profond dégagés par la littérature espagnole dans son ensemble. Et alors que ce genre de textes tenait tout à la fois de la blague de potache aussi bien que du genre, bien parisien, de l'escar-mouche liée à l'existence des 'chapelles' artistiques et intellectuelles, je n'en buvais pas moins chaque mot comme s'il s'était agi d'un élixir de vie.

Sur le front politique, à l'époque, nulle vérité n'aurait su venir des communistes, les ennemis traditionnels des surréalistes, depuis la rupture, dans les années trente, du groupe parisien avec le Parti communiste français. Or, Éluard et son traducteur espagnol étaient bien des écrivains communistes honnis par le groupe parisien. Éluard restait néanmoins l'une des voix privilégiées de la poésie surréaliste, en tout cas pour les surréalistes argentins, ceux du deuxième groupe surréaliste réuni dans les années 1950 autour de Pellegrini<sup>3</sup>. Dans l'atmosphère si particulière de ces années-là (les années du maccarthysme aux Etats-Unis, de la fin du stalinisme en Union Soviétique, de la chute en 1955 de la dictature péroniste en Argentine), je me rappelle que Pellegrini m'avait dit en quelque sorte que « C'est, hélas, Alberti qui a traduit Éluard, mais c'est pas mal. Lisez-le, ça en vaut la peine, malgré tout ».

J'avais commencé à découvrir la poésie moderne, en 1954, dans un numéro de *Ciclo* de 1949 que j'avais trouvé par hasard parmi les livres de ma maison. Mon père, qui travaillait avec Pellegrini, s'est empressé de lui raconter l'intérêt de son fils pour la poésie. Pellegrini lui a alors exprimé son désir de me parler et de m'orienter. C'est ainsi que j'ai été en quelque sorte « adopté » par Aldo Pellegrini, comme il l'avait fait, et le ferait encore, je suppose, pour d'autres jeunes gens qu'il avait conseillés et guidés dans le domaine de la culture. Naturellement, il m'a immédiatement amené sur des terres surréalistes ou voisines, en me conseillant la lecture de poètes tels que Vicente Huidobro, Henri

<sup>2</sup>Aldo Pellegrini (1903-1974) faisait sa médecine en 1926, lorsqu'il a fondé à Buenos Aires un groupe surréaliste dont les membres étaient des camarades d'études, passionnés comme lui par l'avant-garde artistique et littéraire. On en retrouve certains en 1948-1949 dans la revue *Ciclo*.

<sup>3</sup>Benjamin Péret, par exemple, était anarchiste libertaire et, en tant que tel, il avait, dans l'immédiate après-guerre mondiale 1939-1945, publié un opuscule contre les poètes de la résistance française à l'occupant nazi, sous le titre de *Mort aux vaches et au champ d'honneur*. Il y avait aussi eu une publication surréaliste sur la question des commissions politiques des poètes de la Résistance, appelée *Le déshonneur des poètes*.



Michaux ou Novalis (ces deux derniers dans des traductions qui venaient de paraître en 1957 ou 1958). Si je ne savais que confusément qui était Alberti, j'ai toutefois lu attentivement son anthologie éluardienne faite en collaboration avec María Teresa León.

### Le plus tellement jeune homme en 2001

En l'an 2001, je redécouvre cette anthologie et si je pense aujourd'hui comme alors qu'il aurait fallu faire plus de place à l'Éluard le plus surréaliste, celui d'avant son adhésion à une poésie plus politiquement militante, celui d'avant 1936, je me laisse de nouveau convaincre par le travail d'Alberti-León. Et ce en dépit des remarques que j'aurai à faire sur telle ou telle différence d'interprétation sémantique ou grammaticale. Je voudrais qu'il soit clair qu'un tel travail d'amour de la part du couple traducteur dépasse de loin ma, tentative souvent immodeste et fort scolaire, de mettre en évidence certains principes généraux de la traduction du français en espagnol à travers plusieurs traductions de textes de Paul Éluard. J'ai, en effet, voulu mettre en parallèle le résultat du travail d'Alberti-León en espagnol avec celui d'Aldo Pellegrini. Il existe des ressemblances entre ces deux traductions, mais les quelques différences d'approche de tel ou tel vers, de telle ou telle tournure grammaticale, de tel ou tel mot, appellent des remarques qui n'ont pas toutes trait à la réussite poétique de l'une ou l'autre d'entre elles. Non, elles sont plus terre à terre et se rapportent au plan sémantique, au plan grammatical, au plan lexical.

### « Au cœur de mon amour » tel que traduit en espagnol par Rafael Alberti-María Teresa León, puis par Aldo Pellegrini

#### 1. Une traduction aussi littérale que possible, à titre d'introduction

Avant d'étudier les deux traductions espagnoles que nous avons retenues, nous donnons notre propre traduction, à titre purement illustratif. Nous l'avons voulue aussi littérale que les exigences de la langue espagnole le permettent. Nous suivrons ce même cheminement pour les traductions des autres poèmes que nous avons choisis.

N.B. Dans notre traductions nous offrons, pour certains mots ou certaines phrases, des solutions alternatives entourées par des {}. Nous avons signalé de cette même manière des mots que, selon nous, il aurait peut être fallu introduire dans le texte castillan.

De *Mourir de ne pas mourir* (1924) en Paul Eluard, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. I, préface et chronologie de Lucien Scheler, textes établis et annotés par Marcelle Dumas et Lucien Scheler, Paris, Gallimard, 1968, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade

« En el corazón de mi amor » de *Capital del dolor* (1926) traduit aussi littéralement que possible par Norberto Gimelfarb

**Au cœur de mon amour**

1. Un bel oiseau me montre la lumière  
2. Elle est dans ses yeux, bien en vue.

3. Il chante sur une boule de gui  
4. Au milieu du soleil.

5. Les yeux des animaux chanteurs  
6. Et leurs chants de colère ou d'en-  
nuï

7. M'ont interdit de sortir de ce lit.

8. J'y passerai ma vie.

9. L'aube dans des pays sans grâce  
10. Prend l'apparence de l'oubli.

11. Et qu'une femme émue s'en-  
dorme, à l'aube,

12. La tête la première, sa chute l'il-  
lumine.

13. Constellations,

14. Vous connaissez la forme de sa  
tête.

15. Ici, tout s'obscurcit:

16. Le paysage se complète, sang aux  
joues,

17. Les masses diminuent et coulent  
dans mon cœur

18. Avec le sommeil.

19. Et qui donc veut me prendre le  
cœur?

20. Je n'ai jamais rêvé d'une si belle  
nuit

21. Les femmes du jardin cherchent à  
m'embrasser —

22. Soutiens du ciel, les arbres immo-  
biles

23. Embrassent bien l'ombre qui les  
soutient.

24. Une femme au cœur pâle

25. Met la nuit dans ses habits

26. L'amour a découvert la nuit

27. Sur ses seins impalpables.

**En el corazón de mi amor**

Un pájaro hermoso me muestra la luz  
Que está en sus ojos, bien a la vista.

Canta sobre una bola de muérdago  
En medio del sol.

Los ojos de los animales cantores  
Y sus cantos de {enfado=enojo} o de  
aburrimiento

Me han prohibido salir de {esta  
cama=este lecho}

En {la≠el} que me pasará la vida.

El amanecer en países sin gracia  
Toma la apariencia del olvido

Y si una mujer emocionada {se duerme  
=se queda dormida}, al amanecer,

De cabeza, su caída la ilumina.

Constelaciones,

Conocéis la forma de su cabeza.

Aquí todo se oscurece:

El paisaje se completa, con sangre en las  
mejillas,

Las masas disminuyen y {corren por mi  
corazón=fluyen en mi corazón≠se  
hunden en mi corazón}

Con el sueño.

¿Y quién quiere pues

{cogerme=tomarme≠quitarme} el  
corazón?

{No he soñado jamás=Jamás he soñado}  
con una noche tan bella

Las mujeres del jardín tratan de  
besarme —

{Sostenes=Soportes} del cielo, los  
árboles inmóviles

Bien besan la sombra que los sostiene.

Una mujer de corazón pálido

{Pone la noche en su ropa=Se pone la  
noche en la ropa.}

El amor ha descubierto la noche

En sus senos impalpables.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 28. Comment prendre plaisir à tout?                                   | ¿Cómo {gozar de todo=encontrar placer en todo}?Mejor borrarlo todo.                |
| 29. Plutôt tout effacer.  |  |
| 30. L'homme de tous les mouvements,                                   | El hombre de todos los movimientos,  |
| 31. De tous les sacrifices et de toutes les conquêtes                 | {De} todos los sacrificios y {de} todas las conquistas                             |
| 32. Dort. Il dort, il dort, il dort.                                  | Duerme. Duerme, duerme,. duerme.   |
| 33. Il raye de ses soupirs la nuit minuscule, invisible.              | Raya con sus suspiros la noche minúscula, invisible.<br>No tiene ni frío ni calor. |
| 34. Il n'a ni froid, ni chaud.  | Su prisionero se ha evadido — para dormir.   |
| 35. Son prisonnier s'est évadé — pour dormir.                         | No está muerto, {duerme=está dormido}.   |
| 36. Il n'est pas mort, il dort.                                       |  |
| 37. Quand il s'est endormi,   | Cuando se durmió,  |
| 38. Tout l'étonnait,  | Todo lo asombraba,   |
| 39. Et il jouait avec ardeur,   | Y jugaba con ardor,  |
| 40. Il regardait,   | Miraba,  |
| 41. Il entendait.   | Oía.   |
| 42. Sa dernière parole:   | Su última palabra:   |
| 43. Si c'était à recommencer, "je te rencontrerais sans te chercher". | Si tuviera que empezar de nuevo, "te conocería sin buscarte'.                      |
| 44. Il dort, il dort, il dort.  | El {duerme, duerme, duerme=está dormido, dormido, dormido}.                        |
| 45. L'aube a eu beau lever la tête,                                   | Por más que el amanecer haya levantado la cabeza,                                  |
| 46. Il dort   | {El} Duerme=Está dormido}.   |

Vers 1 et 2. Le lien entre les vers 1 et 2 texte français se fait au moyen d'une reprise du sujet par le pronom conjoint, ce qui en castillan devrait se faire soit par l'omission du pronom, soit par un relatif — c'est ce que nous avons choisi de faire.

Vers 2 et 3. Le vers 2 du français se termine sur un point. La reprise du sujet « Un bel oiseau » du 1er vers se fait par un pronom sujet conjoint. En espagnol, il faudrait peut-être remplacer le point final du vers 2 par une virgule et relier plus directement le verbe cantar du vers 3 à son sujet par un gérondif espagnol: « Un pájaro hermoso [...]a la vista, / cantando sobre una bola de muérdago ». Il va sans dire que le mot français « gui », très léger et aigu, et sa traduction *muérdago* sont l'une de ses impasses sonores de toute traduction: non seulement le mot castillan est long, mais sa sonorité est tout à fait différente de l'original français! C'est le sempiternel problème du « cœur » français et du sonore et un brin brutal *corazón* de l'espagnol.

Vers 6 et 7. « Chants de colère » pose le problème de la traduction du mot « colère ». L'espagnol possède au moins quatre mots qui, selon

les contextes, le traduisent: *enfado*, *enojo*, *cólera*, *ira*, sans compter les possibilités offertes par des locutions comme « être ou se mettre en colère » dont le passage en espagnol peut se faire par *enfadarse*, *enojarse* (l'Amérique latine *se enoja* alors que l'Espagne préfère *enfadarse*), *ponerse furioso*. Comment donc traduire « colère » ici? S'agit-il de *enfado* ou *enojo* ou bien faut-il pousser le niveau vers le haut et traduire par *cólera*? Nous n'avons pas de réponse claire et, pour notre part, nous avons le sentiment que, dans ce cas précis, c'est indécidable. Nous avons donc opté pour {*enfado=enojo*}. En revanche, pour ce qui est du « lit » qui termine le vers 7, notre conviction est faite qu'il ne saurait s'agir d'un *lecho*, trop élevé dans le contexte, mais du bien banal *cama*.

Vers 7 et 8. Le lien entre le mot final « lit » et sa reprise dans le 8e vers se fait en français par le pronom adverbial « y » dont le castillan est dépourvu. Ici, comme dans le cas du point qui clôt le 2e vers, il nous apparaît plus approprié d'enchaîner par une construction relative, ce qui suppose la suppression du point: *Me han prohibido salir de {esta cama=este lecho}/ En {la≠el} que me pasaré la vida*. Il me semble que l'excès de respect pour ce découpage des phrases si particulier du français nuit ici à la fluidité de la traduction, mais on pourrait m'opposer le fait que ce n'est pas ça qu'Éluard a voulu et qu'il a plutôt cherché à conférer au 8e vers un ton très conclusif. Si c'est le cas, alors mieux vaut traduire: *Me han prohibido salir de {esta cama=este lecho}. / Me pasaré la vida en él*.

Vers 9. « L'aube dans des pays sans grâce », ce qui y frappe le plus fort c'est l'étrangeté des « pays sans grâce ». Ce sont pourtant les trois traductions possibles du mot « aube » que nous retiendrons. « L'aube » peut être rendu en espagnol par *el alba*, *la aurora*, *el amanecer*. Soit, mais si, du point de vue étymologique, c'est *alba* le plus proche du mot « aube » — et c'est bien *alba* le choix des traducteurs, les niveaux de langue et la fréquence du mot français et du mot espagnol ne sont pas les mêmes. En effet, le mot le plus usité en espagnol est *amanecer* — mais il s'étend sur cinq syllabes, alors que *alba* en possède tout juste deux. Est-ce que le poète français voulait-il que son texte soit aussi choisi ou songeait-il tout bonnement à l'aube de tous les jours, même celle « des pays sans grâce »? Le poème en son entier nous fait plutôt pencher du côté d'un niveau peu choisi, car ce qui y est d'un niveau très élevée, c'est plutôt la pensée même du poète, ses intentions, sa volonté de dérouter et d'étonner mais par le détour d'un montage extrêmement subtile des paradoxes et des ruptures qu'il exprime au moyen d'un vocabulaire assez lisse.

Vers 11 et 12. « Et qu'une femme émue s'endorme à l'aube, / La tête la première, sa chute l'illumine ». Le vers 11 est bien une proposition

hypothétique, mais n'en a pas la forme la plus courante. Les premiers mots du vers 12 « La tête la première » supposent une chute ou une plongée de la femme « émue », mais la chute n'apparaît qu'en fin de vers. Il semble y avoir dans ces deux vers une telle somme de significations comprimées qu'on en a le tournis.

Vers 16. « Sang aux joues » devrait se traduire en espagnol précédé d'une préposition *con*. C'est le genre de complément de manière se rapportant à une partie du corps humain que l'on construit en français sans préposition. On devrait toujours se demander s'il faut ou non, dans ces cas, en ajouter une en espagnol. C'est que sans préposition la construction est plus savante et de l'ordre du seul écrit.

Vers 20. Éluard en fait un alexandrin, si on le lit selon la tradition. Dans ce cas, si on voulait rendre ce vers par un *alejandrino* équivalent castillan, on devrait traduire: *No he soñado jamás una noche tan bella.*

Vers 25. Des deux traductions proposées {*Pone la noche en su ropa.* = *Se pone la noche en la ropa.*}, la seconde, qui semble la plus idiomatique car elle évite le recours au possessif, est frappée ici d'une certaine étrangeté. Elle lui vient de l'étrangeté même du propos d'Éluard, car on ne met pas tous les jours la nuit dans ses habits!

Vers 27. « **Sur** ses seins impalpables » : la préposition doit être traduite par *en*, non pas par *sobre* qui est ici inapproprié. Et ce à la différence du vers 3, où l'oiseau qui « chante **sur** une boule de gui » ne saurait chanter *en una bola de muérdago* — on pourrait interpréter le *en* comme un « dans » — mais évidemment *sobre!* Les traducteurs sont souvent peu regardants au sujet de ces différences entre les usages prépositionnels du français et de l'espagnol.

Vers 44 et 47. Il nous a semblé approprié de traduire ici le pronom sujet conjoint du français « **Il** dort », car on pourrait le prendre pour un impératif espagnol de deuxième personne du singulier: *duerme*, surtout celui du vers 44. Le pronom sujet du vers 46 pourrait être omis sans créer des confusions quant à *duerme*. Or, une autre solution nous vient à l'esprit, l'utilisation d'une périphrase avec *estar*: *Está dormido*. Si elle a pour elle le manque d'ambiguïté, elle est en revanche trop longue.

Nous n'avons fait des remarques que sur les vers où cela nous semblait nécessaire. On verra par la suite que les traducteurs d'Éluard — et qui sait si moi-même également — sont tombés dans les quelques travers de traduction que nous étudions. Mais, à notre décharge collective, nous insistons sur l'extrême difficulté des textes de Paul Éluard, surtout lorsque l'ambiguïté et l'obscurité délibérées y sont trop présentes.

## 2. Quelques difficultés posées par la disposition graphique du texte de « Au cœur de mon amour »

Voici le texte de la Pléiade, que nous avons suivi plus haut pour notre propre traduction du poème, mais qui n'est apparemment pas celui que Pellegrini et Alberti-León ont utilisé pour leurs traductions.

### Au cœur de mon amour

1. Un bel oiseau me montre la lumière
  2. Elle est dans ses yeux, bien en vue.
  3. Il chante sur une boule de gui
  4. Au milieu du soleil.
- \*
5. Les yeux des animaux chanteurs
  6. Et leurs chants de colère ou d'ennui
  7. M'ont interdit de sortir de ce lit.
  8. J'y passerai ma vie.
9. L'aube dans des pays sans grâce
  10. Prend l'apparence de l'oubli.
  11. Et qu'une femme émue s'endorme, à l'aube,
12. La tête la première, sa chute l'illumine.
13. Constellations,
  14. Vous connaissez la forme de sa tête.
  15. Ici, tout s'obscurcit:
  16. Le paysage se complète, sang aux joues,
  17. Les masses diminuent et coulent dans mon coeur
  18. Avec le sommeil.
  19. Et qui donc veut me prendre le coeur?
- \*
20. Je n'ai jamais rêvé d'une si belle nuit
  21. Les femmes du jardin cherchent à m'embrasser —
  22. Soutiens du ciel, les arbres immobiles
  23. Embrassent bien l'ombre qui les soutient.
24. Une femme au coeur pâle
  25. Met la nuit dans ses habits
  26. L'amour a découvert la nuit
  27. Sur ses seins impalpables.
28. Comment prendre plaisir à tout?
  29. Plutôt tout effacer.
  30. L'homme de tous les mouvements,
  31. De tous les sacrifices et de toutes les conquêtes
  32. Dort. Il dort, il dort, il dort.
  33. Il raye de ses soupirs la nuit minuscule, invisible.
  34. Il n'a ni froid, ni chaud.

35. Son prisonnier s'est évadé — pour dormir.
36. Il n'est pas mort, il dort.
37. Quand il s'est endormi,
38. Tout l'étonnait,
39. Et il jouait avec ardeur,
40. Il regardait,
41. Il entendait.
42. Sa dernière parole:
43. Si c'était à recommencer, je te rencontrerais sans te chercher.
44. Il dort, il dort, il dort.
45. L'aube a eu beau lever la tête,
46. Il dort

Alberti-León et Pellegrini semblent être partis d'un texte dont la disposition graphique est légèrement différente de celle adoptée par la très sérieuse édition de la Pléiade, d'où quelques différences dans leur ponctuation. Alberti-León, par exemple, mettent deux astérisques à la suite des quatre vers de la première strophe, ce qui correspond à un seul astérisque de séparation dans le texte de la Pléiade. Celui-ci contient en outre une nouvelle séparation marquée par un astérisque entre les 19<sup>e</sup> et 20<sup>e</sup> vers, ignorée par Alberti-León. Pellegrini respecte, lui, ces astérisques, mais, comme Alberti-León, il laisse un espace blanc entre les vers 36 et 37. Ajoutons que Alberti-León traduisent le vers 43 comme si c'en était deux: l'original étant « Si c'était à recommencer, je te rencontrerais sans te chercher », eux traduisent: « Si c'était à recommencer, / je te rencontrerais sans te chercher ». Si l'on ajoute que les responsables des œuvres complètes d'Éluard de la Pléiade remarquent à quel point il est difficile d'établir des textes éluardiens sûrs, l'auteur ayant souvent repris certains poèmes de tel ou tel ou recueil pour les placer dans tel autre ultérieur, avec, parfois, de légers changements... Bien que ce ne soit pas notre propos ici, de tels problèmes d'établissement du texte, ne sauraient être ignorés.

De *Mourir de ne pas mourir* (1924) in Paul Eluard, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. I, préface et chronologie de Lucien Scheler, textes établis et annotés par Marcelle Dumas et Lucien Scheler, Paris, Gallimard, 1968, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade

#### Au cœur de mon amour

1. Un bel oiseau me montre la lumière
2. Elle est dans ses yeux, bien en vue.
3. Il chante sur une boule de gui
4. Au milieu du soleil.

\*\*

De *Morir de no morir* (1924) in *Poemas* (1917-1952), selección, versión y prólogo de Rafael Alberti y María Teresa León, Buenos Aires-Barcelona, Argonauta, 1990, p. 24

#### En el corazón de mi amor

- Un pájaro hermoso me muestra la luz  
 Que está en sus ojos, bien presente.  
 Canta sobre una bola de muérdago  
 En medio del sol.

\*\*



- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 5. Les yeux des animaux chanteurs                        | Los ojos de los animales cantores                     |
| 6. Et leurs chants de colère ou d'ennui                  | Y sus cantos de cólera o cansancio                    |
| 7. M'ont interdit de sortir de ce lit.                   | Mehan prohibido salir de este lecho                   |
| 8. J'y passerai ma vie.                                  | Donde pasaré mi vida.                                 |
| <br>   |   |
| 9. L'aube dans des pays sans grâce                       | El alba en los países sin gracia                      |
| 10. Prend l'apparence de l'oubli.                        | Toma la apariencia del olvido.                        |
| 11. Et qu'une femme émue s'endorme,<br>à l'aube,         | Y si una mujer emocionada se duerme,<br>al alba,      |
| 12. La tête la première, sa chute l'illumine.            | Primero la cabeza, su caída la ilumina.               |
| <br>   |   |
| 13. Constellations,                                      | Constelaciones,                                       |
| 14. Vous connaissez la forme de sa tête.                 | Conocéís la forma de su cabeza                        |
| 15. Ici, tout s'obscurcit:                               | Aquí todo se oscurece.                                |
| 16. Le paysage se complète, sang aux joues,              | El paisaje se completa, sangre en las mejillas,       |
| 17. Les masses diminuent et coulent dans mon cœur        | Las masas disminuyen y resbalan en mi corazón         |
| 18. Avec le sommeil.                                     | Con el sueño.   |
| 19. Et qui donc veut me prendre le cœur?                 | ¿Y quién quiere agarrarme el corazón?                 |
| *  | *   |
| 20. Je n'ai jamais rêvé d'une si belle nuit              | Nunca jamás soñé una noche tan bella                  |
| 21. Les femmes du jardin cherchent à m'embrasser —       | Las mujeres del jardín buscan besarme                 |
| 22. Soutiens du ciel, les arbres immobiles               | Soportes del cielo, los árboles inmóviles             |
| <br>   |   |
| 23. Embrassent bien l'ombre qui les soutient.            | Abrazan bien la sombra que los sostiene.              |
| 24. Une femme au cœur pâle                               | Una mujer de alma pálida                              |
| 25. Met la nuit dans ses habits                          | Pone la noche en sus trajes                           |
| 26. L'amour a découvert la nuit                          | El amor descubre la noche                             |
| 27. Sur ses seins impalpables.                           | Sobre sus senos impalpables                           |
| 28. Comment prendre plaisir à tout?                      | ¿Cómo encontrar placer en todo?                       |
| 29. Plutôt tout effacer.                                 | Mejor borrarlo.                                       |
| 30. L'homme de tous les mouvements,                      | El hombre de todos los movimientos,                   |
| 31. De tous les sacrifices et de toutes les conquêtes    | De todos los sacrificios y todas las conquistas       |
| 32. Dort. Il dort, il dort, il dort.                     | Duerme. Duerme, duerme., duerme.                      |
| 33. Il raye de ses soupirs la nuit minuscule, invisible. | Borra con sus suspiros la noche minúscula, invisible. |
| <br>   |   |
| 34. Il n'a ni froid, ni chaud.                           | No tiene frío ni calor.                               |
| 35. Son prisonnier s'est évadé — pour dormir.            | Su prisionero se ha evadido — para dormir—.           |

36. Il n'est pas mort, il dort.	No está muerto, duerme.
37. Quand il s'est endormi,	Cuando se durmió,
38. Tout l'étonnait,	Todo le asombró,
39. Et il jouait avec ardeur,	Y jugaba con ardor,
40. Il regardait,	Y miraba,
41. Il entendait.	Y escuchaba.
42. Sa dernière parole:	Su última palabra:
43. « Si c'était à recommencer, je te ren- contrerais sans te chercher ».	« Si empezara de nuevo hubiera, te encontraría sin buscarte. »
44. Il dort, il dort, il dort.	Duerme, duerme, duerme.
45. L'aube a eu beau lever la tête,	Aunque el alba levante la cabeza,
46. Il dort	Duerme.

### 3. tel que traduit par Alberti-León

Vers 1. Une remarque s'impose : le mot « oiseau » du premier vers se traduit en espagnol par *pájaro* ou par *ave*, mais les deux traductions ont préféré *pájaro*, plus usité. *Ave* aurait cependant permis d'être plus près du décasyllabe français : *Un ave hermosa me muestra la luz* fait un endécasyllabe espagnol, alors que *Un pájaro*, y introduit une douzième syllabe.

Vers 2. Au deuxième vers, la locution « bien en vue » est traduite par *bien presente* — alors qu'on pourrait s'attendre à *bien a la vista* ou à *bien visible*, le choix semble néanmoins raisonnable. Alberti-León optent pour relier les vers 1 et 2 au moyen d'un relatif. Nous avons déjà signalé que cette solution nous semblait plus idiomatique que la juxtaposition des deux phrases sans reprise du sujet: *Un pájaro hermoso me muestra la luz/ Está en sus ojos, bien presente*. Relevons, par ailleurs, l'absence totale de ponctuation entre ces deux vers dans le texte de départ.

Vers 6. La solution choisie par Alberti-León paraît ici plus contestable, en ceci que « colère » traduit par *cólera* pourrait être pris par une excessive servilité au texte français. En effet, des traductions possibles du mot « colère », *cólera* est d'un niveau trop élevé, puisque si l'on pense à des locutions comme « être en colère », la traduction en est *estar enfadado*, *estar furioso*, alors que l'espagnol *cólera* correspond plutôt au niveau du mot « ire ». Si la traduction de « colère » par *cólera* n'est pas à rejeter, il faut se poser la question de sa justesse dans le contexte le plus proche et dans le contexte du poème au sens large. Dans ce même 6e vers, nous trouvons le mot « ennui », qu'Alberti-León traduisent par *cansancio*, c'est-à-dire « fatigue », alors que Pellegrini, comme nous verrons, le traduit par *hastío*, qui

prend « ennui » du côté de la lassitude morale et du dégoût. Il est en fait assez dur de savoir au juste de quel côté sémantique Éluard entend ce mot.

Vers 7 et 8. Ils posent, eux, un problème moins ardu, mais tout aussi important : « Les yeux [...] / et leurs chants [...] M'ont interdit de sortir de ce lit. / J'y passerai ma vie ». C'est la présence du pronom adverbial « y » qui permet en français de construire ces deux phrases séparées par un point, alors que l'absence d'un tel opérateur en espagnol oblige à construire le lien par un relatif qui traduit « où » : *donde* pour Alberti-León et Pellegrini. On peut tout aussi bien traduire par une locution relative analytique: « *salir de esa cama / en la que pasaré mi vida* ». Ajoutons qu'on voit souvent dans les traductions du français une hyperfidélité aux possessifs du français qui pourraient être, en espagnol, remplacés par des datifs possessifs, une construction dont la langue espagnole fait un usage assez large. Cela veut dire que dans « *salir de esa cama / en la que pasaré mi vida* », l'expression « *pasaré mi vida* » pourrait très bien être remplacée ici par « *me pasaré la vida* ».

Vers 9 à 12. Nous trouvons, au vers 9, « *El alba en los países sin gracia* », où le substantif *alba* peut tout aussi bien être traduit par *aurora* ou par *amanecer*. Ici, les similitudes purement étymologiques sont trompeuses: « aube » et *alba* n'ont pas la même fréquence dans les deux langues. Le substantif déverbal *amanecer* est celui dont l'usage est le plus fréquent. Alors, que faire dans ce cas? Penser au plus près du registre choisi par Éluard, si tant est qu'on puisse le déterminer avec précision, et, bien entendu, à la métrique. Les vers 9 et 10 sont des octosyllabes, le 11e un décasyllabe et le 12e fait, si l'on compte à la manière traditionnelle, 14 syllabes. Mais, avec une certaine liberté moderne, le 12e est un alexandrin libre. Quid de leurs pendants espagnols? Les 9e et 10e sont des décasyllabes, le 11e peut faire 15 ou 16 syllabes, dans le 12e, enfin, on peut y compter 14 syllabes et en faire un alexandrin castillan moyennant une licence qui ferait de *caí-da* un *caí-da* à deux syllabes. On n'a pas l'impression qu'Alberti-León y aient pensé. Surtout compte tenu du fait que n'importe quel traducteur se serait plutôt concentré sur la difficulté grammaticale et sémantique de rendre la construction « Et qu'une femme émue s'endorme, à l'aube », sans compter avec le véritable mystère, quant au sens, constitué par ces deux vers. Et en oubliant les différences de niveau de langue entre cette construction et la locution qui la suit associée normalement plutôt à des verbes comme qu'au verbe « s'endormir ». Tout cela n'efface pas le fait que le sens véhiculé semble être « il suffit qu'une femme émue tombe endormie, à l'aube, la tête en premier lieu, pour que sa chute l'illumine ». Honnêtement, en

tant que traducteur et, par là, dans le devoir de donner une interprétation aussi serrée que possible de l'original français, j'avoue que l'affaire est loin d'être simple.

Vers 16. *El paisaje se completa, sangre en las mejillas*: Alberti-León ont choisi de suivre le français et de ne pas ajouter la préposition que, à notre avis, rendrait la phrase plus idiomatique en espagnol.

Vers 17. « Les masses [...] coulent dans mon cœur ? », Alberti-León traduisent « couler » par *resbalar* qui est plutôt « gliser » en français, on ne voit pas la raison de leur choix.

Vers 19. « Et qui donc veut **me prendre** le cœur ? » est rendu par *¿Y quién quiere agarrarme el corazón?*, ce qui provoque un petit sourire en coin de l'Argentin que nous sommes. On s'attendrait à ce que Alberti-León nous disent *cogerme el corazón*, puisqu'ils sont tous deux espagnols. Ils ont donc tenu compte du public rioplatéen qui allait lire leur texte et suivi l'usage du Río de la Plata, où *coger*, ayant pris le sens obscène de « baiser », est toujours remplacé par *agarrar* ou par *tomar*. Nous avons le soupçon qu'Éluard se sert de « prendre » pour dire plutôt « conquérir », comme une armée prend une ville ennemie, ou, peut-être, au sens de « déposséder ».

Vers 20. *Nunca jamás soñé* semble excessif pour rendre « Je n'ai jamais rêvé ». *Nunca jamás* serait plutôt la traduction de l'émphatique : « Jamais, au grand jamais ». Tel quel, le vers espagnol est un alexandrin et ses 14 syllabes rendent bien les 12 de l'alexandrin français.

Vers 21. Encore un alexandrin pas orthodoxe, mais l'espagnol ici se borne à traduire littéralement et ne fait pas de vers. On pourrait traduire : *Las mujeres del jardín tratan de darne besos*, mais on n'aurait ainsi qu'un meilleur semblant de vers. *Tratan de* est, par ailleurs, une façon plus correcte de traduire « cherchent à » que *buscan*, choisi par Alberti-León.

Vers 23. « Les arbres [...] / Embrassent bien l'ombre qui les soutient. » ne saurait devenir « **Abrazan bien** la sombra que los sostiene », pour deux motifs: le premier est que *abrazar* n'est pas ici la bonne traduction d'embrasser, qui est tout bonnement *besar*, le second tient à l'ordre des mots car « embrassent bien » doit être en espagnol *bien besar*. C'est qu'en général l'adverbe français « bien », placé en français après un verbe pour exprimer une action décidée et/ou énergique, se retrouve en espagnol, s'il est traduit par l'adverbe *bien*, avant le verbe.

Vers 24 et 25. On ne comprend pas très bien ce qui a pu se passer dans la tête d'Alberti-León ici: le « cœur pâle » de la femme devient *alma pálida*, et ses habits deviennent *sus trajes* ; c'est-à-dire, en rétrotraduisant: « Une femme à l'âme pâle / Met la nuit dans ses costumes ». Il nous semble que ce qu'il faudrait traduire est bien: *Una*

*mujer de corazón pálido/ Pone la noche en su ropa.* Le vers 25 pourrait se dire aussi: *Se pone la noche en la ropa*, en interprétant « met » comme si elle mettait un vêtement sur ses vêtements et en évitant en même temps le possessif direct moins idiomatique que le datif possessif que nous proposons. Est-ce bien ce qu'Éluard voulait dire ? Il y aurait cependant un autre angle d'approche des vers 24 à 27 par les rimes. En effet, Éluard nous donne une manière de quatrain rimé, car « pâle » est en assonance avec « impalpables », de même que « nuit » et « habits » — qui est une rime par le son, mais non pas par l'orthographe. De ces quatre vers assonancés, Alberti-León en garde deux, le 25 — *trajes* — et le 27 — *impalpables* —, assonancés en *a-e*. D'où peut-être *con trajes* au lieu de *ropa*.

Vers 26 et 27. Alberti-León traduisent le passé composé « a découvert » par un présent, peut-être pour ne pas trop allonger leur texte espagnol. Ils ont dû ressentir le besoin d'être aussi brefs et légers qu'Éluard. La longueur et le poids différents de certains mots castillans ne vous permet souvent pas d'aller aussi vite et d'être aussi bref que le français ou, surtout, l'anglais avec ses nombreux monosyllabes. A remarquer que Alberti-León tombent dans le panier de la préposition *sobre* au lieu de *en* pour ce qui est de traduire « Sur ses seins ».

Vers 28 et 29. On ne comprend pas pourquoi ont-ils choisi de supprimer, à moins que ce ne soit une coquille, le mot *todo* qui est l'objet direct d'« effacer » du vers 29. Cela introduit une ambiguïté superflue. Éluard est ici on ne saurait plus clair : à la question « Comment prendre plaisir à tout ? », il répond « Plutôt tout effacer ». En traduisant *Mejor borrarlo*, on perd de vue quel est l'objet direct de *borrar*. Est-ce le plaisir, est-ce tout ?

Vers 35. Voici qu'Éluard introduit un mystérieux prisonnier de « L'homme de tous les mouvements », qui s'est évadé... pour dormir et qui semble être le sujet de toute la fin du poème, à moins que ce ne soit l'homme et pas son prisonnier. Mystère encore. Peut-être l'homme et son prisonnier évadé sont-ils la même personne, le prisonnier n'étant que l'homme libéré par le sommeil vers le monde des rêves, ce qui correspond aux idées surréalistes. Il serait l'homme vrai, non pas l'autre, cet autre lui même qui l'emprisonne quand il est à l'état de veille.

Vers 37 à 41. Au vers 37, Éluard se sert du passé composé de la langue orale au lieu du passé simple de la langue écrite, car la dominante verbale est ici aux temps du passé. Alberti-León gardent les imparfaits des vers 39 à 41, mais traduisent par un *pretérito indefinido* celui du vers 38. Difficile, en l'occurrence, de décider s'il faut bien un *imperfecto*. Nous nous bornons à le signaler. La suite de coordonnées copulatives de l'espagnol nous semble tout à fait justifiée, même si

Éluard se borne à juxtaposer les verbes après s'être servi du « Et » du vers 39.

Vers 42 à 44. *Si empezar de nuevo hubiera, / te encontraría sin buscarte.* Le vers 44 a l'air un brin empesé du fait de la construction hypothétique choisie par Alberti-Léon. Éluard se sert d'une construction tout à fait banale que l'on devrait traduire par: *Si tuviera que empezar de nuevo* ou *Si tuviera que volver a empezar* ou encore *De volver a empezar*. Le choix de *Si empezar de nuevo hubiera* a le mérite de constituer un pendant octosyllabe à l'octosyllabe éluardien. On se doit cependant de relever que la traduction de « rencontrer » ici n'est pas en principe *encontrar*, mais *conocer* au sens de « faire la connaissance de quelqu'un » et que même les dictionnaires de traduction ignorent souvent cette nuance.

Vers 45 à 47. C'est le vers 46 qui appelle des remarques, car il est traduit au présent, alors que l'original est au passé composé. Il est possible que le *presente* réponde à l'indifférence marquée par la tradition de l'espagnol à l'égard de certaines marques d'antériorité d'une action. Si nous rétrotraduisons *Aunque el alba levante la cabeza*, nous trouvons: {Quoique=Bien que} l'aube lève la tête », qui marque une nuance par rapport « L'aube a eu beau lever la tête » dont la traduction devrait être: *Por más que el alba haya levantado la cabeza*. Mais voilà que nombre de syllabes en trop se bousculent dans cette traduction pourtant plus fidèle à l'original.

De *Mourir de ne pas mourir* (1924) en Paul Eluard, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. I, préface et chronologie de Lucien Scheler, textes établis et annotés par Marcelle Dumas et Lucien Scheler, Paris, Gallimard, 1968, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade

« En el corazón de mi amor » de *Capital del dolor* (1926) in *Antología de la poesía surrealista de lengua francesa*. Estudio preliminar, selección, notas y traducciones de Aldo Pellegrini, Buenos Aires, Compañía General Fabril Editora, 1961, p. 142-143

#### Au cœur de mon amour

1. Un bel oiseau me montre la lumière
2. Elle est dans ses yeux, bien en vue.
3. Il chante sur une boule de gui
4. Au milieu du soleil.  
\*
5. Les yeux des animaux chanteurs
6. Et leurs chants de colère ou d'ennui
7. M'ont interdit de sortir de ce lit.
8. J'y passerai ma vie.

#### En el corazón de mi amor

- Un hermoso pájaro me muestra la luz  
Que aparece claramente en sus ojos  
Un pájaro que canta sobre una bola de muérdago  
En medio del sol.  
\*
- Los ojos de los animales cantores  
Y sus cantos de cólera o de hastío  
Me prohíben salir de este lecho  
Donde pasará la vida.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 9. L'aube dans des pays sans grâce   | El alba en países sin encanto                                       |
| 10. Prend l'apparence de l'oubli.  | Toma las apariencias del olvido.                                    |
| 11. Et qu'une femme émue s'endorme, à l'aube                                 | Y si al alba una mujer conmovida se adormece                        |
| 12. La tête la première, sa chute l'illumine.                                | Al caer de cabeza, su caída la ilumina.                             |
| 13. Constellations,  | Constelaciones,   |
| 14. Vous connaissez la forme de sa tête.                                     | Conocéís la forma de su cabeza.                                     |
| 15. Ici, tout s'obscurcit:   | Aquí todo se oscurece:  |
| 16. Le paysage se complète, sang aux joues,                                  | El paisaje se completa, las mejillas se encienden,                  |
| 17. Les masses diminuent et coulent dans mon cœur                            | Las masas disminuyen y circulan por mi corazón                      |
| 18. Avec le sommeil.   | Unidas al sueño.  |
| 19. Et qui donc veut me prendre le cœur?                                     | ¿Y hay quién quiera tomar mi corazón?                               |
| *  | *   |
| 20. Je n'ai jamais rêvé d'une si belle nuit                                  | Jamás soñé con noche tan bella                                      |
| 21. Les femmes du jardin cherchent à m'embrasser —                           | Las mujeres del jardín tratan de besarme                            |
| 22. Soutiens du ciel, les arbres immobiles                                   | Sostenes del cielo, los árboles inmóviles                           |
| 23. Embrassent bien l'ombre qui les soutient.                                | Abrazan fuertemente la sombra que los sostiene.                     |
| 24. Une femme au coeur pâle  | Una mujer de corazón pálido   |
| 25. Met la nuit dans ses habits  | Guarda la noche en sus vestido                                      |
| 26. L'amour a découvert la nuit  | El amor ha descubierto la noche                                     |
| 27. Sur ses seins impalpables.   | Sobre sus senos impalpables.  |
| 28. Comment prendre plaisir à tout?  | ¿Cómo poder gozar de todo?  |
| 29. Plutôt tout effacer.   | Mejor borrarlo todo.  |
| 30. L'homme de tous les mouvements,  | El hombre de la movilidad total                                     |
| 31. De tous les sacrifices et de toutes les conquêtes                        | Del sacrificio total, de la conquista total                         |
| 32. Dort. Il dort, il dort, il dort.   | Duerme. Duerme, duerme, duerme.                                     |
| 33. Il raye de ses soupirs la nuit minuscule, invisible.                     | Borra con sus suspiros la noche minúscula, invisible.               |
| 34. Il n'a ni froid, ni chaud. 35. Son prisonnier s'est évadé — pour dormir. | No sufre ni frío ni calor. Su prisionero se ha evadido para dormir. |
| 36. Il n'est pas mort, il dort.  | No está muerto, duerme.   |
| 37. Quand il s'est endormi,  | Mientras dormía,  |
| 38. Tout l'étonnait,   | Todo lo asombraba,  |
| 39. Et il jouait avec ardeur,  | Jugaba ardentamente,  |



40. Il regardait,	Miraba,
41. Il entendait.	Oía.
42. Sa dernière parole:	Su última palabra:
43. « Si c'était à recommencer, je te rencontrerais sans te chercher ».	« Si empezara de nuevo, te encontraría sin buscarte ».
44. Il dort, il dort, il dort.	El duerme, duerme, duerme.
45. L'aube a eu beau lever la tête,	En vano el alba levanta la cabeza,
46. Il dort.	El duerme.

#### 4. tel que traduit par Aldo Pellegrini

Vers 1 et 2. Pellegrini relie, comme Alberti-León, ces deux vers par un relatif, mais traduit le deuxième *Que aparece claramente en sus ojos* au lieu de *Que está en sus ojos, bien presente*. Alberti-León suivent de plus près l'original français et Pellegrini s'en éloigne de par son choix de rendre « elle est » par *aparece* « bien en vue » par *claramente*. Pellegrini semble avoir mieux perçu ici que l'ordre des constituants de la phrase en français répond à d'autres principes que ceux du castillan et que le « bien en vue » qui clôt le groupe devrait se trouver plus près du début de la phrase espagnole. Il nous semble que pour rendre la hiérarchie des constituants du texte éluardien, l'espagnol aurait pu être : *Claramente {visible≠presente} en sus ojos*, où on supprime le verbe du texte de départ. Le traducteur que nous sommes se voile la face devant les observations de son pendant professeur de langues et fait un geste de désespoir. Surtout que, au premier vers, Pellegrini copie l'ordre des mots « Un bel oiseau » pour en faire *Un hermoso pájaro*, ce qui constitue une légère trahison à l'original : l'ordre « bel oiseau » est obligé en français, alors que l'adjectif antéposé est emphatique en espagnol.

Vers 3 et 4. Ici toutes ces facettes de nous-même se mettent à pleurer. Pellegrini choisit de reprendre le sujet presque en entier : *Un pájaro que canta*, alors que Alberti-León se bornent à reprendre le verbe et son sujet implicite. Le choix de allonge démesurément le 3e vers qui compte, en français, dix syllabes au maximum et, phonétiquement, sept. Avec ses quinze syllabes, l'espagnol de Pellegrini est très loin de la musique si légère d'Éluard et du vers français qui se termine sur une voyelle bien aiguë. La sonorité de *pájaro* et de *muérdago* nous mène très loin de celle d'« oiseau » et de « gui », hélas! Le mot *ave* aurait-il mieux convenu, même s'il est loin d'avoir la fréquence de son pendant français ?

Vers 6. *Cantos de cólera o de hastío*, nous nous sommes déjà exprimés sur ce vers à propos de la traduction d'Alberti-León. Nous y renvoyons nos lecteurs.

Vers 7 et 8. Le passé composé de « M'ont interdit de sortir de ce lit » est rendu par un présent que rien ne semble justifier. Pellegrini traduit « lit » par *lecho*, comme Alberti-León. Nous y voyons de l'hyperfidélité au français : *cama* suffit aux besoins de ce vers et du contexte. Le vers 8, en revanche, évite le possessif du français : *Donde pasaré la vida*, ce qui joue en sa faveur. Nous insistons sur le fait que le datif possessif serait préférable : *Donde me pasaré la vida*.

Vers 9. « pays sans grâce » devient *países sin encanto* — ce dernier mot est bien un synonyme de *gracia*, mais nettement moins riche en connotations, en harmoniques sémantiques que *gracia*.

Vers 11 et 12. La « femme émue » devient *mujer conmovida* pour Pellegrini. Mais il interprète visiblement l'incise « la tête la première » comme *caer de cabeza*. C'est là certes l'une des possibilités, mais une lecture attentive tendrait à nous faire penser qu'Éluard n'y évoque pas qu'une chute physique et concrète. Il semble entendre, au lieu de « s'endormir et tomber la tête la première » séparés, « s'endormir la tête la première », ce qui est beaucoup plus insolite. Nous pensons, en outre, que la « chute » qui illumine la femme est bien plus que la chute physique, elle est la chute au sens moral et religieux aussi. Il ne faudrait pas oublier que tout cela se passe « dans des pays sans grâce » et que l'aube y « prend l'apparence de l'oubli ». Aube, grâce, apparence, oubli, chute, illumination : trop de mots à connotations multiples pour ne pas chercher à garder coûte que coûte le mystère. Ici, cela passe par une certaine servilité à l'original français, comme Alberti-León l'ont fait : *Y si una mujer emocionada se duerme, al alba, / Primero la cabeza, su caída la ilumina*. Délibérément ? On ne sait pas. Tout ce que nous pouvons dire, c'est qu'il faudrait plutôt traduire : *Y si al alba una mujer emocionada se duerme de cabeza, su caída la ilumina*. A y regarder de près, il faudrait faire plus confiance au lecteur qui s'arrêterait peut-être sur *dormirse de cabeza* et penserait à *caerse de cabeza*, mais ne négligerait pas les harmoniques sémantiques les plus lointains de *su caída*. On voit que nous avons délibérément lissée la syntaxe hachée du français dans ce cas, car, paradoxalement, elle serait trop baroque pour la langue espagnole ! Entendons-nous, ce n'est pas sur ce point qu'Éluard est baroque, au contraire, il ne fait qu'adopter une manière française bien traditionnelle de dire.

Vers 16 et 17. Pellegrini interprète « sang aux joues » au sens de *las mejillas se encienden*, comme si les vers 16 et 17 étaient une énumération : le paysage, les joues, les masses, alors que nous y voyons un complément de manière en incise, d'où notre idée de traduire « sang aux joues » précédé d'une préposition. Pour Pellegrini « Les masses [...] coulent dans mon cœur » serait un écho de « sang aux joues », d'où

son idée de *circulan por mi corazón*, où le verbe « couler » est pris au sens de « circuler comme le sang ». A moins qu'il ne prenne « les masses » pour une multitude qui circulerait ? Nous avouons notre difficulté à cerner le sens des vers 16 et 17. Pellegrini lui fait « circuler » et les masses et le sommeil, car les masses pour lui « circulent » *Unidas al sueño*, en français « Unies au sommeil ». Soit, il est possible que cet « avec » d'Éluard ne soit pas seulement un complément de compagnie, mais encore une union. Cela dit, si l'on ajoute que le mot *sueño* veut dire rêve et sommeil à la fois et que c'est le contexte qui indique à l'hispanophone le sens voulu de *sueño*...

Vers 19. *¿Y hay quién quiera tomar mi corazón?* retraduit en français nous donne : *¿Y a-t-il quelqu'un qui voudrait prendre mon cœur ?* Éluard a cependant fait usage du datif possessif du français, possible tant qu'il se rapporte à une partie du corps humain. Pourquoi donc Pellegrini ne suit-il pas la construction proposée par Éluard, qui est parfaitement possible en espagnol ?

Vers 20. En traduisant le passé composé du français dans un contexte de présent dominant par un *pretérito indefinido*, Pellegrini se montre bien riplatéen, car il aurait tout de même fallu rendre ce passé composé par un *pretérito perfecto*, ce d'autant plus qu'il est associé à un adverbe indéfini de temps comme *jamás* — la norme veut que l'on construise les adverbes *nunca*, *jamás*, *siempre* avec le *pretérito perfecto*, jamais avec le *pretérito indefinido*.

Vers 21. Pellegrini, à la différence de Alberti-León, traduit « cherchent à » par *tratan de*.

Vers 22.. « Soutiens du ciel » devient ici *Sostenes del cielo*. Nous soupçonnons Pellegrini de ne pas avoir pensé que *sostén* au singulier traduit « soutien-gorge », ce à quoi Alberti-León ont dû penser en tant qu'Espagnols — ils ont traduit *soportes*. Quid ? Au Río de la Plata on n'associe pas *sostén* à la lingerie, puisqu'on se sert d'un autre mot, *corpiño*.

Vers 23. Curieux, Pellegrini et Alberti-León traduisent « Embrassent » par *Abrazan*. Mais s'agit-il d'un baiser que les arbres donnent à l'ombre ou d'une étreinte ? Car *abrazar* veut dire « étreindre » et nous ne voyons pas ici d'étreinte mais un baiser. Qui de nous quatre aurait raison ? Pellegrini traduit l'adverbe « bien » de ce vers par un *fuertemente*, que nous approuvons, même si nous n'y adhérons pas. Pour nous, on devrait ici traduire : *Bien besan la sombra que los sostiene*, ce qui laisse les portes de divers sens possibles bien plus ouvertes.

Vers 24 et 25. Pour Pellegrini la « femme au cœur pâle » *Guarda la noche en sus vestidos*. Si l'on rétrotraduit on a : « Une femme [...] /Range la nuit dans ses robes ». Rappelons notre préférence pour : *Una mujer de corazón pálido/Se pone la noche en la ropa*. Nous pensons que l'on

demeure ainsi plus près du sens voulu par Éluard, et, accessoirement, de son sens de l'épate et du saugrenu.

Vers 26 et 27. Pellegrini, à la différence du couple Alberti-León, garde le passé composé du texte départ : « L'amour a découvert la nuit » est traduit par *El amor ha descubierto la noche*. En revanche, le vers suivant pêche, comme chez Alberti-León, par excès de fidélité au français : dans *Sobre sus senos impalpables*, la préposition *sobre* est à rejeter. Il faut bien traduire par *En sus senos impalpables*.

Vers 28 et 29. Avec son *¿Cómo poder gozar de todo?*, Pellegrini tape dans le mille, puisque son énéasyllabe castillan est un bon pendant de l'octosyllabe éluardien. De même avec le vers 29 : *Mejor borrarlo todo*, un heptasyllabe, proche des six syllabes de l'original.

Vers 30 et 31. Pellegrini se montre moins heureux : à « L'homme de tous les mouvements » il oppose en espagnol ce qui nous semble une restriction du sens très ouvert de l'original. Rétrotraduit, le texte de Pellegrini dit en effet : « L'homme de la mobilité totale », alors que « tous les mouvements » comprend la mobilité parmi une foule d'autres significations. Il en va de même pour ce qui est du vers 31 : *Del sacrificio total, de la conquista total* ; si on retrotraduit, on obtient : « Du sacrifice total de la conquête totale ». Nous persistons à y déceler des significations trop restreintes par rapport au français éluardien. Quant à la métrique, rien à redire, la mesure des vers ne s'éloigne pas trop de celle du français.

Vers 33. Pellegrini, comme Alberti-León, interprète le verbe « rayer » du côté d'effacer, mais il nous semble que ce n'est là qu'une possibilité parmi d'autres. En effet, nous penchons pour *rayar*, c'est à dire « marquer quelque chose de raies », mais ne saurions nous prononcer clairement. Nous égarerions-nous ?

Vers 34. *No sufre ni frío ni calor* traduit Pellegrini en ajoutant une allitération *fre-frío* de son cru au vers éluardien et en tirant « Il n'a » du côté de « souffrir ». Rétrotraduit, son texte donne : « il ne souffre ni du froid ni de la chaleur ». Alberti-León et leur traduction sont bien plus concis : *No tiene frío ni calor*.

Vers 35. Ce vers pose un problème de traduction de la ponctuation, car on y trouve un tiret isolé typiquement français dont l'usage en castillan était encore peu répandu à l'époque où Alberti-León, 1957, et Pellegrini, 1961, ont publié leurs traductions. Pellegrini choisit d'ignorer le tiret et Alberti-León en font une incise entre tirets. C'est vrai que, depuis, ce signe de ponctuation est entré dans l'usage espagnol, bien que l'on ne sache pas clairement ce qu'il signale. Il s'agit, même en français, d'un signe de ponctuation dont le sens n'est pas facile à cerner.

Vers 37 à 41. Pellegrini traduit « Quand il s'est endormi » par *Mientras dormía*. A tort selon nous, car Éluard entend une action ponctuelle et non durative. On peut cependant comprendre une certaine perplexité de la part du traducteur. Éluard veut-il dire par « Quand il s'est endormi » que les imparfaits suivants expriment des actions simultanées à celle de s'endormir ? Ou bien seraient-ils des imparfaits dits de narration utilisés en lieu et place de passés simples et, donc, la temporelle doit s'interpréter comme « Une fois qu'il se fut endormi » ? Si c'était le cas, l'espagnol pourrait être ainsi : *Cuando se durmió,/ Todo lo asombró,/ Y jugó con ardor,/ Miró,/ Oyó*. Autrement, il faudrait interpréter les imparfaits comme des simultanés de s'endormir et croire que « Au moment même où il s'est endormi, / Tout l'étonnait / etc. » et traduire : *Al dormirse,/ Todo lo asombraba,/ Y jugaba con ardor,/ Miraba,/ Oía*. Si l'on compare cette strophe et celle de Alberti-León, on remarque quelques différences qui se rapportent à l'usage de certains opérateurs grammaticaux selon qu'on est latino-américain ou péninsulaire. *Todo lo asombraba*, écrit Pellegrini; *Todo le asombraba*, écrivent Alberti-León. Pellegrini suit la vieille règle de la Real Academia ou, mieux, l'usage le plus répandu en Amérique Latine; Alberti-León suivent, eux, l'usage péninsulaire le plus répandu: pas de pronom objet *lo* pour un être humain.

Vers 44 à 46. Pellegrini a peut-être pensé ici à la confusion possible — que nous avons du reste déjà signalée — entraînée par la forme *duerme*, la même pour la troisième personne du présent de l'indicatif et la deuxième personne de l'impératif. Il a donc opté pour accompagner le verbe de son prénom sujet, en principe superflu ici : *El duerme*, dans les vers 44 et 46. Nous rappelons la possibilité de traduire par une périphrase avec *estar*: *está dormido*. Là encore on se heurte à la longueur de cette solution.

5. Si je n'ai appris à aimer l'oeuvre poétique et artistique de Rafael Alberti que bien plus tard dans ma vie, je me sens toujours redevable du magnifique et imposant travail qu'il a entrepris, pendant la seconde moitié des années 50, avec María Teresa León. Avoir accès, à cette époque, à un vaste choix de poèmes éluardiens, c'était un vrai rêve. Et mes rêves se sont multipliés à la lecture de cet hommage rendu au poète français par deux voix de l'Espagne en exil, qui n'en continuaient pas moins d'entretenir le feu sacré de la liberté, de l'amour et du rêve afin que leur pays puisse, après le long cauchemar franquiste, les retrouver dans leur pureté.



## Picasso Aggrandized in Alberti's Ekphrastic Poetry

In Rafael Alberti's poetry relating to painting ("ut pictura poesis", in Horace's expression), Picasso's life and work is mythified. Alberti feels absorbed by the painter for whom he writes one of his most avantgarde works, *Los 8 nombres de Picasso*,/*The 8 Names of Picasso*, a work of which Manuel Bayo has commented that:

[t]he enthusiasm, the affection and admiration for his friend are expressed in a kind of word festival. The language explodes and decomposes and recomposes in astonishing and varied forms to display Picasso and his work in a homage that is passionate yet precise. Poetic fantasy is inspired by, and fuses into pictorial fantasy. Autobiographical elements, longing for happiness and nostalgia for the past mark this at once ordered and tumultuous Picassian fiesta (93).

Later we shall analyse Alberti's Picassian poetry and the lyrical-pictorial symbiosis that is at its origins, but for now suffice it to say that painting is a paradise for the poet, in which he rediscovers himself. Unlike many other poets guided by the ekphrastic principle, Alberti's first passion was painting just as his later allegiance was to an original broad artistic project known as "liricografía" (lyricography), that is, a pictorial alphabet. In this sense, Alberti's manuscript poems are of a piece with drawings, lines, pictorial suggestions, in line with his ekphrastic model.

For Kurt Spang painting in Alberti is synonymous with unease, a paradise of the lost tree-groves in the nostalgia of exile. As a mere youth, the poet goes into that "adolescent box of colours" announced in the "Diario de un día"/"Diary of a Day" from *Poemas de Punta del Este*/*Poems of Punta del Este* (328). He also does this in the visual poetics contained in *A la pintura*/*To Painting* (as homage to the painting, techniques and colours of painters represented in the Prado Museum) and much later, through his poetry, his alphabetic calligraphic drawings, in the exhibition *La parola e il segno*/*Word and Sign*, held in Rome in 1972. In this connection Alberti told me [PGR] when I interviewed him in 1989 that *A la pintura* was a treatise, his treatise on painting, in the same way that León Battista Alberti, Luca Paccioli, Rejón de Silva or Leonardo da Vinci wrote poetic treatises on painting. Numerous writers and scholars such as Carlos Arean, Ángel Crespo, Vittorio Bodini, Luis Monguió, Pedro Ruiz Martínez, Ana María Winkelmann, Kurt

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Spang, García de la Concha, González Martín, Luis Lorenzo Rivero, Catherine G. Ellver, Concha Argente have emphasized the importance of painting in the poetic works of Alberti and, especially, his lyrical/pictorial passion for Picasso, to whom he devoted not only a poem in *A la pintura* but a whole book and one of the greatest works that have been written on the Malagan painter's mythic dimension: *Los 8 nombres de Picasso / The 8 names of Picasso*.

### The names and eyes of Picasso

*Los 8 nombres de Picasso (y no digo más que lo que no digo) / The 8 Names of Picasso (And I'm not saying more than what I'm not saying)*, published by Kairós in Spain and by Grafica Internazionale in Italy, in homage to the painter on the occasion of his eighty-ninth birthday, and containing drawings (almost all of them erotic) by Picasso with a dedication to the poet and his wife, María Teresa León, as well as lyricographs by Alberti, who opens this book and the one published by Bruguera, *Lo que canté y dije a Picasso y Picasso o el rayo que no cesa / What I sang and said about Picasso and Picasso or the Unceasing Flash of Lightning* with the following lines:

Dios creó el mundo -dicen	God created the world -so they say-
y en el sétimo día,	and on the seventh day,
cuando estaba tranquilo descansando,	when he was resting peacefully,
se sobresaltó y dijo:	he gave a start and said
he olvidado una cosa:	I've forgotten something:
Los ojos y la mano de Picasso.	The eyes and the hand of Picasso.

(Lo que canté, 7)

For Alberti Picasso is the hundred eyes in two eyes, the one who painted the nameless little bullfighters and doves, like his father, the one who painted peace and war, for whom the poet calls on all his love for the painter's eyes, those eyes, the all-embracing eyes, and the one who looks at everything.

In 1968, Alberti, by now almost entirely devoted to what he would call "creaciones caligráficas" (calligraphic creations) presented in Milan's Galeria 32 a file entitled *Los ojos de Picasso / The Eyes of Picasso* (Alberti had begun to write this work of homage to the painter in Anticoli), together with three other works: *Tauromaquia / Tauromachy* and the other works devoted to the painter Calle and the sculptor Mastroianni. The file contained leadplate engravings and drawings and verse accompanied by drawings, all relating to Picasso.

"A Picasso lo conocí en París, la noche menos pensada, en el patio de butacas del teatro Atelier de Charles Dullin", dice Alberti en "Imagen primera de Pablo Picasso". Y añade: "Me lancé al patio de butacas, no sin cierto pánico a una helada acogida o, lo más grave, a un fracaso en mi ilusión de visitarle".

— “¿Picasso?

—Y continúa Alberti: “...le dije mi nombre, hablándole, entrecortado, de amigos comunes y de mis pretensiones de verle en su estudio.

— Pase por mi casa: veintitrés, rue de la Boétie. Pero avíseme antes. Mañana mismo, si puede.” / “I first met Picasso in Paris, one fine night in the stalls of Charles Dullin's Atelier theatre”, Alberti informs us in “Imagen Primera de Pablo Picasso” / “First Image of Pablo Picasso”, adding that “I rushed to the stalls, feeling not a little panic-stricken at the prospect of a chilly response or, even more seriously, that I would fail to fulfill my dream of visiting him. —“Picasso?” And I told him my name and spoke to him in a faltering voice of friends we had in common and my aim of seeing him in his studio.— “Come by my house: 23 de la Boétie Street. But telephone in advance” —As soon as tomorrow, if you can” (*Imagen* 97).

What Alberti remembered most about that first visit were his “two gray buttons”, the painter's eyes, “round tobacco-coloured eyes, insistent and flat, “as hard as two insufferable buttons.” Alberti goes on to say that “[t]he following day, at three o'clock sharp in the afternoon, Picasso himself opened me the door of his flat. As I had in the theatre, I again felt the presence of a bull, crossed this time—minotaur-like—with something of the rancher, a Fernando Villalón, perhaps less uncouth, more refined, owing doubtless to the luminous grayness of his eyes and the famous now graying wave, which divided his forehead at a slanting angle.” Picasso then showed Alberti the paintings in his studio, “a simple garret, measuring little more than three metres by four” (*Imagen* 97) Alberti pictured him as reminiscent of the Cordoban poet Góngora, grazing on stars and offering the horned divinity of his solitude (*Relatos* 143).

Years later, Rafael Alberti's stay in Europe tightened the bonds of friendship with Picasso. They saw each other on different occasions: living in close-by Antibes, Alberti went to visit Picasso frequently at his house at Mougins, at a time when Picasso continued to be Director of the Prado Museum, because, as Alberti pointed out, they had never informed the painter of his dismissal from the post.

Thus was formed a deep friendship between the two, that involved meetings and long conversations on Andalusia, on the bullfighters Frascuelo, Lagartijo, el Guerra o Machaquito, whom only Picasso could remember as Alberti started to go to bullfights when Belmonte and Joselito came on the scene. They spoke of their Parisian experiences on the hill at Mougins or in the rooms of Notre-Dame de Vie; after five months of visits, Alberti bade farewell to Picasso, who gave him a monumental copy of Pierre Reverdy's posthumous poetry, with ten of his own watercolours and a dedication in his own handwriting:

Para Rafael Alberti	For Rafael Alberti
(Lo que es todo decir)	(which is to say everything)
mi amigo (no hablemos)	my friend (don't let's speak of it)
mi primo y mi tío	my cousin and my uncle
su amigo y el mío	his friend and mine
y que más que un montón	and more than a pile
de abrazos novísimos y muy	of new embraces and very
viejos y además el cariño	old ones as well as the affection
De tu	of your
Picasso	Picasso
El 22-5-68	El 22-5-68

(“Visitas...” 217)

Rafael Alberti took to *Notre-Dame de Vie Los 8 nombres de Picasso* (Picasso's book *El entierro del Conde Orgaz/The Burial of the Count of Orgaz*, with a prologue by Alberti had already been published). The poet always found in Picasso an entertaining, quick and witty friend and they always had a good time together. Alberti created a poetic mythology around the Andalusian painter, his joviality, creative force and surprising eyes, the eyes of the “monster”. In the first instance, “Los ojos de Picasso” / “The Eyes of Picasso” was a manuscript poem from which were made twenty copies, illustrated with lead engravings and coloured drawings.

Alberti commented that in *Los 8 nombres de Picasso* he wanted to express all the admiration that he had felt for him since he was a youth: “Picasso siempre ha sido un pintor para poetas y en todas las diversas etapas de su vida estuvo cerca de ellos: recordemos a Max Jacob, a Apollinaire, a Pierre Reverdy, Jacques Prévert, Paul Éluard... Todos han sabido recoger algo de ese gran río de fluir permanente que es Picasso: una onda, un reflejo, un pez, un pájaro, una estrella...” (*Canciones*, 82) / “Picasso has always been a painter for poets and during all the different stages of his life he was close to them: think of Max Jacob, Apollinaire, Pierre Reverdy, Jacques Prevert, Paul Éluard... All of them have drawn something from that great permanently flowing river that is Picasso, a wave, a reflection, a fish, a bird, a star...”.

Alberti would define Picasso as “un movimiento sísmico cuyo epicentro se halla en los dedos de su mano” / “a seismic movement, whose epicentre is to be found in the fingers of his hand”, as “un mundo que inventó la primera palabra” / “a world that invented the first word”, as “un hombre que se derrama en luz por los miles de ojos que ha pintado” (*Lo que canté*, 162-63) / “a man. who flows out in light through the thousands of eyes he has painted”. The poet also noted that “[s]u genio es el del pueblo español, capaz de las arrancadas más luminosas y violentas. El bombardeado toro de Guernica clama siempre en su sangre” (*Lo que canté*, 163) / “[h]is genius is that of the Spanish people, capable of

the most luminous and violent spurts of energy. The bombarded bull of Guernica always clamours in his blood." When Alberti took him the Italian edition of *A la pintura*, with his own illustrations, in the Italian bilingual Grafica Internazionale edition, (a more complete volume than the Kairós one), along with the reproduction of the dedications that Picasso had inscribed to him during the meetings of the later years and a folder with three new poems and three prints in lead plate, as a homage to the painter on the occasion of the ninetieth birthday, Picasso made him a present of some extraordinary lyricographs, "Twenty-nine Imaginary Portraits," and remarked: "C'est très bien fait, n'est-ce pas?" (*Lo que canté* 168).

But Picasso, according to Alberti, was at that moment all "en furia, en llama, en ira, en cólera, en trompa, en toro, en sangre, en perro, en rabia, en gato, en odio, en fallo, en pito,, en paz, en luz, en sombra, en guerra"(L que cante, 169)/ "in a fury, aflame, in a rage, irate, aroused, like a bull, incensed, doglike, maddened, cat-like, hate-ridden, in a void, on hard, at peace, alight, wrapped in shade, at war", a mythic constellation for the poet of Puerto de Santa María. At the beginning of *Los 8 nombres de Picasso* Alberti presents us with a startling aggrandizement. It is God who says: "He olvidado una cosa: /los ojos y mano de Picasso" (7) /"I have forgotten one thing: / the eyes and the hand of Picasso".

After this introduction would come seventy-two poems divided in seven sections, in the Kairós Spanish edition, and seventy five poems — three more— in the Grafica Internazionale Italian edition. The first section has a mythical dimension. According to Concha Argente del Castillo, the poet lingers over "the physical, psychological particularities and over the myths of his work that embody that individuality called Pablo Ruiz Picasso" (169). In order to express this, Alberti goes from a reflexive tone to a burlesque one, passing through the chaotic enumeration of "Los ojos de Picasso"/"The Eyes of Picasso" or "Consejos picassianos"/"Picassian Pieces of Advice", or the childlike and illogical series in "Tres retahílas para Picasso"/"Three Series for Picasso", in a kind of poetry that mythifies the painter:

Es un demonio. Se metió en el siglo  
por la puerta menos pensada.  
Escondía colores nunca vistos

(.....)

Se veía en sus ojos que era hijo de las llamas  
(.....)

Nunca ha habido hasta hoy fuerza capaz de detenerlo

(*Lo que canté*, 26)

He is a demon. He got into the century

through the least imaginable door.  
 He was hiding colours never seen before.  
 (.....)  
 It could be seen in his eyes that he was the the son of the flames.  
 (.....)  
 Never till today has there been a force capable of stopping him.

In this first section, "Sueño y mentira" / "Dream and Lie", poem XIX does not appear in Kairós's Spanish edition, but it does in the Italian edition and the Bruguera one. In general, the poems vary metrically, and also in their tone; some are descriptive, others intelligent and penetrating, adjusting the poetic to the figurative. There are short epigrammatic compositions and sonnets of perfect classical structure. The poetic tone is nimble, amusing and ironical, or there are rigorous examples of Alberti's powerful poetic imagination, which as an example of exceptional creative complicity matches Picasso's plastic imagination. "He is a demon", Alberti writes of him. "Picasso — Catherine G. Bellver notes— emerges from this poetry as monster of nature, synonymous of the sea and of cataclysm. As a dehumanized and deified being, he shows qualities of the devil as well as of God. With the devil he shares his strength, rebelliousness, originality and his insatiable search for freedom, which because of the threat this implies against the established order of things is the enemy of the world (155).

This transposition of Picasso's "different" painting, is also related to the avantgarde. The technique is common to all his ekphrastic poetry, as much in the sonnets, in separate poems, in the poems on paintings as in the description of Picassian techniques, in the dualistic approach and in the painter's paradoxical, chaotic and mythical side, as if both Alberti and Picasso were having a dialogue in poetry and painting, talking, recreating a similar kind of painting and poetry. Kurt Spang comments that "the autobiographical plays a larger part in *A la pintura/To Painting* and memories of meetings between the two friends come up frequently ("Cuando te conocí" / "When I met you", "Así lo vio" / "Thus he saw it") and the praises and friendly homages ("Tres retahílas para Picasso" / "Three Series for Picasso", "Mougins", "Cuando yo andaba junto al mar", "When I was walking by the Sea", and "Denuestos y alabanzas en honor a Picasso" / "Insult and Praise in honour of Picasso" (149).

The visual-pictorial dimension is for Alberti a paradise that seemed lost and that he finds again in Picasso's artistic genius. Picasso is the symbol of a lost paradise, identified with the painter from Málaga, whose eyes fix on it and go beyond the real and create new unrepeatable forms, new disturbing and permanent registers with which Alberti constructs his ekphrastic model.

The second section of *Los 8 nombres de Picasso* is concerned with the daily life of the painter in Mougins amidst the bright Picassian colours, his doves of peace, the sea overflowing with Picassian objects and full of light:

El mar domesticado por los flautas suelta ovejas azules y caballos.	The sea domesticated by the flutes releases blue sheep and horses.
Sobre la arena al sol todos los días tiende la luz sus ojos amarillos.	Over the sand in the sun every day the light stretches out its yellow eyes.

(Lo que canté, 49)

In the words of Argente del Castillo, "Alberti introduces himself into the poems as a privileged spectator of that relation established between Picasso and nature, which at times expresses itself as harmony, at other times as a struggle between vital principles" (171).

Son las profundas horas,  
Las más cargadas de pasión, de asombro  
que este siglo soporta ya escalando las cimas

(Lo que canté, 57)

It is the deep hours,  
that are the most heavy with passion, and with astonishment  
that this century endures as it scales the heights

The century is the one that Picasso occupies, time stood still in Picasso, time that is Picasso.

The third section is a commentary on Picassian themes and techniques. Five sonnets with figures who are in the paintings by the artist, to whom the figures speak: "De la Fornarina a Picasso"/ "From Fornarina to Picasso", "De Rafael..."/ "From Raphael..." and "De Miguel Ángel"/ "From Michelangelo".

In the fourth section of the book, we find the return to Pablo Ruiz Picasso, who "is but is not there". The poems LXX ("Antes que tú les rayabas las tripas"/ "Before you scratched their guts") and LXXI ("Tú serías quemada"/ "You would be burnt") are not to be found in the Kairós edition of 1970, but do appear later in the Grafica Internazionale bilingual edition. Here Picasso writes, paints, engraves, harmonizing with the century in which he creates his works:

¿Pablo? ¿qué haces? Pintas  
Oyes el siglo. Pintas.  
Pintas dibujos, grabas, escribes, pintas, pintas...

(Lo que canté, 98)

Pablo, what are you doing? You paint.  
You hear the century. You paint.  
You paint drawings, you engrave, you write, you paint, you paint...

In poem LXIV, section 12 Alberti writes:

Picasso ofende y cuanto más ofende  
crecen más los que le aman.

(*Lo que canté*, 101)

Picasso offends and the more he offends  
the greater the number of those who love him.

And in section 15:

Si Velázquez volviera y recrease  
las Meninas recreated by Picasso,  
¿pintaría de nuevo sus Meninas?

(*Lo que canté*, 102)

If Velázquez were to come back and recreate  
the Meninas recreated by Picasso,  
would he paint his own Meninas again?

This creative intentionality, which is disconcerting, aggrandized, a form of poetry concerned with Picasso's occupancy of his century is parallel to the idea of the "monster" as Alberti compares him with that other great genius, Velázquez, identifying the studies Picasso made of the Meninas with Velázquez's painting in the Prado Museum.

The fifth and sixth sections have the function of recalling the Picassian mythology in Alberti's spirited poetry. Poem LXXIV ("No digo más de lo que no digo" / "I'm not saying more than what I'm not saying") is the one that Picasso asked Alberti to write as a prologue to his own book *El entierro del Conde Orgaz*.

Using nuances and metaphorical and stylistic registers in *Los 8 nombres de Picasso*, Alberti embodies the painter in a poetically mythical world (Picasso and God share the act of creation) and in "Tú eres una catástrofe" / "You are a catastrophe", Picasso comes out of the sea to engender a child, as G. Bellver has it. For this critic the painter represents the order that emerges from the disorder of destruction and chaos, "although the God that Alberti sees in Picasso is in himself all-powerful and immutable" adding that "the god Picasso rises up like a terrible force to challenge man, other painters, nature and God himself. Implicit in the cult that Alberti pays Picasso is not only the firm faith of the poet in the eternity of art but also a raising of the painter to levels higher than those reached by all other painters that have existed. And Catherine G. Bellver goes on to say that "Alberti leaves us with a man transformed into an abstraction, an emblem, and one could say, into a symbol of a whole century"(156):

Una vez en la tierra existió una edad maravillosa  
A la que llamaremos picassiana.

(*Lo que canté*, 107)



Once on earth there existed a marvellous age  
that we'll call Picassian.

Notable too is Picasso's obsession with eyes, and the poetic game involving Picasso's names, the use of "all" and "without":

...Pablo  
sin Diego,  
sin José,  
sin Francisco de Paula,  
sin Juan Nepomuceno,  
sin María de los Remedios,  
sin Crispín  
sin Crispiniano de la Santísima Trinidad

(*Lo que canté*, 14)

...Pablo  
without Diego  
without Joseph  
without Francis of Paula  
without John Nepomuceno  
without Mary of Remedies  
without Crispin  
without Crispiniano of the Holy Trinity Picasso

Also the Picasso from Malaga, the man of blues ("De azul se arrancó el toro" / "From blue the bull charged" and the Spanish Picasso, of the Albertian alphabetical name:

España:  
fina tela de araña,  
guadaña y musaraña,  
braña, entraña, cucaña,  
saña, pipirigaña,  
y todo lo que suena y consuena  
contigo: España, España.

Spain:  
fine spider's web  
scythe and speck in the eye,  
pasture, entrails, greasy pole,  
fury, pipirigaña [children's pinching game]  
and all that sounds and harmonizes  
with you: Spain, Spain.

(*Lo que canté*, 15)

These are all the confines of non-jingoistic Hispanism, of all of Spain that exists in Alberti: black Spain and luminous Spain, which also forms part of Picasso's painting. Here are the memories of two Andalusians, who had to leave Spain at a young age, and that memory of what is Spanish remains like an evocative recurrent nostalgia in the conversations they shared in Mougins, memories that also appear in the poems of Alberti.

Spain as it appears in Alberti's exile: the Spain of Málaga and bull-fights, tragedy and uncertainty, the bull and Guernica, war and peace, and the poetry that derives from going through Picasso's paintings: the

women from Avignon, the doves, the Meninas..., all expressed in that vibrant way of aggrandizing the painter, who does not takes his eyes off him," *el cien mil ojos en dos ojos*" / "the hundred thousand eyes in two eyes", "el que te clava con los ojos en un abrir y cerrar de ojos" / "the one who rivets you with his eyes in the wink of an eye" (*Lo que canté* 22).

Eyes, always the eyes of Picasso, a poem dedicated "a Jacqueline que vive siempre dentro de los ojos del monstruo" / "to Jacqueline, who always lives inside the eyes of the monster", and coming after a quotation from the Ultraist poet Vicente Huidobro, the form and poetry in the Albertian ekphrastic mythology in "Los ojos de Picasso" / "The Eyes of Picasso" and his book *Los 8 nombres de Picasso*:

Siempre es todo ojos.	It's always all eyes.
No te quita ojos.	He doesn't take his eyes off you.
Se come las palabras con los ojos.	He eats up the words with his eyes.
Es el siete ojos.	He's the seven-eyed one.
Es el cien mil ojos en dos ojos.	He's the hundred thousand eyes in two eyes.
El gran mirón como un botón marrón y otro botón.	The big starrer like a brown button. and another button.
El ojo de la cerradura	The eye at the keyhole
por el que se ve la pintura.	through which he sees painting.
El que te abre bien los ojos cuando te muerde con los ojos.	The one who opens his eyes wide when he bites you with his eyes.
El ojo de la aguja que sólo ensarta cuando dibuja.	The eye of the needle that he only threads when he draws.
El que te clava con los ojos en un abrir y cerrar de ojos.	The one who rivets you with his eyes In the blinking of an eye.

(*Lo que canté*, 22)

And from Picasso's eyes emerges:

El ojo avizor,	The vigilant eye,
agresor	aggressive
abrasador.	scorching.
El ojo amor.	The loving eye.
El ojo en vela,	The awake eye,
centinela	sentry,
espuela,	spur,
candela,	candle,
el que se rebela y revela.	The one who rebels and reveals.

(*Lo que canté*, 22-23)

Alberti constructs a whole poetic edifice on Picasso's painting (only a pictorially-inclined poet could have done so), but he also plays with Picasso's nature, his names, his eyes, concerned to discover for us inef-

fable eyes, which are everything, which compose and decompose you. The poet gradually makes the poem take shape, rise in an imaginative vertigo, and very rhythmically in that mythical-magical-poetic mode imbued with musicality he metaphorically pursues Picasso's ever open eyes, which pursue us too.

No cierra los ojos.  
 No baja los ojos.  
 Te quita los ojos.  
 Te arranca los ojos  
 y te deja manco  
 o te deja cojo.  
 Luego te compone  
 o te descompone  
 la nariz te quita  
 o te pone dos.

He doesn't close his eyes.  
 He doesn't lower his eyes.  
 He takes out your eyes.  
 He rips out your eyes  
 and leaves you one-handed  
 or he leaves you lame.  
 Then he puts you back together  
 or takes you apart,  
 he takes away your nose  
 Or gives you two.

(*Lo que canté*, 23)

And Picasso's eyes, in a poetic crescendo full of sketched-out irony, as in Picasso's erotic drawings, which takes on a tremendous hyperbolic speed in the untrammelled rhythmic advance of the laudatory poem on Picasso:

Ojo que te espeta  
 que te desjarreta  
 te agranda las tetas,  
 te achica las tetas,  
 te hace la puñeta,  
 te levanta el culo,  
 te deja sin culo,  
 te vuelve un alambre,  
 te ensarta en estambre,  
 te ve del revés,  
 todo dividido,  
 tundido, partido,  
 cosido, raído,  
 zurcido, fluido.

Eye that transfixes you  
 that hamstringing you  
 that makes your tits bigger,  
 that makes your tits smaller,  
 that tells you to go to hell,  
 he raises your arse,  
 he leaves you arse-less,  
 he makes you thin as a rake,  
 he strings you into woollen yarn,  
 he sees you inside out,  
 all divided up,  
 beat up, split open,  
 sewn up, threadbare,  
 darned, free-flowing.

(*Lo que canté*, 23)

Eyes, eyes and eyes in Picasso, the natural ones, the overflowing ones, those that look at you and make you confused, and the eyes of the black bull of Spain, aggrandized, eyes in a shiver, eyes in fear, eyes as word-game, poetic palette, rhythm, vertigo...

Ojos animales,  
 letales,  
 mortales,  
 umbilicales,

Animal-like eyes  
 deadly,  
 mortal,  
 umbilical.

Ojos cataclismo,  
temblor, terremoto,  
maremoto, abismo,  
flor.

Ojos toro azul,  
Ojos negro toro,  
ojos toro rojo  
Ojos.

Cataclysmic eyes,  
tremor, earthquake,  
tidal wave, abyss,  
flower.

Blue bull-like eyes,  
Black bull-like eyes,  
Red bull-like eyes,  
Eyes.

(*Lo que canté*, 23-24)

Eyes, Picasso's eyes, which "con el sin y el con" *Lo que canté*, 23" "are the with and the without", eyes that are "opuestos, crueles, molestos" *Lo que canté*, p. 24) "opposed, cruel, discontented". And in a poetic flourish, springing from lexical invention and musicality, Alberti creates some concluding lines for the eyes of his friend the painter in a form of poetry that recalls on occasions his poem for Hieronymus Bosch, in its invented and sonorous letters and for its joy, and for the existence of eyes for which he seeks eternity, for these eyes are those of the monster Pablo Ruiz Picasso. Furthermore, he seeks for the eyes of the painter "all the love of the world", eyes that at the same time are killing him.. This poem, which is remarkably beautiful, forms part of the "topográfica" (topogrammic) and musical poetry that Alberti liked so much and that here leaves us startled:

¡Afuera esos ojos!  
¡Quítlenme esos ojos!

(...)

Mátenme esos ojos,  
virojos,  
pintojos,  
ojos trampantojos.

(...)

Ojo, que remonto plato..  
Ojo, que salto hecho jarra.  
Ojo, que giro paloma  
Ojo, que remonto cabra.

Vivan esos ojos.

Luz para esos ojos.

Líneas y colores para esos dos ojos.

Todo el amor para esos ojos.

El cielo entero para esos ojos.

Outside with those eyes!  
Take those eyes out for me!

(...)

Kill those eyes for me.  
swivel-eyes  
painter's eyes  
tricky eyes.

(...)

Eye, that plate-like I get over  
Eye, that jar-like I jump over  
Eye, that dove-like I circle  
Eye, that goat-like I surmount.

Long live those eyes.

Light for those eyes.

Light and colours for those those  
two eyes.

All love for those eyes.

The whole sky for those eyes.

El mar entero para esos ojos.	The whole sea for those eyes.
La tierra entera para esos ojos.	The whole earth for those eyes.
La eternidad para esos ojos.	Eternity for those eyes.

(*Lo que canté*, 24-25)

That paradise of Alberti's, painting, becomes in the shape of Picasso's painting a passion for him. Alberti looks at it and looks at himself through the eyes of the "monster". It is not only a question of eyes but also hands in accordance with the line "he olvidado una cosa: los ojos y la mano de Picasso" (*Los 8 nombres* 7)/ "I have forgotten something: the eyes and the hand of Picasso", eyes with which to see and hand with which to paint. The poet asks that they be loved and kept safe, although also the strength they express as they reappear before him cause pain. Picasso's hand goes through a process of multiplication in Alberti's *Arboleda perdida*: "Primero Picasso comenzó pintando con dos manos, luego con cuatro, luego con diez, con veinte, con cuarenta, con cien, con quinientos, con mil, hasta llegar a tapar de colores todas las superficies. Manos de Picasso, por todas partes, por sobre papeles, sobre cerámicas, sobre hojalatas, hierros, sobre todas las cosas. Y se llenó el mundo con sus manos" ("El otoño 19")/ "First Picasso began painting with two hands, then with four, then ten, the twenty, then forty, then a hundred, then five hundred, then a thousand, reaching the point at which all surfaces were being covered with colours. The hands of Picasso were everywhere, on papers, on ceramics, on tin, iron, on all things. And the world was filled with his hands".

The hyperboles relating to eyes and hands in *Los 8 nombres de Picasso* come one after another to form a metaphorical chain. Eyes and hands that are necessary to achieve plasticity; a hundred thousand eyes and the world was filled with his hands. Picasso is "un relampaguear de pura plástica sonora, de puro ingenio delirante, en continua arrancada vertiginosa" (*Relatos* 18) "a flashing of pure sonorous plasticity, of pure delirious wit, a continuous outpouring", for Alberti, who will be similarly enthusiastic in his dedication to Picasso in *A la pintura*, and the poems in this book "Picasso" and "De azul se arrancó el toro"/ "From blue the bull charged" .. The bull recurs in Alberti's burlesque poetry as an explosive game and becomes the terrible animal of the Spanish Civil War when it shakes the Guernica painting. This is the other mythical dimension that Picasso assumes in the work of Alberti, who asserts: "Arrancada, sí, arrancada de fuerte toro español (...)arrancada de toro haciendo añicos el orden de las cosas (...) Para ofrecerlo compuesto de otro modo, en reinventada, cínica e imposible vida nueva" (*Relatos* 143) "Charge, yes, charge of the strong Spanish bull (...) Charge of the bull shattering to pieces the order of things (...) To offer it composed in a new way, in a reinvented, cynical, and impossible new life". Alberti pictures

Picasso in the bull: "Y me lo imaginé paciendo de aquel alimento sobrenatural que el picassiano poeta cordobés Luis de Góngora ofrece a la divinidad astada de sus Soledades: stars" (*Relatos* 143) "And I imagined him grazing on that supernatural nourishment, which the Picassian Cordoban poet Luis de Góngora offers to the horned divinity of his *Solitudes: stars*". Grazing on stars, the mythic painter, all eyes and hands, takes on in Alberti's poetry the personality of the immense talent of the monster or the aggrandized genius, whom objects seem to follow, passing through his eyes to be devoured, digested in a singular way and recreated by his painter's hand. This, then, is Alberti's Picasso: "cien mil ojos en dos ojos" (*Lo que canté* 22) / "a hundred thousand eyes in two eyes".

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## Image Upon Image: Alberti and Van Gogh

0. Rafael Alberti's poem "Van Gogh" appears in the second edition of *A la pintura (Poema del color y la línea)/To Painting (Poem of Line and Colour)*, a collection published in Buenos Aires in 1948.<sup>1</sup> In subsequent editions of the volume, this text remains unchanged, although the accompanying iconographic subjects change in illustrated editions. The Argentinean edition has the drawing of the *Cypresses* (Saint-Remy, June 1989) in black and white. The 1968 Spanish edition reproduces an enlarged detail (the moon) of the famous work *The Starry Night* (Saint-Remy, June 1989) in colour,<sup>2</sup> whereas the bilingual Italian edition of 1971 features Alberti's own collages and drawings.<sup>3</sup>

The author speaks poetically not of a specific painting by Van Gogh, but of his pictorial trajectory as a tragic symbiosis of life and art: a genius of the excess he approaches with a reticent discourse from a semantic point of view, but very expressive from a formal point of view. It is a case of poetic language that speaks of pictorial language metaphorically and symbolically, in a very broad sense. The metaphor allows us to perceive what the concept turns to stone,<sup>4</sup> and the symbol allows us to traverse the borders of codes.<sup>5</sup> With (verbal) images of (visual) images, Alberti constantly replaces the signs of his habitual contexts —through a succinct, elemental, "impressionist" statement— with his scant syntactic articulations and his many resonant implications.

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<sup>1</sup>Rafael Alberti, *A la pintura (Poema del color y la línea)*, Buenos Aires, Losada, 1948, pp.201-203.

<sup>2</sup>Rafael Alberti, *A la pintura. Poema del color y la línea (1945-1967)*, Madrid, Aguilar, 1968.

<sup>3</sup>Rafael Alberti, *Alla pittura. Poema del colore e della linea. 1945-1952*, Disegni e collages dell'autore, translated by Ignazio Delogu, Roma, Editori Riuniti, 1971.

<sup>4</sup>For Aristotle the metaphor helps us understand things in motion and refers therefore to the *physis*. Cf. Paul Ricoeur, *La metafora viva*, Milano, Jaca Book, 1997, pp.60-61. Ed. orig.: *La métaphore vive*, Paris, Seuil, 1975.

On the representation of things in motion

<sup>5</sup>According to Umberto Galimberti, *La terra senza il male*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1984, p.75, "in order to pro-voke the symbol in order to 'call' upon it as much as possible to produce meaning, it is necessary first of all to trans-gress the semantic order, in a literal sense, that is 'to proceed beyond' its codified signs, since the symbol, as a dimension that begins working when the conceptual apparatus fails, and as a reference to further meanings beyond the codified meanings, makes up for a deficiency and ensures a progression, that very same progression which, despite Hegel's prediction, the symbolic order continues to have vis-a-vis the semantic order".

Like Van Gogh's pictorial technique, here Alberti's poetic art suggests that more is said with less, in the end effectively representing what is at play: not the perfection of the work, but the potency of the act. Something so mysterious that it needs much silence,<sup>6</sup> so that between pauses the figurative saying may interrogate that limit of outward appearance where, for both the painter and the poet, experience starts from the body.<sup>7</sup> Van Gogh, especially in his final years, made a heart-breaking metaphysic by painting nature. Let's see how Alberti, who had a more positive attitude<sup>8</sup> on this topic, managed to bring that relationship to his poetry.

VAN GOGH<sup>9</sup>

1	Pincelada quemada. Fuente de aparente	Sunstruck brushstroke; source of a seemingly
5	corriente desordenada. Matutina, golondrina fuente.	orderless streaming, morning- like source of the swallows.
10	Se arremolina, campesina, ondula. Noche en círculo rueda,	Whirls, the countryside swirls night's wheel twirls

<sup>6</sup>Pier Aldo Rovatti observes in *L'esercizio del silenzio*, Milano, Raffaello Cortina, 1992, p.130: "Thus language can enter into a sort of oscillation: names and things are slowed down in their correspondence to each other. Semantic deviations and shifts are more visible: words, inertially attracted by the normal conceptual organization, are induced to reveal their metaphorical dimension".

<sup>7</sup>According to José Luis Pardo, *Las formas de la exterioridad*, Valencia, Pre-textos, 1992, p.261: "In Greek thought, 'experience' can mean only 'the experience of feeling,' that is, being becoming sense itself or the natural experience of nature. But like nature it is considered —like *physis*— before all *work*, and *work of art*, a product of technique and *poiesis*, it does not deal with the perception of a chaotic, inert, undifferentiated, abstract or empty multiplicity; nature can be experience —become something felt— in environments of sense within certain limits that we have called Spaces (and which contain time retained and concentrated, which are 'full of things,' which are Images, Shams or Scenes); such spaces are specific places that nature inhabits (they are habitats) and habits with which nature cloaks itself."

<sup>8</sup>Luis García Montero, *La palabra de Ícaro (Estudios literarios sobre García Lorca y Alberti)*, Universidad de Granada, 1996, p.143: "The unprecedented astonishment of creating makes the forces of nature unite with art in Alberti's poetic world. Poetry and painting are activities that are capable of limiting the astonishment of nature, the impetus for life, mystery and metamorphosis, the exaltation to beauty. This creative logic explains the opportunity of the Albertian homage to painting.

<sup>9</sup>Translation of poem by Carolyn Tipton, *To Painting: Poems by Rafael Alberti*, Evanston, Illinois, Northwestern University Press, 1997, pp.149 and 151. —tr.



	azula	blues
15	la arboleda.	the grove.
	Crepita,	Crackling,
	carrasca infinita,	the mazed holly-oak,
	t izo,	a blaze of coals,
	el paisaje:	the scene:
20	rescoldo movedizo,	embers shifting,
	mar,	an uplifting
	oleaje.	of the sea.
	Nuclear	Yellow dementia
	demencia en amarillo,	at its core,
25	pincel cuchillo,	knife-applied
	girasol,	sunflower:
	cruento	yellow sun-
	amarillo sol,	gore,
	violento	violent-eyed
30	anillo.	round.
	Gualda trugal,	Wheat-field of weld,
	verde alucinación,	hallucination in green,
	naranja, bermellón,	orange, vermilion,
	metal,	brass
35	chilla,	scream—
	pesadilla	nightmare,
	mortal,	mortal dream:
	humilde silla.	humble, in a room,
	Flor,	chair,
40	candela	yellow candle,
	amarilla.	bloom.
	Se corta,	Your colors
	se recorta	then cut short,
	tu color	cut off
45	se exalta,	painter,
	vuela,	you rise,
	pintor.	apotheosized.
	Mas permanece lo que importa:	Yet what you worked
	alta,	to make
50	la estela <sup>10</sup> .	remains:
		a starry wake.

<sup>10</sup>Rafael Alberti, *A la pintura (Poema del color y la línea) (1945-1976)*, Madrid, Alianza, 1989, pp.124-125; the citations from other poems in the collection refer to this edition. For a general critical work on this volume, cf. Pedro Guerrero Ruiz, *Rafael Alberti: Poema del color y la línea*, Murcia, El Taller, 1989. For a generic interpretation of the poem *Van Gogh*, cf. *ibídem*, pp.73-77. For a precise albeit brief analysis, cf. Kurt Spang, *Inquietud y nostalgia. La poesía de Rafael Alberti*, Pamplona, Universidad de Navarra, 1973, pp.146-148.

1. In the first stanza Alberti focuses immediately on the theme of creation, from the mythology of technology relative to the mythology of nature. The first word, which comprises the first line, is “pincelada”/“brushstroke,” a metonymy of the entire pictorial work in the classic sense of *ars* or technique. With a hyperbolic use of the poetic signifier and its effects of suprasegmental meaning, in this strategic opening Alberti dedicates a line to each word, breaking the fluidity of the text with the first representation of Van Gogh’s abrupt style.<sup>11</sup> The second word is “quemada”<sup>12</sup>/“burned,”<sup>13</sup> a description that refers to the dark stroke as though it were taming fire. Like a new Prometheus, the Dutch painter appears as owner of that cosmogonic element that leaves only the fingerprint of its intervention, the sign that something that existed stopped existing thanks to the noble and sacred process of combustion. The final period, after this minimal noun phrase that—in addition, the enjambment full of emotional tension—indicates that the short, symptomatic foreshortening has come to an end.

The third word—to which, also emphatically, the poet dedicates a single line—is the apposition “Fuente”/“source,” an allusion to another theme in Van Gogh’s paintings: water, another cosmogonic element. Just like the igneous element, the aquatic element is a symbol of creation. In particular, the image of the fountain refers to perennial regeneration, to the endless energy that flows from a secret origin. Here, furthermore, it takes shape as the medium that mysteriously guides chaos toward the cosmos: such is the significance of the noun phrase “source/ of a seeming-/ly orderless/streaming.” The reiterated enjambment postpones interpretation until the end. At the same time, the phonic structure reinforces the dynamic polarity between what is stated and what is hidden: in the dissemination of the clear dominant vowel [e], the continuant consonants [f], [n], [r] (“fuente/de aparente/corriente”) oppose the explosive consonants [p] [d] [k] y [t] (“fuente/de aparente/corriente”), while two types of perfect rhyme closely tie together all of the preceding lines. Following the a-a-b-b-b-a rhyme

<sup>11</sup> On the mimetic effects of the formal structure of the poem, Spang notes in *Inquietud y nostalgia/Worry and Nostalgia*, cit., p.146: “The short lines, often a single word, that rhyme irregularly, the long and irregular stanzas give the poem a breathless and restless rhythm and are a faithful reflection of Van Gogh’s technique in his tense and laboured brushstrokes.” *Inquietud y nostalgia. La poesía de Rafael Alberti*, Pamplona, Universidad de Navarra, 1973, pp. 146-148. Cf. also Eric Bou, *Pintura en el aire*, Valencia, Pre-textos, 2001, pp.157-177.

<sup>12</sup> When the author’s analysis involves the word order of the poem, its rhyming scheme or its linguistic components, the Spanish is included. Otherwise, only the English is provided. –tr.

<sup>13</sup> Tipton’s translation is often creative and interpretive, not literal. If the discussion of the Spanish word or phrase cannot be applied to the translation, a literal translation is provided in parentheses. –tr.

scheme, the two sequences “*pincelada, quemada, desordenada*” and “*fuenta, aparente, corriente*” are also integrated from the sonorous point of view. Furthermore, on the poetic plane, the technical, aesthetic and ethical expressions of the painter are reinvented *metaphorically*. Consider, for example, the gloomy paintings of the first Dutch period, whose scenes of peasant life are dominated by brownish tones and blackened outlines. The blue colour belongs to his subsequent stage in Paris: the city’s skies and the backgrounds of his still lifes and self-portraits seem lined with short waves. In both cases, motion is fixed, and the start and finish of movement fall outside the scope of the senses, in the territory of imagination which by its very nature allows us to see what is there *plus ultra*: in this case through the metaphysic of fire and water.

To capture what is beyond the shapes, through the shapes themselves: this was Van Gogh’s obsessive and paradoxical search that Alberti depicts with his knowledge as a poet and a painter. In this way, he sets out the conditions starting in the first verse, especially in the conclusion, where the adjective “morning-like,” which opens the last noun phrase, is another symbolic image from the beginning, analogous to that of the “swallows”, an apposition related to inaugural time and movement.<sup>14</sup> Between “source” (3) and “source” (8), the anaphora that encircles the specifications of “brushstroke,”<sup>15</sup> Alberti introduces the cyclical return of the dawn (“morning-like”) and the spring (“swallows”), as subsequent images of Van Gogh’s creative ability, related to the cosmogonic element of air, an invisible but sensitive mediation between fire and water. This enumeration without verbs, as simple and solemn as a timeless truth, precedes a great dynamic explosion.

2. The “*pincelada*”, also the subject of the second stanza, suddenly begins to act as if it had a life of its own. The poet again encloses each lexeme in a single line, but here the first two lines are both marked by commas and the third line by a period, with a closed rhyme effect, which accompanies and underscores the semantic component: “*Se arremolina, / campesina, / ondula*” / “*Whirls, / the countryside / swirls*”. The interaction between the signifier and the signified is consistent at all levels. For example the continuant consonants in the Spanish [s], [r], [m], [n] of the first reflexive verb (“*se arremolina*” / “whirls”) accentuate the kinetic flow of the referent, its revolving, concentric frenzy: metaphor of metaphors (“*moler*” > “*molino*” > “*remolinar*” >

<sup>14</sup> For example, Alberti also associates light with a bird in flight also in the first lines of the poem *Al movimiento/To Movement*: “To you, winged grace, form in flight/headlong mass revived by light” (p.108).

<sup>15</sup> Line 1 in Spanish –tr.

“arremolinar” / “to grind” > “mill” > “to spin” > “to whirl”), this image synthesizes the painter’s maximum energy, his incessant wish to break up figures and pile them up, always longing for the supernatural revelation. The synecdoche formed by the adjective “campesina” (“rural”) elaborates further on one of Van Gogh’s favourite themes during both his Dutch and Provençal periods: the country. At the same time it completes the fourth corner of classic cosmogony: fire, water, air, in the first stanza; earth in the second. Once more the material, as well as ideological, ties them together, given that another perfect rhyme creates a single, strategic tone at the end of the stanza (“matutina, golondrina, se arremolina, campesina”), lexemes belonging to distinct semantic areas and stanzas. The last verb of this phrase —“ondula” (“undulates”)— also expresses a movement, but it is a movement of nature as opposed to the first movement: the “burned brushstroke” is now replaced with a soft, horizontal rhythm, from one side to the other, forming waves. The circle (“whirls”) and the line (“swirls”), never static, respectively refer to totality and discontinuity, to that which is indivisible and that which is discrete, to the being and to the entity: that is, to the eternal polarity of creation.

The idea unfolds over the rest of the stanza, where the result rather than the process of painting is stressed. For the first time a phrase comprised of the subject, complement and verb occupies a single line: “Night’s wheel twirls.” This demiurgic scene represents darkness being replaced with a circular movement: the act of going around, whose vigour is acoustically strengthened by the phoneme [r] in the initial position, since the symbology of the wheel introduces in the eternity of the circle the contingency of becoming and, therefore, the mortal existence of all creation.<sup>16</sup> The “night” is also the grammatical subject of the following noun phrase: “blues/the grove” which, with the fragmentation of the line and the suspension of the enjambment, returns to the mysterious atmosphere of the beginning, but a religious halo has been added. Van Gogh considered blue to be a sacred colour, typical of eternity and infinity.<sup>17</sup> The germinal and powerful night contaminates a grove with its chromaticism, activating the dual symbology of the spiritualization of the subject and the regeneration of life. The tree, a cosmic axis that unites the underworld and the celestial world,<sup>18</sup> completes the four constituent elements of the universe.

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<sup>16</sup>Cf. Jean Chevalier - Alain Gheerbrant, *Dictionnaire des symboles*, Paris, Robert Laffont e Jupiter, 1969, s.v.

<sup>17</sup>Meyer Schapiro, *Vincent van Gogh*, New York, Harry N. Abrams, 1950, p.19, observes that if yellow is the colour that ideally represents divine light, “the more recessive blue suggests a distant heavenly space or an inwardness of spirit restored to its celestial source - the blue of the sky absolutized in color, almost to the state of darkness.”

<sup>18</sup>Cf. Chevalier - Gheerbrant, *Dictionnaire des symboles*, cit., s.v.

This stanza seems to allude to a painful period in the artist's life. When Van Gogh lived in the mental hospital in Saint-Remy (for one year, starting in May 1889), he painted extraordinary works that present analogous features: in addition to *The Starry Night*, there are numerous versions of cypresses, olive groves and other trees, where blue tones prevail even though they are daytime scenes.

3. From the third stanza on, Rafael Alberti brings life to Van Gogh's painting with prosopopeias that introduce a perception beyond the visual. The grammatical and referential subject is "the landscape" (19), but the poet first presents the verb "Crepita"/"Crackling." Again it is an isolated opening on a single line, whose forceful initial tone, a result of the union of the explosive [k] and the continuant and vibrant [r], is disseminated in the apposition "carrasca"/"holly-oak," with echoes that are made endless with the adjective "infinita" ("infinite"). This noisy image, which the perfect rhyme ("crepita, infinita") subsequently brings into a common sonorous subject, may refer to clicks of any origin if the subsequent apposition "tizo," also presented in a line by itself, does not resume the isotopy of the /fire/ that descends from the initial "Pincelada / quemada" "Burned/brushstroke". The following apposition "rescoldo movedizo"/"embers shifting," linked by another perfect rhyme to "tizo"/"a blaze of coals" is the beginning of the poem but brought up to date. The following isotopy of /water/ also confirms this through the final appositions of "sea" and "uplifting." Again the sonorous linking together of the perfect rhyme strengthens the already established semantic relationships. In particular "oleaje", in the last line, is connected to "el paisaje" ("the landscape"), one of the two lexemes in the entire poem that have the determinate article and that here symmetrically occupies the centre of the stanza, in a strategic position between combustion and undulation, fundamental metaphors of Van Gogh's painting.

4. All of this is brought to the extreme in the fourth stanza, which refers to the Arles period (from February 1888 to May 1889), when artistic creativity and mental illness collided with convulsive vehemence. With the isolated images of the noun phrases, Rafael Alberti represents the condition of the tormented genius that at that time produced an astonishing number of masterpieces. The opening lines —"Yellow dementia/at its core"— alludes to the pathological root of the work of art, the point of irradiation that participates in the same symbolic properties of the /circle/. The following line sums up the aggressive use of the pictorial instrument *par excellence*: the "Burned/brushstroke" from the beginning of the poem is now the (literally) "knife-paintbrush," as if the

dark lines were incisions, cuts, wounds. The evocative power of this bare and elemental style is enormous: who could forget, for example, that on the night of December 24, 1898 Van Gogh sank a knife into his own flesh, mutilating his ear?

The rest of the stanza presents the results of this paroxysmic condition. It addresses one of the most famous subjects of the artist's life: "sunflower:/yellow sun-/gore,/violent-eyed/round," often mentioned in letters to his brother Theo. During that period, Van Gogh considered that flower, painted in many versions, the code of his art *par excellence*. But in general the Arles landscape, its light and its weather never stopped surprising him, so much so that at times he painted outside in a rapture of mystic communion with nature. This undying stupor, which drove him to portray the same subject over and over in an attempt to capture its secret essence, belongs to the realm of the sacred. It is a feeling, far from reason, that brings so much loneliness. Van Gogh longs for contact with the vital powers of the universe and he removed himself further and further from the community of men.<sup>19</sup>

Alberti's ambiguous poetic text is in keeping with this vague and inexplicable intimacy that the artist wished to paint, thereby producing the effects of music<sup>20</sup> in his work. The semantic borders formed by the semiotic signs are dubious: "cruento/amarillo sol" ("bloody/yellow sun") could be the metaphoric apposition of "sunflower", like an autonomous detail from the diurnal paintings of the period. The same holds true for "violento/anillo" ("violent/round"), which may refer to "sunflower" and to "sun" or to one of the two or neither. A key to interpretation lies in the fact that in Arles, Van Gogh stopped painting in the canonical style of the impressionists. Inspired by the ancient masters of Japanese art, he eliminates the shadows and natural light sources as if the objects themselves emitted light, with an autonomous and unknown power.<sup>21</sup> Even the gigantic suns stopped illuminating the world from high above it: they are powerful, mysterious, terrible coils.<sup>22</sup> In his figurative art, so concrete that it becomes unreal, everything is joined to everything else.

The open form of the noun phrase and the striking presence of poetic signifier play a primary role in the construction of labile semantic borders: through the unequal intermittency of the short and extremely short lines (from three syllables to seven); through the enjambments

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<sup>19</sup> In reference to the "political" consequences of sacredness, cf. Roger Caillois, *L'homme et le sacré*, Paris, Gallimard, 1950, p.174.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. letter 531. from the Italian edition: *Tutte le lettere di V. van Gogh*, Introduzione di J. van Gogh-Bonger, Milano, Silvana Editoriale d'Arte, 1959, vol.3, p.26.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *ibídem*, pp.337 y 341.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *ibídem*, p.360.

("Nuclear/demencia"; "cruento/amarillo", "violento/anillo") that break up the strongest logical-syntactic ties; through the etymological figure and the perfect rhymes ("sol, girasol"; "amarillo, cuchillo, amarillo, anillo"; "cruento, violento") which, together with the anagrammatical dissemination of the subsequent common phonemes (in particular the vowels [u] and [a]; the consonants [k], [r], [m]) keep forming their own sonorous structures. All of this inserts subsequent tensions in a referent that is in itself distressing, devoid of harmony. The relationships are very much woven together: by the isotopies of /circle/; in the symbolic acceptance of invariability and vagueness, ("Core", "sunflower", "sun", "round"); of the /fury/, in the ambiguous valence of the creative drive and the uncontrolled behaviour ("dementia", "knife", "bloody", "violent"); of the /yellow/, which was one of the painter's favourite colours at the time.

It is interesting to note that, in the poem entitled "Yellow," Rafael Alberti dedicates some lines to Van Gogh, conjugating in a manner approaching chromaticism, insanity and an iconographic search. Furthermore, the illustrated Spanish edition of *A la pintura/To Painting* associates the poem "Amarillo" "Yellow" with the painting of the twelve sunflowers (Arles, August 1888). Fragment 28 of this poem is almost a citation from the poem "Van Gogh": "El amarillo del temlor, el tenso / amarillo febril de la demencia" "The yellow of the shivering, the tense/febrile yellow of dementia"; fragment 29 changes the isotopies of the /fury/ and the /circle/, personifying the phenomenological meeting between colour and the artist's eye: "Sueno, resueno. grito / hasta hincarme en el centro / —Van Gogh— de la retina y desgarrarla" "I make a sound, I echo, I scream/until I kneel in the centre/ —Van Gogh— the retina, tearing it up"; fragment 30 possibly refers to the passage from the realistic chromaticism to the symbolic: "Me tuesta el ocre. El rojo / me excita y me suspende hasta la altura / naranja de la llama" "The ochre toasts me. Red lifts me excites me and lifts me high up to/the orange of the flame" (p. 63).

In his letter to Theo from Arles, Van Gogh describes in minute detail this emotional change of colour. Speaking of the portrait of an artist friend, he affirms that he has given up blond hair, initially yellow, for a fiery orange. It is an example that clarifies an aesthetic beginning announced shortly before: using colour arbitrarily is to express himself with intensity.<sup>23</sup>

5. Strengthened by the articulation of poetic signifier, the fifth stanza continues to represent fragments of Van Gogh's famous paintings. The expressive strategy is the same: noun phrases confirm, in an indefinite

<sup>23</sup>Cf. letter 520, in *Tutte le lettere di V. van Gogh*, cit., p.6.



way, the persistence of the synergy among the context of Arles, chromatic audacity and mental malaise. The first three lines bring together the emotional, passionate use of the most frequent colours: "Wheat-field of weld,/hallucination in green,/orange, vermilion". These lines evoke not only the many versions of wheat-fields, but also the unusual chromaticism of many pictorial subjects from that period onwards, be they men, landscapes or simple objects. In his symbiotic relationship with the universe, Van Gogh's love could not conceive of hierarchy.

The following lines—"brass/scream—/nightmare,/mortal dream: humble, in a room,/chair"—allude to the celebrated paintings of interiors: the painter's bedroom (where the bed is prominent: orange wood, red bedspread, yellow sheets) and his chair (alone in the foreground, the yellow back, legs and straw seat); the green foreshortening of the door and the wall, the orange brick floor). The solitary and sleepless Van Gogh lives humbly in Arles but is concerned about his domestic surroundings: he wants to give it an artistic style, very distinct from the excessively ornate bourgeois taste of his time. He achieves this with very modest furniture, carefully chosen in spite of his scant resources. Painting them means expressing the paradox of an intimately tender and aesthetically heterodox relationship. For similar reasons he paints the chair of his friend Gauguin, with whom he shared his house in Arles for a season. Both chairs—which one critic considers a metaphor of the twentieth century crisis<sup>24</sup>—are so important for the painter that he describes them to his brother with great passion.<sup>25</sup> We are in December 1898: his sudden and dramatic changes in mood are becoming more intense, and Alberti expresses them with the syntagma "mortal dream" and the verb "scream," without a clear subject. Nevertheless fragment 29 in the poem "Yellow" ("I make a sound, I echo, I scream /until I kneel in the centre/—Van Gogh— the retina, tearing it up";) may guide our interpretation: "scream" may personify the deep tone of the colour and also represent the effect of a wave of insanity.

Again, the poetic signifier subsequently ties what semantics joins isotopically. In considering the striking phenomenon of the perfect rhymes in the final line, we note the homogenous series "Trigal, metal, mortal", "alucinación, bermellón" and "chilla, pesadilla, silla, amarilla".

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<sup>24</sup> Referring to the psychic fragility of so many European geniuses of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, identified by Hans Seldmeyer, affirm Ingo F. Walther - Rainer Metzger, *Vincent van Gogh. The Complete Paintings*, Köln, Taschen, 1997, p.11: "Van Gogh's chairs constitute a metaphor of the crisis of the entire century, a metaphor that corresponds to the somewhat forced pathos of Sedlmayr's account. We cannot grasp van Gogh's own *via dolorosa*, through his fits of madness and final suicide, in isolation from the century he lived in. Van Gogh's ailment was the *maladie du siècle*, the self-fulfilling *Weltschmerz*, that Seldmayr attempts to explain by the loss of belief in God."

<sup>25</sup> Cf. letter 563, in *Tutte le lettere di V. van Gogh*, cit., p.110.



Separated by a period, the last lines introduce two other well-known subjects of the artist's period in Arles: "Yellow candle,/bloom." Van Gogh continues to cultivate the floral theme he debuted in Paris. The final image is the lit candle, a symbol of cosmic individualized life and of rising strength,<sup>26</sup> but also the simple testimony of an object that the artist used at night to paint the skies sewn with stars. The symbolism of fire continues to be an active cosmogonic element. No longer a "Burned brushstroke," but rather a flame that keeps burning, as in *The Starry Night*, in which colossal stars are shown in motion across a dark sky: they all have circular halos and a yellow centre, as if they were lit candles.

The adjective "yellow", referring to the "candle", concludes the stanza, which is opened with the variant "wheat-field" and is tied chromatically and symbolically to the previous stanza. This colour connects everything.

6. The entirety of Van Gogh's personal adventure has been outlined. At the conclusive moment, after so many suggestive and unconnected scenes, now a concrete apostrophe appears with the key elements of the poem: the artist, his paintings and —completely unexpected— the spectator. The sixth stanza, as intensely dynamic as the second, both symmetrically equidistant with respect to the beginning and end of the poem, begins with the reflexive verb "Se corta." It is a transformation that may affect a piece of fabric or material; but it is also a metaphor for the pictorial technique of the artist, who increasingly accentuates the reckless lines in his compositions. Each cut is a separation and a beginning: all of the shapes are always in motion, as though threatened by chaos.

An anaphora and an etymological figure subsequently stress this artistic strength in the second reflexive verb: "se recorta" (to stand out or be silhouetted). Thus Rafael Alberti alludes to the schematicism of the silhouettes painted by Van Gogh, from the period in Arles forward, under the influence of the models of Japanese art that he admired.<sup>27</sup> Only in the third line does the subject of the phrase appear: "your

<sup>26</sup>Cf. Chevalier - Gheerbrant, *Dictionnaire des symboles*, cit., s.v.

<sup>27</sup>"Van Gogh used these models primarily to perfect his grasp of colour. He was able to juxtapose large areas of unmixed colour, relying on the familiar impact of contrast; and this brought home the full effect of monochrome blocks of colour alongside each other, where previously the setting of yellow beside violet or red beside green had depended on local colour or on small-scale brushwork. This was the first time van Gogh brought himself to use monumental areas of unmixed colour, undimmed by questions of light and dark, in their full, vivid, radiant power." (Walther - Metzger, *Vincent van Gogh. The Complete Paintings*, cit; pp.291-292).

colour," strategically placed in the centre of the sequence of actions that are divided in two blocks. The first two verbs represent the aspect of tangible construction of the work of art: the next two verbs represent the aspect of their emotional idealization. The third reflexive form — "se exalta" / "you rise" — reunites various components of the state of mind with which Van Gogh went about executing his paintings: enthusiasm, fervour, exasperation, derangement, mysticism, etc. Through the fourth and final verb — "vuela" (flies), which rhymes significantly with "candela" / "candle" of the previous stanza — the dynamic of colour reaches its metaphoric acme. The passage from matter to spirit is fulfilled. Defeating the strength as well as dense and compact texture, in Alberti's poem Van Gogh's colour manages to finally achieve the desired, higher sphere of existence.

But all of this exists thanks to the persona of the "painter," a lexeme that summarizes at the level of the signifier the semantic trajectory that he progressively brings to it. Through the sonorous anagrams and perfect rhymes, the phonemes [t], [o] and [r] of "pintor" are announced in advance by the subject of the phrase, "tu color" / "Your colours." These same phonemes and the phoneme [k] are anticipated by the initial verbs "se recorta" y "se corta." It is a crucial moment of the poem.

The last line of the stanza is a vocative, a moment of discourse that casts a different light on the entire previous enunciation, characterized by an abundance of noun phrases, general assertions and absolutes that, without the temporal and modal localization, are distant from the subjectivity of the speaker.<sup>28</sup> The other verbal phrases express objective processes through the pronominal structure of the third person (or non-person).<sup>29</sup> Summarizing, the static scenes as well as the dynamic situations do not raise suspicions regarding the poet's *coup de théâtre*. Suddenly he addresses the painter, who emerges as a *presence* that reveals himself and takes over the communication. The other being evoked is the "you" that implies the existence of "I," the speaker. Alberti calls upon Van Gogh and the ontological dimension of time and of the being is opened with the occurrence of his voice.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Cf. Émile Benveniste, "La frase nominale", en *Problemi di linguistica generale*, Milano, Il Saggiatore, 1971, p.189. Tit. orig.: *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, Paris, Gallimard, 1966.

<sup>29</sup>Cf. Benveniste, "La natura dei pronomi", *ibidem*, pp.306-307.

<sup>30</sup>Taking up the reflections of Benveniste on the enunciative act, Giorgio Agamben affirms, in *Il linguaggio e la morte*, Torino, Einaudi, 1982, p.49: "Since language takes place in the Voice (that is, in the non-place of the voice, in its having-been), language takes place in time. By showing the instance of discourse, the Voice opens up simultaneously being and time. It is chronthetic".

8. The consequences of this instantaneous enunciation are seen in the very brief conclusion, which nevertheless has the longest and most articulated opening line of the whole poem. Now that the representation of the paintings of Van Gogh is finished, the language recovers its speculative autonomy. Inaugurated by an adversative conjunction, the stanza poses the explicit duration of the work of art against the implied, previous event of death. The ephemeral destiny of the living is silenced, reduced to linguistic nothingness. The discourse focuses directly on the artistic heritage as both challenge and compensation: “mas permanece lo que importa: /alta, / la estela” “Yet what you worked/to make/remains:/a starry wake.

The poetic signifier forms, up to the end, a sonorous network among lexemes that already share the same semantic context. The verb “importa” (“matters”) (which rhymes with “Se corta,/se recorta”), the adjective “alta” (“high”) (which forms an etymological figure with “se exalta”), and the noun “estela”/ “wake” (which rhymes with “candela” and “vuela”), comprehend everything that in Van Gogh has a higher or preeminent symbolic connotation: his utopian conception of painting, the sublime heritage of his paintings, universal posthumous fame, etc. But “alta/estela” is at the same time a metaphor with a negative connotation, because it is also the image of a lost unity between the artist and his work. In terms of objects destined to last into the future, the products of painting (or of writing) break from the original context, they escape the control of the subject-creator; they become fingerprints that articulate the experience of loss.<sup>31</sup> Beyond the good intentions of the poet, who must have been thinking about his own destiny as well, for however high it may be—or perhaps because it is high—the wake of a work of art never saves the artist.

On July 27, 1890 Van Gogh writes to Theo and says goodbye, saying that he risks his life in his work.<sup>32</sup> For him, writing and painting are components of the same creative yjectory.<sup>33</sup> But this time, he never

<sup>31</sup>It is the subject that Jacques Derrida addresses especially in *L'écriture et la différence*, Paris, Seuil, 1967 and in *La dissémination*, Paris, Seuil, 1972. With regard to Van Gogh, goes into detail on the reflections of Heidegger on the pictorial subject of the boots in *La vérité en peinture*, Paris, Flammarion, 1978.

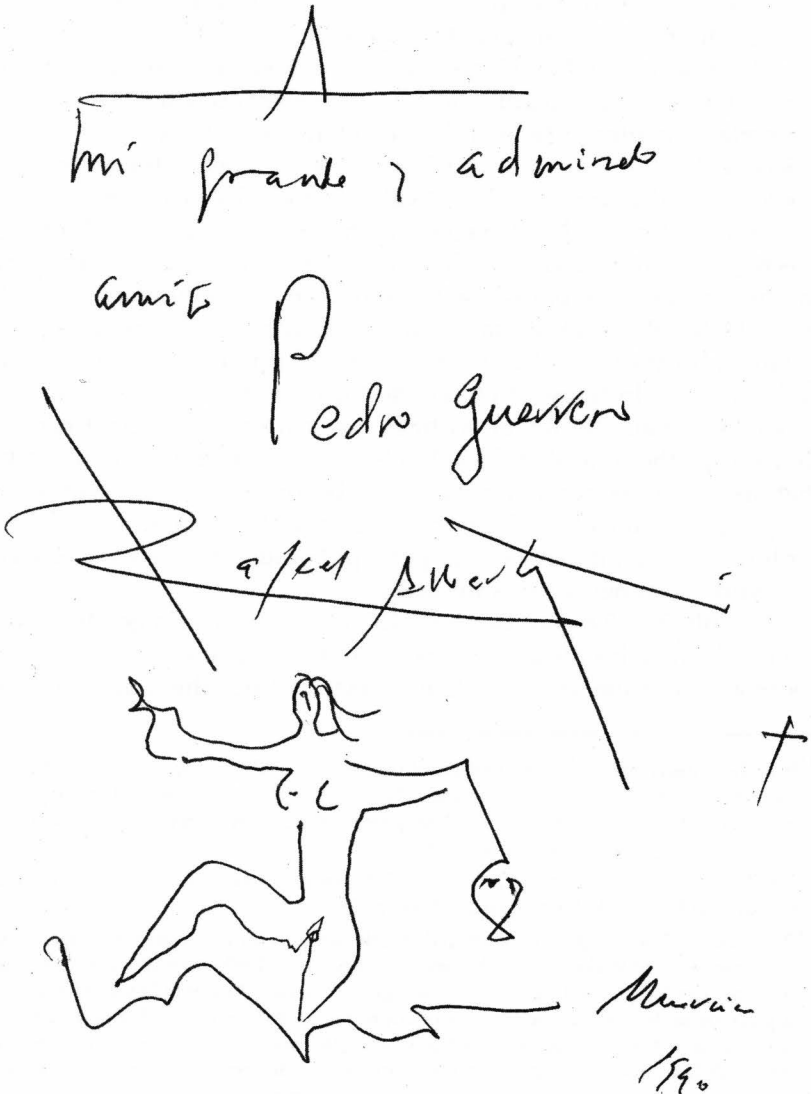
<sup>32</sup> Cf *Vincent van Gogh. Lettere a Theo*, a cura di Massimo Cescon, con un saggio introduttivo di Karl Jaspers, Milano, Guanda, 1984, p.358.

<sup>33</sup> The letters of Van Gogh have a seminal artistic function for Jean-Louis Bonnat, *Écriture sus parole. Vincent Willem van Gogh*, Paris, La lettre volée, 1993, pp.9-10: “L'écriture, dans la vie de Van Gogh, n'est pas une simple figure de style. Elle fait l'Œuvre. Elle marque la place de la destinée du peintre. La peinture s'y révèle comme le destin d'une écriture singulière. C'est elle qui domine Van Gogh. Elle constitue cette marque et ce trait de génie par lesquels nous sommes nous-même obligé de reconnaître qu'il y a là trace, marquage, insistance; le passage d'une rigueur d'abrupt, la chose sur laquelle les gens s'accordent alors en parlant d'un style.”

ended up sending the letter, or painting another work. On that bright summer day, he went out into the fields and shot himself.

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