

## **Paz's Poetics: Textuality, Sexuality, Politics**

**Haider A. Khan  
University of Denver  
Denver  
Co. 80208 USA  
Tel. 303-871-4461/2324  
Fax 303-871-2456  
e-mail:hkhan@du.edu  
and  
Visiting Professor,  
CIRJE,  
Graduate School of Economics  
University of Tokyo,  
Tokyo, Japan  
Tel.03-5841-5642  
Fax 03-5841-8294**

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(1)

In their study of Kafka, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari raise a set of interrelated questions:

How many people today live in a language that is not their own? Or not yet, even know their own and know poorly the major language they are forced to serve? This is the problem of immigrants, and especially of their children, the problem of minorities, the problems of a minor literature, but also a problem for all of us: how to tear a minor literature away from its own language, allowing it to challenge the language and making it follow a sober revolutionary path? How to become a nomad and an immigrant and a gypsy in relation to one's own language? (quoted in Lawrence Venuti's "Simpatico," *Substance*, Vol. 20, No. 2, 1991, p. 3)

Two people who write in French may perhaps have some justification for raising such questions about the Czech jew Kafka who wrote in German. But how can anyone raise these, or similar questions with regard to the work of Octavio Paz? Is he not an acknowledged master of the Spanish language? Has he not shown consummate skill in inhabiting all the modern forms and genres, utilizing them to produce dazzling effects? Is he not the cosmopolitan *pensadore* par excellence, a person of culture spanning the entire distance between not just Mexico and Madrid but also Paris and New Delhi? Is he not, after all, a poet of this century who embraced the modernist idea of universalism, rejecting the narrow provincialism of Mexico? In a sense, the answer to all these questions, even to the last, Paz's edited anthology of Mexican poetry notwithstanding, could be yes. But that is really not the crux of the matter. Simply to juxtapose this list of questions with the ones raised by Deleuze and Guattari (which, I might add, do not stand as absolutes, but rather, to use their term, as "nomadic" strategies to counter a certain domination by other questions and other terms) is to confront a complexity that may otherwise be easily swept away. It is a conventional criticism with its usual litany of

questions and strategies of reading may very well suppress: for it is the Oedipal anxiety to tame the text, to master its codes and its meaning that very often drives the conventional reader of (conventional) texts. One might even call it the grand cosmopolitan attempt at erasure, a move, often unconscious, to repress the uncomfortable traces of the other especially but not exclusively from the writings of women and non-Western people. Even when practiced in the name of the universal principles of modernism by the new criticism critics this has given a certain closure to texts which would otherwise open up spaces for a radical form of discourse. As I will argue, precisely such orthodox critical moves have been called into question by Paz's work even before the formal advent of post-structuralism or deconstruction. Without recourse to any currently fashionable literary labels, his work speaks in multiple voices about its own uncertainties as well as its discoveries.

It was perhaps Paz's good fortune that he came of literary age in the turbulent thirties, and found his own voice not only among the young poets in the self-consciously modernist journal *Contemporaneos*, but also in the confusion and turmoil of the dissolution and the reconstruction of reality surrounding him. It is true that the *Contemporaneos* and other dissident poets' European cultural curiosity led Paz to discover modernism in Spanish poetry from Gerardo Diego's *Antologia* (1932). The poetics of absolute interiority practiced by the contemporary Mexican poet Villaurrutia had tremendous initial impact at least from 1928 to the early thirties on the precocious Paz, so much so that even in 1973, Paz would recall that Villaurrutia "opened the doors of modern poetry for me." Indeed Villaurrutia and the *Contemporaneos* confronted the narrow cultural nationalism of Mexico during the 1920's and 1930's with the universalist approach to poetry and art. It is crucial for Paz and for much of the subsequent history of Mexican (perhaps even Latin American) literature that the European focus was continental, especially French, and unlike some other languages (for example, Bengali in India) not narrowly confined to the already established modernist English literature.

In going over Paz's literary production, one has to acknowledge his repeated confrontation not only with Time and History, but also with *time* and *history*. Among the Western readers of Paz's poetry, only Wilson comes close to grasping this aspect of Paz's struggle to be a poet.

The active, bitter conflict between poetry and history generates moments of freedom, an epiphany that Paz calls `poetic instants: Consequently, the poet's reactions to history become a test of his moral fiber. *At this level Paz's desire to become a poet, to rebel against necessity has led him to explore the functions of the poet and poem in society, both Western and Eastern, almost anthropologically. This desire to work out his salvation as a poet inevitably invokes the fatality of having been born a Mexican. This implies belonging to the marginalized provinces of the great empires of the twentieth century (Europe, the United States, Russia, Japan).* Thus Paz's measuring himself with the world's great poets and thinkers takes on poignancy, he was not born in one of the centers of power and had to fight his way out of a limited nationalistic tradition to discover his true roots, his *mexicandad* . . . his contemporaneity with all who suffer history, his freedom. (my emphasis)

Leaving aside the inclusion of Japan among the empires (for it is another problematic non-Western, actually a non-Indo-European cultural formation), Wilson posits part of the problem of being a poet from the periphery accurately. However, Paz is also a poet of this acute, cruel, and infernally complex century when empires crumble and the old sometimes gives way to the new only for part of the old structure to reappear in another guise. Thus any polar confrontation, while a better way of bringing into relief a poet's inner landscape than the traditional interpretative criticism can only be a start. In Paz's case it is a promising start, as Wilson realizes.

Paz's vueltas (return) from living abroad (Spain, \_ the United States, France, India) to Mexico have engendered his most fertile thinking about values. This moral stance, tested by the accidents of history, travel, change, love, aging, reading, and so on, supplies a remarkable *coherency* to the *diversity of* his work. (my emphasis)

However, reading Paz in too 'coherent' a fashion carries its own dangers. It may not be the best way to reveal or even to know the site of conflicts that lend his poems such poignancy, resilience, and power. Wilson's reading of Paz, although insightful and admirable for its consistency, ultimately locks itself in the 'prison house of Language' by not recognizing its own logocentrism. It ends up striving after the project of unearthing the changing but essential Paz, a presence which cannot be found because it is always already absent. I will try to show that Paz's own poetry grapples with this presence/absence/change problem in a way that reveals a field of forces running the entire gamut from the unconscious creative impulses to the politics of utopia.

It is remarkable that Paz's texts defy simple interpretative gestures. By enmeshing multiple, sometimes parallel, always polyphonic linguistic collages together, Paz has, since the mid-fifties, moved beyond even the modified modernism of his early poems. In poems like *Blanco* and *Vuelta*, even in his repeated revisions of these and some other poems, Paz seems intent on teasing the readers on, but he also has a serious purpose. The textuality his work presents is not simple replication. Like Kierkegaard his problem is "how to repeat without replication?" Such an approach to his text plays down any notion of commentary as a hermeneutic exercise performed on an autotelic text. As Barthes has pointed out (such) a text has "other texts present in it, at varying levels in more or less recognizable forms: the texts of the previous and the surrounding culture." Barthes goes on to claim that:

Any text is a new tissue of past citations. Bits of codes, formulae, rhythmic models, fragments of social languages pass into the text and are redistributed within it . . . (Barthes, "Theory of the Text," in *Untying the Text*, p. 39)

Thus Paz seems to deliberately expose his poems to an intertextual field in the sense Jameson has defined the term. That is to say, far from denying the traces of the other (or in fact others), Paz seems intent on highlighting these traces as much as possible. Starting with *Piedra de sol*, or perhaps even before that with *tAguila o sol?* in the beginning of the fifties, Paz invites (rather than suppressing for the sake of coherence) multiple meanings and offers a delirium of excess in his poems which is always already departing

from both AngloSaxon modernism and simple varieties of surrealism. In Paz there is no simple economy of text, no simple political thematic organization, no transcendental signifier/signified that can be used to unlock 'the interpretation' of his works. In spite of this (or perhaps because of this), I would argue, his texts are densely packed with poetic/political subversion.

(2)

There are two overtly political periods in Paz's life. One belongs to the decade of the thirties, the other since his resignation from the Mexican diplomatic service as a protest against the massacre of students in Mexico City in 1968. In 1936-37, Paz broke off his formal education and went to Yucatan to set up a school near Merida. In his *Poemas* there is a 'final' version of a poem he first published in 1941, called "*Entre la piedra y la flor*" (Between the Stone and the Flower). Paz began this poem during his stay in Yucatan. Explaining his later revisions, Paz insisted on the political intentions of the poem: an expose of the rule of the dead hand of capital over living human bodies and spirits. Although Paz went to Spain the next year, he never fought in the Spanish civil war. However, he did observe in Spain a fusion of human spirit in revolt against terror, a unity that affirmed life against death. He would come back to this keenly felt experience of the possibility of a community of autonomous subjects (Foucault and Lacan notwithstanding) time and again. In the previously mentioned long, mythic poem *Piedra de sol* which marks a transition (but not from a political to non-political phase as some critics maintain), Paz is led to juxtapose the bombing in Madrid with lovers "fused together while making love."

Madrid, 1937 in the Plaza del Angel women were sewing, and  
singing with their children, when the siren sounded and the  
screams, houses kneeling down in the dust, towers splitting,  
facades gave in and the hurricane noise of the engines

(*Poemas* 268-69)

This barbarity and utter destruction of fascism is contrasted with

the two naked bodies make love to defend our share of eternity,  
our ration of time and paradise, to touch our roots, to recover  
ourselves, to recover our inheritance, stolen by the thieves of life a  
thousand centuries ago . . . .

*(Poemas 268-69)*

Here Paz has already advanced beyond the politics of power, but not, as I have mentioned before, beyond politics. For, recovering the legacy of "the garden," another image used by Paz with increasing frequency, is not possible without fusing life and poetry-and life, social life, includes a political life. The triumph of fascism and the corruption of communism under Stalin left Paz in despair. For him renouncing party politics was easy, but it raised new problems of theory and practice. After all, can a man be a man in isolation? What is poetry, if not communication? *Soledad* (solitude) must be explored not for the sake of solipsistic self-justification, but to understand the limits of man and possibility of the community which Paz experienced in revolutionary Spain. ,

In 1941 Paz wrote "I want to find the deepest voice inside me . . . the insoluble solution . . . ."

This period also coincides with his reading of Nietzsche "Only Nietzsche is capable of comfort."

When the retreat from direct politics is not an escape, it raises questions that are strategic in terms of life's choices. For Paz the strategic choice seems to have been, a deeper exploration of the self through the medium of words. And here we come up against the question: how does a marginalized poet from the margins of the empires find his voice? Paz's answer to this question produced a polyphony of textured poems and essays. But at the most palpable level, that of poetry, we are led to see an exploration of the "moral sense" (Paz's term) in relation to natural freedom, human integrity, passion and sexuality. Why this occurs is also partly related to Paz's relationship with the French as opposed to the English modernists. But here, too, there are complications ahead.

(3)

Paz had come to surrealism through the influence of Luis Cernuda. When Paz wrote in 1942 that communion was `still possible in poetry, he was exploring a psychic field that was possible because of surrealism. He also tried to project his own psychic landscape into the writings of modernists like Eliot. It is interesting that like many poets from the periphery, some of whom were left wing, he (mis)read Eliot's *The Waste Land* as a description of a historical reality, our own purgatory in our time. Ironically, Eliot himself never encouraged such a reading. On the contrary, he mobilized an interpretation along the lines of a spiritual journey. Paz also shows an appreciation for reality and aversion to systems that would certainly run counter to high modernism in the Anglo-Saxon world. At the same time, poetry becomes for him a dialogue with the world, moving between the two poles of solitude and communion. Paz's heterodoxy would evolve into a morality and politics of the body and not an escape from it. It is also important that he understood American capitalism directly by having been there. Thus, unlike some former revolutionaries, his renunciation of direct politics did not lead him to a reactionary status quo-oriented political stance.

Yet the stubborn problem of bringing poetry into life remained. In 1945 Paz published a poem called "*La calle*" (The Street). Here the poet is far from sure-footed, blindly tripping over stones that are dumb.

where no one awaits or follows me where I follow a  
man who falters

("La calle")

Later Paz would talk about the phenomenon of *ningunuendo* (nobodying) in the industrialized, capitalist societies.

Perhaps it was lucky again for Paz that he went to a Paris that was humiliated. For a brief few years devastated Paris (or Berlin or Tokyo) would receive the citizens of the periphery on more or less equal terms. Although aware of a certain amount of exoticism



with respect to Mexico, that country being the surrealist landscape par excellence, Paz attempted a synthesis rather than playing up his Mexican-ness. There may even have been an initial reversal of cultural oppositions which today, after Derrida, we might think of as being deconstructive. Yet Breton, while accepting Paz, made him represent mysterious Mexico, understandable in a man of Breton's temperament, but hardly an embrace without irony. Thus a return to Mexico on Paz's own terms would be necessary.

In *zAgüla o sol?* Paz already declared his rupture with the earlier lyrical period. He also celebrated the discovery that poetry-surrealist poetry-can be action. Even at this stage he offered his anguished battle with language for the reader to feel the disturbing and palpable violence of a clash among thinking, feeling, and being. The language of the first part called *Trabajos del poeta* bears resemblance to Henri Michaux in its continuous leaps and metamorphoses of expressions. It is a language that is deliberately undomesticated, not put in the service of the poet. The fact that this attitude to the relation between the poet and the language was a conscious choice is revealed by Paz in his reflections on writing:

Each time we are served by words, we mutilate them. But the poet is not served by words. He is their servant. In serving them, he returns them to the plentitude of their nature, makes them recover their being.

(El arco y la lira, trans. Ruth Simms, 37)

The prose poems of *tAgüla o sol?* (Paz would declare later: "There is no prose . . . everything is poetry in language," eliminating an unnecessary distinction much as John Cage did for music) confront the many selves in the itinerant Mexican Paz. One called "El ramo azul" (The Blue Bouquet) included in the second section called "Arenas movedizas" (Quicksand) is particularly interesting for dealing with the threat of mutilation and the ambiguities of being a Mexican.

A man (the poet-narrator) wakes up at night and walks off into a Mexican pueblo for a smoke. He soon realizes that someone is following him. A dialogue in "authentic" Mexican, dialect takes place between him and an Indian peasant who apparently had followed him. The Indian demands the narrator's eyes as a bouquet for his fiancée. "She

wants a little bunch of blue eyes," he explains. The narrator has to kneel down. A light is held up to his eyes as he stares dumbly at the machete. The ending is almost like that of a Maupassant short story. The Indian apologizes, realizing his mistake: "Well, they are not really blue, señor, please pardon me." For the narrator there is nothing left to do but to stumble back to his inn and then to flee.

Paz's very language of macabre fantasy/stark realism exposes the reader to the treacherous nature of any fixed notions about the identity of the poet-narrator and the integrity of the text. Next to the cosmopolitan European poet (Paz, whose eyes are, in reality, blue) or rather within this mask/reality there is also the reality/mask of to *mexicano*. Indeed the pachuco and the *indio* are alive in Paz, threatening him and his text from becoming a universalistic, "modern" text, which will, in effect, reflect merely the dominance of the cultural imperialism of Europe. By contextualizing his surrealism and by letting the pores and fissures of his text show, Paz tends towards a radical form of discourse which stands apart from the conventional modern or even postmodern varieties.

Paz's long literary and intellectual *vuelta* (return) is accomplished in the truly epic and awesome poem *Piedra de sol*. Even the structure with the beginning and the ending stanza being identical reinforces the theme of eternal recurrence (Nietzsche's influence again?) which opens the poems:

a willow of crystal, a poplar of water  
a tall fountain the wind arches over  
a deep-rooted tree but dancing away  
a river course that curves,  
advances, recedes, comes back again  
forever arriving . . . .

*(Piedra de son)*

Yet the poem itself is a meandering through a hall of mirrors, labyrinths, and traps. The body of a woman (several or the same, called Melusine, Eloise, Persephone, Maria and other names) merges surrealistically with various natural objects and the stone-goddessnature comes alive at the end. This rich poem, densely packed with

images and sonorous words, is made to perform a magic, the limits of which are also there as traces of palpable violence.

Thus the violence of history has to be acknowledged in the question

Does nothing happen, only a blink?

-and the feast, the exile, the primary crime,  
the jawbone of the ass, the opaque thud  
and the incredulous glance of the dead falling  
on an ash-covered plain, Agamemnon's  
great bellow, the scream of Cassandra  
over and again, louder than the screams of the sea,  
Socrates in chains . . . .

the jackal. discoursing in the ruins of  
Nineveh, the shade before Brutus  
on the eve of the battle, Moctezuma  
insomniac on his bed of thorns,  
the carriage riding towards death  
-the interminable ride counted  
minute by minute by Robespierre,  
his broken jaw between his hands-,  
Churruca on his casklike scarlet throne  
the numbered steps of Lincoln  
as he left for the theater,  
the death-rattle of Trotsky and his howl  
like a boar . . . .

*(Piedra de son)*

Notice here the inclusion of mythical, fictional, and historical sufferers of violence. Regardless of the geometry of spatiality ("real," three dimensional man, or imaginary zero/infinite dimensional characters) or the arithmetic of time (before/after, past/present)

the deliberate mixing makes them all alike: There is violence in history and in reason, but also in imagination. This violence is the "rational" man's other, this is the goddess of stone, the teeth mother, or Kali drinking blood from human skull. After Lacan, and Deleuze and Guattari's Anti-Oedipus, we may want to change the metaphors to name-of-the-father or name-of-the-despot, though these are more prosaic. However, the fact remains that the darkness of history is deep within us. Suppressing this and trying to create a presence that is merely the appearance of the good life would be self-deception. Paz apparently has read Nietzsche all too well. Thus we are left with the image of the "foaming mouth of the prophet, his scream/the scream of the hangman and the scream of the victim . . . :"

In spite of the carefully chosen circular form and the marked transitions at the end, Paz is altogether too successful in impressing the reader with imagery like the following:

afternoon of saltpeter and stone,  
armed with invisible razors,  
in red, indescribable script  
you write on my skin and the wounds  
dress me like a suit of flames

*(Piedra de son)*

Even at the end, in spite of all his effort he cannot erase the trace of psyche which exclaims:

I burn endlessly, I search for water,  
but in your eyes there is no water

*(Piedra de son)*

The ending of this poem is a tour *de force* by a poet of the highest sensibility, and yet we know, after Barthes, Derrida, Lacan, Foucault, and Deleuze and Guattari that even the greatest of the writers cannot write a closed text, appearance to the contrary. Borrowing from Bakhtin I would observe that the text of *Piedra de sol* is "still warm from the struggle and hostility, as yet unsolved and still fraught with hostile intentions and

accents." That, in my view, is also what makes this long poem such a powerful transitional text.

(4)

It is then not surprising that Paz's wrestling with the issues of identity/difference, text/context, morality in life/morality in poetry could not end with *Piedra de sol*. The turning point would not come until his long stay in India (1962-1968) and his immersion into both Madhyamika and tantra. In this phase Paz also took a critical stance towards the structuralism of Levi-Strauss. Although he never articulated in prose the kind of critical readings that Barthes or Derrida would perform later, a discussion of his late poems will show a distinct post-structuralist tendency.

In India Paz most creditably rejected the way of the *Sadhu* and his self-involved way of inner salvation. Paz describes such a *Sadhu* as an *idolo podrido* (a rotten idol). However, confronting the mystical tradition, the suppressed other of the West, and though deformed and sometimes commercialized, a living cultural tradition in a peripheral community like India made the poet pose the previous problems more starkly in terms of words versus silence, invocation of the woman as the other in surrealism versus the woman as both woman in flesh and mother goddess, poetry or contemplation as a substitute for action versus moral action as being indispensable. India with its contradictions, its past of rich speculation and practice and its hopeless present of inaction jolted not just Paz the poet, but also Paz the man himself. In *Tumba de Amir Khusru* he juxtaposed the brilliant poet-musician Amir Khusru with the wandering dervish theologian Nizamuddin.

Tombs, two names, their stories:  
Nizamuddin the travelling theologian,  
Amir Khusru, tongue of the parrot  
the saint and the poet.

But the poem itself is a reflection and *partly* self-reflexive. Showing remarkable ambivalence towards poetry, Paz states, "Amir Khursu, parrot or mocking bird," ending the poem with the realization, "every poem is time and it burns!"

Another poem shows this oscillation between eternity and now, the contrast between the poet's temporality and the mystic's *nirvana* even more vividly.

I am in the unsteady hour  
The car races between houses  
By the light of a lamp I write  
Absolutes eternities  
and their outskirts  
are not my themes  
I hunger for life and also for death  
I know what I believe and that is what I write  
Advent of the instant

(Poemas 425-26)

This is poignantly defiant and acknowledges the fun frailty of art, especially poetry when confronted with the plentitude of being. Paz's solution is not to lapse into a mystical quiescence, or to find his way back to some political *vita activa*, although such explorations are not ruled out completely. Rather, he chooses to stay with and within his art and to give it as much life as possible at each moment with the full consciousness of the treacherous nature of the whole enterprise. Out of this Sisyphus-like striving comes a fuller realization of the role of Eros in life, and a need to demystify the surrealistic conception of woman as the ideal other half: Out of the imperative for showing the fortitude and moral courage to pursue the project of constructing a life and an art would also come the political phase after 1968. Paz's concern for the possibilities of unrepressed eroticism (the ideal of tantra) and the necessary human freedom runs parallel to his increased recognition that democracy has to be fought for actively in the most recent phase of his life and art. As mentioned previously, his contacts with Asia

played no small preparatory role in this. I now want to focus on some specific texts to elaborate this point further.

(5)

Paz dealt at length with his first encounters with Asia already in "Mutra" in New Delhi and "¿No hay salida?" in Tokyo, both written in 1952. As Jason Wilson rightly observes

"Mutra" is a crucial self-defining poem. The title places the poem in a town just south of Delhi and deals decisively with a 'temptation to cede to Hindu or Buddhist mysticism.' Paz does not seek the 'dissolution' of his consciousness, but its active involvement with historical life.

Determined to be involved with time (history) at the same time as he condemns it, Paz did not allow the prolonged encounter with India to create in him a solipsistic surrender to quietism. At the same time he came to understand the limits of language and the possibilities of erotic love in even more poignant terms than he did during his surrealistic period. In both *Blanco* and "Carta de Creencia," two superb long poems, he uses language to reveal both its possibilities and its limitations.

In "Carta de Creencia" the very first thing that is called into question, by pointing out its uncertainty, is time itself.

The uncertain territory  
between the night and day  
is neither light nor shadow  
it is time.

The uncertainty of writing on a darkening page, in a precarious temporal pause is underlined immediately after this. Writing/ Speech/Words, -all are uncertain.

Words are bridges  
also traps, jails, wells.

I speak to you: you do not hear me

Yet a poet who has chosen the social life must also participate in the making of poems with these uncertain bridges. He realizes that even love is an equivocal word ("Amor es *una palabra equivoca*"). The second and third parts of- this poem, "Cantata," is a poetic reflection on the incertitudes as well as the multiplicities contained in the word amor.

Desire invents it,  
Deprivations and lacerations give it life,  
jealousy drives it  
custom kills it.

A gift  
a punishment.

Rage, beatitude  
a knot: life and death.

A wound  
that is the rose of resurrection  
A word:

speaking it, we speak.

However, affirming that in speaking this word amor we speak ourselves cannot dissolve all questions. A series of further reflections and probes must follow:

Love commences in the flesh  
where does it end?

If it is a phantasm  
it is made flesh in a body:

if it is a body  
it dissipates at a touch.



Meditations on love, especially the overcoming of the male-centered surrealist view helps him grasp that the word *love* is

Fatal mirror:  
the image of desire disappears  
you drown yourself in your own reflections.

To face the fact of earthly love without the benefit of mysticism; to explore amor through words and, nothing but a poem exposes the poet to the ravages of time:

Time is evil  
the instant  
is the fall

Yet the naturalistic position that love is a "permutation/ . . . in the history of primigeneal cells/ and their innumerable divisions . . ." does not lead to any diminution of joy in its celebration.

On the contrary, in another image as striking as the ones in *Piedra de sol*, Paz recognizes the magical power of love to transmute:

Invention, transfiguration:  
the girl becomes a fountain  
her hair-a constellation,  
a woman asleep an island.

This may be Nietzschean *amor fati*, but it is also deeper than that, for there is no need for a metaphysical justification. The coda to this cantata reveals with deceptive simplicity the depth Paz has reached since his earlier surrealist conception of love and eroticism:

Perhaps to love is to learn

to walk through this world.  
To learn to be quiet  
like the oak and the linden of the fable  
To learn to see  
Your  
glance scatters seeds It planted a tree  
I speak  
because you shake its leaves

The liberation that results from even an indirect confrontation with the logocentrism and phallo-centrism of (Western) civilization is not only the recognition of the limits and contingencies of language *a la Nagarjuna* or the Zen masters, but it is also an affirmation of the possibilities of our very contingencies and a willingness to surrender. It is to surrender that part we call ego, to part with the ego's psychological slogan "where there was id there will be ego." At the same time it is not a surrender to the chaotic forces of infantile strivings. Rather it is learning how to let go of narcissism and to return to something like the logic of the unconscious as Deleuze and Guattari describe it in *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*.

It is indeed ironic, as Susan Suleiman points out in *Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics and Avant-Garde* that the avant-garde, including the surrealists, could not go beyond the patriarchal conversion of the woman as the other, the ideal partner of a split and alienated man. In some of his late poems, Paz seems to have progressed beyond the simple male/female polarity. In *Vuelta* there is a striking poem, *Nocturno de San Ildefonso* (*Nocturne of San Ildefonso*), which closes with the poet affirming the blood circulating in his head as he looks at his wife in flesh. She is alive, next to him, a *fuentes en la noche* (fountain in the night). The serene surrender of ego is almost inaudible in the last line:

I trust myself to her calm flow

Beyond love, it also seems that in *Vuelta*, Paz also returned to "real" (in the sense of Jameson, as that which hurts) life. Even as he recognizes that

The good, we wanted the good:  
to make the world right  
We did not lack integrity:  
we lacked humility

*(Poemas 634).*

Facing the wreckage of youthful dreams he is able to affirm:

Fraternity over emptiness

*(Poemas 637)*

Not respecting his own texts, but respecting the dynamic flow of the unconscious pulses and their conscious materialization, Paz revised a number of his earlier works. The comparison of some of the changes in the poem entitled *Vuelta* in its two versions in 1971 and 1976 shows the deepening protest against authority and opening up of even more space for an inner discourse. Not only is there addition (twenty-eight additional lines in 1976) but also respatialization through typographical reorganization ("language poetry" comes readily to mind as an analogy). Paz is more explicit in denouncing escapism. For example, a section in 1971 which reads simply:

Germination of nightmare  
in the stomach of the cinemas.

is expanded to read

Germination of nightmare  
infestation of leprous images

in the belly brains lungs  
in the sex of the temple and the college  
in the cinemas

It is possible to read in this use of synecdochical part-objects like "belly, brain, lungs" and a conceit-like expansion the criticism of the whole body of the society, but there is more. The nightmare germinates everywhere. Therefore, is the word immune from it? Given the radical doubt in which Paz has already thrown the surrealistic moves of equaling word with action, the answer implied would seem to be negative. Here we are brought face to face with the realization that history, real history (even putting both the words under erasure) involves palpable institutions and genuine suffering. Words can no longer stand in where moral action is necessary. It reminds one of Foucault's comments to Deleuze vis-a-vis the intellectuals in May 1968:

... the masses no longer need him to gain knowledge: they *know* perfectly well, without illusion; they know far better than he and they are certainly capable of expressing themselves. But there exists a system of power that blocks, prohibits, and invalidates this discourse and this knowledge . . . . Intellectuals are themselves agents of this system of power-the idea of their responsibility for "consciousness" and discourse forms part of the system. (Foucault, "Intellectuals and Power," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, p. 207)

This, Paz has known all his life, Paz the wayfarer and the itinerant poet, at once the voice of to *mexicano* and a human being with no country.

In his lifelong devotion to struggle with words and authorities, Paz, like Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz of an earlier period, the subject of his detailed study called *Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz o las trampas de la fe* (Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz or the Traps of Faith) had to confront -the rituals, codes, hierarchies and dogmas of the twentieth century. Creating poems against despotism and the tyranny of time, Paz may have reached a tentative realization in *El mono gramático* with his resolve to explore "*mas ser sin yo*" (more being without. ego). Given his earlier encounter with "the real," renouncing the "symbolic"

stance of ego would seem to be. another step towards freedom. Perhaps Paz can accomplish this and the West can accomplish what Paz suggested: "rediscover the secret of the incarnation of the poem into collective life, the fiesta." Perhaps all this and much more, but not without struggle. This is where the opacity of the text joins the opacity of life that has to be lived just as the text that has to be written over and over. Life, like the text, is a palimpsest.

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