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**Epic Linearity and Cyclical Narrative:
Moving Beyond Colonizing Discourse in
Alejandro Morales' *The Brick People***

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Hipertexto

Alejandro Morales' 1988 novel ends with the caveat, "*The Brick People* is a work of fiction. Any similarity between the characters and people, living or dead, is coincidental" (319). The publisher most likely placed this statement on the last page to avoid legal complications because *Brick People* is a historical novel that at times provides a scathing representation of the people, events, and politics that find their way into the text. These final lines may provide a kind of legal shield for Arte Público Press by asserting the unreality of the narrative, but they have the opposite effect upon the reader who immediately suspects that more of this narrative may be drawn from true events and personalities than she previously supposed. *Brick People* contains a teleological, linear narrative structure that describes the rise and fall of the Simons brick empire modeled upon epic conventions. *The Brick People* includes a cyclical narrative strategy that also draws upon the epic tradition and functions as the true heroic discourse in the novel. These clashing narrative strategies are interspersed with unreal events—*lo real maravilloso*—that further undermine the linearity of the dominant discourse and create a cognitive space that requires the reader to mediate between history, (un)reality, and narrative fiction. Morales, like Fyodor Dostoyevsky,

... placed the idea on the borderline of dialogically intersecting consciousnesses. He brought together ideas and worldviews, which in real life were absolutely estranged and deaf to one another, and forced them to quarrel. He extended, as it were, these distantly separated ideas by means of a dotted line to the point of their dialogic intersection. (*Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics* 91)

David Quint describes the narrative of history's victors as "a coherent, end-directed story told by their own power; the losers experience a contingency that they are powerless to shape their own ends; to the losers belongs romance, with its random circular wandering" (9). Quint's identification of epic with history's victors and romance with history's victims makes it possible to read *Brick People* with the recognition that this text presents a narrative split between winners and losers. This narrative dialectic functions to signify contending discourses within the novel and suggests that in the end, one narrative form has the potential to triumph over the other or perhaps create a third term—a mestizo narrative that is borne of the tension between epic and romance. It is this tension between narrative types that I will discuss. The linear, teleological narrative itself requires little, if any, explanation, but it is the textual details that make the difference between a monological reading of *Brick People* or a multidimensional, recursive structure that has the potential to imbricate the reader.

As Antonio C. Márquez has noted, "Morales posits that the reader must capture more than surface reality and become the author in the creation of a text...and calls for a criterion that is more flexible, knowledgeable, open, and reciprocal with *the author's experimentation with narrative forms* [sic]" (77). This outward expansion in narrative form—a form that engulfs the reader through the narrative strategy of reciprocity can be located in Latin-American modernism, which insists on the novel as a discourse of newness and inclusion for its audience. Argentinian critic Macedonio Fernández's influence upon Jorge Luis Borges as well as Julio Cortázar in the construction of their texts has articulated his ideal of reciprocity in "Toward a Theory of a Novel." Fernández offers an illumination of how one might engage a reader in conversation across time and space, insisting that the novel that the reader expects is not novel at all, but really a conglomeration of ideas that the reader already recognizes. Instead, Fernández valorizes the novel that really causes the reader to engage with and even question reality (33-34).

Of course, Fernández's aesthetics seem outrageous and provocative, but he continues to argue that a reader must experience *vertigo* in order for the work to qualify as a true novel: "you will believe that the *Quixote* lives when you see this 'character' complain of what is said about him and his life . . . you will have the sudden shock of thinking that it is you, who believed yourself to be very much alive, that are the 'character' without reality" (34-35). In other words, Fernández demands that the reader's sense of reality be reconstituted through a narrative that distracts its audience to the point where his or her own sense of the world is changed (35). Fernández wants the author to live in his text and invites the reader to join his world. Fernández thus engages the reader in a dialogical mode so that it is as if he himself were present, addressing the reader in person. This technique, as he describes it, lends itself to intertextual and intratextual dialogues that indeed distract the reader so that one's sense of reality destabilizes.

Morales' textual destabilization of reality parallels his destabilization of history, which may well explain his merging of the historical novel with *lo real maravilloso*. It is his way of contesting the normative narrative in California history, and replacing the history of marginalized peoples into the appropriate context so that he develops a tension between the history of the dominant culture and the counternarrative that is already there. Cultural critic Emma Pérez argues that, "the colonial imaginary in the United States, specifically in the Southwest since the sixteenth century, has been constructed by the imagination of contemporary Chicana/o historians" (110), and it is important to realize that for Morales, the story in *Brick People* is both historical and personal. The need to create a history that includes himself is manifest in the novel. More than once he has acknowledged the autobiographical aspect of the texts:

The Brick People is based on the life of my mom and dad, so it's biographical. It is based on their experience coming from Mexico to the United States. I guess I always interject events or things that I've heard that are based on reality. I guess all my books in one way or another reflect that, my particular experience or somebody that I knew; so there is the interjection of autobiographical elements, or biographical elements, of history, of community history, family history, state history, national history.... (Gurpegui 10)

Morales suggests that biographical and experimental elements of his texts are historical, and he contends that "*The Brick People* is intrahistory. It is popular history. It is the domain of novelists" (Grandjeat 111). Significantly, Morales emphasizes the research that went into constructing his text:

I had to do a tremendous amount of field work, locating people, interviewing them, asking them for photographs, and documents, death certificates or whatever. Even now, when I'm invited to speak, for example, at East Los Angeles College or at a library in East L.A. or in Long Beach, there's always a tremendous number of oldtimers that attend. Old folks that were related to workers in Simens or had heard about *The Brick People*. I have had many people come to me and bring me bricks out of their gardens, bricks from their patios, Simens bricks. (114)

The very solidness of the bricks represents a history that is perhaps more substantial than the received knowledge recorded in state-sanctioned textbooks and legal documents. Naturally, the state offers a hegemonic narrative—a flat, monological figuration that lacks the tension offered by the presence of the Revueltas clan as they strive to prosper and assimilate into U.S. culture while simultaneously working toward their own independence, and independence that can only be realized by establishing one's own empire within the globalizing Imperial structure established by the U.S. and other dominant European empires such as England and France.

Morales artfully conflates received knowledge with the tangible concreteness of the workers' experiences making brick. *Brick People* undermines facticity by placing the real and the unreal side by side so that the two become almost indistinguishable. Magical realism is usually characterized by the presentation of the fantastic in a realistic context in which the characters and narrative voice accept and respond to the unreal in a realistic manner. However, geography, intrahistory, and intertextuality converge when Octavio Revueltas goes on one of his gambling excursions: "Barrio Margarito was the Andorra of Southern California, receiving every kind of natural and synthetic product..." (188). The narrator describes an unknowable place—a kind of perpetual circus-city through an obscure analogy to Andorra, which in most cases creates a seemingly unreal analog because Andorra is not a well-known geographic reference. Such an exotic reference suggests unreality of place: fantasy. It signals the possibility that another disruption in the realistic narrative is about to occur. Andorra, however, is quite real. It is a very small country situated between Spain and France, and as a border-space it brings together a variety of peoples, languages, and cultures so that difference becomes relative and attenuated. Whether or not the reader recognizes the geographic analogy, she realizes that Octavio has entered a cosmopolitan zone—a place between where his difference is not Otherness the way it is in Simons, Los Angeles, or Montebello. This is a place where Octavio has the potential to win, but because of the seemingly unreal geographic reference, the reader suspects that Octavio's winnings will somehow be unreal, and anticipates the rupture between the real and the unreal to quickly and unmistakably follow as it has at diverse moments earlier in the text.

Octavio's gambling is indeed an alternate discursive space, for it is what makes his resistance to the Simons' Brickyard hegemony possible. The cards enable him to break out of the economic determinism carefully constructed by the colonizing power.

Walter Simens designed his brickyard after the model he observed in Sonora when he was invited as a potential investor in Mexican lands and agricultural development. He imagined an empire of his own—and started a colony of Mexican workers intended to serve his design. The hacienda owners presented a utopian, pastoral paradise in which generations of peons willingly worked for virtually nothing but food and clothing and lived simple, humble lives with their families. The security offered by the *hacendados* was cheap labor in exchange for an apparently simple and carefree life. Walter Simens, in his building of the brickyard, recruits Rosendo Guerro to oversee the workers and to make sure that they were happy and secure—but Simens also sees to it that the brickyard is incorporated as its own township and that all of the workers' needs are met in Simens. The people therefore have no need to leave Simens, to make purchases, to attend church, or even to learn English—their homes are built and paid for by their labor, their supplies are laid to their account, and they are intended to live, work, raise their families, to dwell and to die in Simens for

generations. In fact, it is almost taboo to leave Simens—although there is no ordinance, no written law that says the people cannot leave Simens for any reason, there is an unwritten code that is much more powerful. So, when Octavio Revueltas shows the desire to think on his own or to leave Simens and know something more of the world, he is considered a threat and his family fears for the consequences. This threat of individuality in contrast to the more communal, feudalistic-based hacienda system, which thrived for centuries in Mexico becomes the unconscious manifestation of assimilative conflict based upon new Mexican-American freedoms and the influence of the spirit of individualism versus the ways of the old world.

Without language, skills, or other resources, it is almost impossible for him to leave, but his *desire* to leave is treated with disdain, and his tasks in the brickyard become more onerous, his house catches fire, his pay is purposefully diminished while the cost of food, clothing, and other supplies in Simens increases. At this point in the counter-narrative, Octavio's gambling skill becomes well established and becomes a more powerful source of income than labor in the brickyards. Octavio is a risk-taker, and turns his individuality to advantage; what is penalized in Simens is rewarded in the outside world. Thus, in his excursion into El Barrio Margarito progresses through a victorious night of winning, no unreal event seems to take place, and Octavio walks away from the game with a great deal of money. The episode is quite ordinary in tone, unless one notices the cameo appearance of Pierre Menard. Like the analogy to Andorra, the significance of Pierre Menard in El Barrio Margarito and as the central figure organizing Octavio's circle of gambling associates depends upon the reader's recognition and resources for constructing an informed narrative. Only readers who recognize the allusion to Jorge Luis Borges' character, Pierre Menard, realize the strangeness of the episode. Morales causes the reader to become a part of the narrative, effectively recruiting her into the narrative structure and undermining her reality according to the aesthetic set forth by Fernández.

Pierre signals Octavio's imminent victory and perhaps alters the nature of how Octavio's economic resources might be understood, for Pierre originates as a seemingly real character invented by Borges in his pseudo-critical essay, "Pierre Menard: Author of the *Quixote*" in which Borges valorizes Pierre for re-writing the *Quixote* not by mimicking Cervantes, but by *becoming* Cervantes more completely than Cervantes himself. Pierre is simulacra; he represents representation, and ironically, Octavio gains the most from Pierre: "Octavio enjoyed the challenge and by two o'clock Monday morning when he announced his departure, he had won a large amount of money. Federico Robles and Pierre Menard had lost the most to Octavio" (189). If as Pérez posits, fantasy is the site where resistance becomes possible, then the expansion of this narrative to encompass Boregesian pseudo-characters has a multiplicitous effect. First, Pierre's unreality has the potential to render Octavio more real. Secondly, it creates an aesthetic, secret intertextual reference that excludes an unknowing

reader from recognizing the (un)reality of Pierre Menard, Barrio Margarito, and Octavio's economic resources while including the knowing reader in a conspiratorial discourse against passive reading.

If it so happens that the reader fails to recognize the obscure geographical and intertextual references, she will simply understand the El Barrio Margarito episode as linear. Morales thus distinguishes between his readers—those who have wandered the circular ruins that a reference to Borges would invoke, and those who are uninitiated and perhaps trapped inside the linear narrative space. This particular preference signals that Latin-American literary production remains important to understanding *Brick People* despite Morales' choice to compose this novel predominantly in English, unlike his previous works that required the reader be bilingual in order to appreciate the text.

The narrative structure thus becomes a construct of *both/and* rather than *neither/nor*. In other words, the text is layered and incorporates a teleological as well as a cyclical model. By doing so, Morales reinscribes the discourse of what Quint identifies as the historic epic victim without erasing or eliding the presence of the dominant discourse. John V. Waldron has observed that “the map of the dominant discourse is written on top of the erased maps of those who came before,” concurring with Daniel Cooper Alarcón, who has argued persuasively for understanding history as palimpsest. Waldron also observes with regard to *Brick People* that the “truth of origin and the identity of center, which [received] history supports is based on a simulacrum” (99). It is therefore no surprise that Pierre Menard, the representation of representation—textual simulacra characterized—appears in the all-important poker game that takes place in the middle of the novel. This is an important moment in the identification of Octavio as an alternative epic hero in the novel because it is here that his great victory will be achieved, enabling him to overcome whatever obstacles are thrown in his path in the remainder of the text. His economic victory in the magical poker-game with Pierre Menard creates the material and magical power required to overcome the intense and overwhelming grip of the centuries-old hacienda system—in order to break with the economic and ideological forces that kept the Mexican peon subject to the *hacendados*, Octavio must attain a level of power and strength of epic proportions. It is this struggle, and the pressure of this confrontation that raises Octavio Revueltas to the level of the epic hero in this narrative. These ancient social, economic, and epistemological systems which humanity clings to, and whose cultures are built around are not easily flung aside. Morales's text is multi-layered, and one's historical understanding enables the reader to better conceptualize its more intricate nuances.

It is interesting to notice this hero's name: Octavio Revueltas. *Revueltas* is clear in what it signifies. The name suggests revolt, revolution, rebellion; he will overturn hegemonic and colonial authority. The name is also intertextual, resonating with Oscar Zeta Acosta's *Revolt of the Cockroach People*. Octavio will revolt, but in the process, he and his family will have to suffer and overcome oppression and indignity like the cockroaches:

The Revueltas family lived like insects of the dirt. There was little furniture and clothing and only a few blankets. Never in his life had he dreamed that he and his family would suffer this fate. A bitterness palpitated in his heart and throbbed in his mind, but he blamed only himself. He condemned himself for bringing his wife and children to living like cockroaches of the earth. (288)

Octavio's revulsion at his condition propels him to confront and overcome the Anglo community's refusal to allow his family a space in which to live beyond the boundaries of the Simons brickyard; his revulsion is thus transformed into revolution.

Octavio suggests something more obscure, and at first, seemingly coincidental, but potentially just as significant. His first name resonates with another Octavio—in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*—Octavius Caesar. In that text, Octavius ascends the imperial throne, seeks justice for Brutus' betrayal of Julius Caesar, and renames himself Caesar Augustus. The new emperor says of the dead Julius, "According to his virtue let us use him,/ with all respect and rites of burial" (V.v.II. 76-77). Augustus also becomes the valorized patron of Virgil's *Aeneid*, a text that also offered a counternarrative that worked against the dominant discourse established in Homer's *Odyssey*. Lest this intertextual relationship seem far fetched, it is important to notice that Octavio is haunted by the memory of his lost brother, Julio, whom Octavio vows to honor:

We prepared a grave as best we could because the rain would not stop. When we went for him, my mama did not resist. She cleaned his face, combed his hair, buttoned his jacket and gave him up to my papa. We placed him in a hole lined with rocks. When we were burying him, my mama prayed the rosary, and with each rock my eight-year-old brother disappeared....and in my dreams I swore to Julio that all the family would make it to Simons. I knew that was what Julio wanted most—to reach Simons... (311)

It is important to note that this last chapter is Octavio's first-person narrative of his own beginning. Just as in Bakhtinian dialogics, the narrator steps aside to allow the character to speak, opening a possibility for dialogism in the narrative that a linear narrative could not permit. Structurally, the placement of this narrative completes the pattern set forth at the beginning of the novel by Rosario Guerrero because the narrative has finally come to fruition by becoming cyclical rather than linear.

Morales signals that his text will diverge from the centralized cultural history established by the dominant culture when he begins his novel in medias res, yet in an alternative space outside of time and outside of Western civilization: "From the east where time began...." Rosendo Guerrero is situated in the hub of Joseph Simon's growing empire and the center of his own "directional mandala that his parents had inculcated into his psyche." Rosendo's mandala originates with his parents, suggesting the idea of original sin—an always already fallen state. Rosendo begins his journey with a devastating

moment of destruction in which a crazed Frenchman seeks the Emperor Maximilian in the Guerrero home, shooting the entire family in his murderous rage. Only Rosendo escapes “to survive the blackness of the North.” Rosendo’s trajectory after his loss takes him straight North, troping the first narrative form to be located in the novel: the linear, teleological narrative. Rosendo’s destiny had always been to go North:

He kept advancing on the Flint Knife of the Northern axis of the ancient Aztec coordinates his parents had taught him. He could not go toward the Red Reed axis of the East, nor to the White House of the West, nor dare to look back at the Blue Rabbit of the South. At this time, these colors and images were hidden deep in his mind. Traveling through the pure blackness for seven years, Rosendo followed the brilliantly sharp Flint Knife that opened a path to the North. (9)

Upon his arrival, Rosendo replicates the directional mandala in his plan for the Simons’ brickyard. This post-modern use of the objective correlative signals to the reader that the narrative will begin with linearity, but will end in the mandala’s dilation. Thus, the mandala grows beyond the boundaries of the brickyard, moving in all directions at once and defying its point of origin. The would-be protagonists are lost when the linear structure is subsumed. Joseph Simons is first supplanted by his brother Walter, and later falls into dementia and death; Rosendo Guerrero remains faithful to the Simons, and his character fades into the background with Joseph’s decline. Rosendo, however, dies a mysterious, sacrificial death that causes him to momentarily re-emerge in the text and enables him to recoup his attenuated subjectivity before being entirely lost in the newly emergent narrative. It may be that his sacrifice is meant to symbolize the violence required to oppose the teleology of epic convention; the linearity must be altered, but that alteration is in itself a narrative act of violence that requires pain and self-sacrifice and is generally unseen and misunderstood. The mandala thus destroys and immortalizes Rosendo for he cannot be forgotten though he may be recursively misunderstood:

The horrible state of Rosendo’s body was such that the man and the child who discovered it went mad. The body had been dismembered and arranged in a large round kettle with a narrow neck which flared at the opening just enough to hold Rosendo’s head while the rest of him cooked. The room had frescoes painted on three walls. A man with Indian features sitting on a nautilus shell knotted around the waist, sat with forearms resting on his knees and large tears streaming down his cheeks. The eastern wall was adorned with a large, perfect, yellow-orange circle. According to several accounts, the northern wall depicted a man severing his own left arm that was placed on a round stone. On the southern wall there was a painting of a kettle with a fire under it and a man’s head protruding through the opening in the top. (137)

Rosendo’s death is disturbing and gruesome, but passes without narrative comment and is not referred to in the text again. The witnesses of the sacrifice

can only resort to madness, and the reader could almost forget Rosendo in the expanding narrative if it were not for the pointedly violent and seemingly allegorical nature of his death. This death suggests that the cyclical narrative, though liberating in contrast to the telos of the victor's epic, retains its own sense of violence. After this episode, the decline and fall of the Simons' brickyard becomes inevitable.

One may easily draw the parallel between the Simons' eventual decline and another historical text entitled *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* constructed by Edward Gibbon in the 18th century. Gibbon posited that the seeds of destruction had already been present in the beginning. Implicit in Gibbon's historical narrative is the mapping and re-mapping of territories and peoples in the process of being absorbed and assimilated by various degrees into Rome for the sake of Empire. For the Simons, the lands upon which they map their capitalist empire is cursed by Doña Eulalia, whose legend is representative of the Mexican citizens who were systematically deprived of their lands and privileges as a result of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Doña Eulalia's prophesy that she will become an insect upon her death comes to fruition after the disappearance of her husband and the murder of her sons. Her lands are stolen from her after she refuses to leave her family's property; her beloved tree is uprooted from the ground and her body disintegrates into the tree—leaving only brown insects—cockroaches in her wake. Henceforth, the stolen land is accursed and sterility, infection, disease, and infestation become the plagues that haunt those who attempt to take the land and make it their own.

Thus, the Simons are doubly cursed because the cognitive map shaping Simons brickyard is determined by Rosendo, and unbeknownst to them, it is inscribed with the Eurocentric insanity embodied by a crazed Frenchman seeking the Emperor Maximilian, and dubious claims to power in Mexico, violence, fear, death, and isolation. These deceptively trivial details become powerful forces with their turning and returning in the narrative: the mandala literally shapes the development of the brickyard while Eulalia's enigmatic power causes one to wonder at the source of her lasting hold on the land its new owners. Her name, however, does provide some clue to how we might read her. St. Eulalia of Merida was martyred because Emperor Dioclesian compelled his subjects to offer sacrifices to the gods of empire. Eulalia was tortured and immolated and later became a patron saint of miscarriage, torture, drought, and widowhood. It is therefore no surprise that the first manifestation of Eulalia's powerful curse is the contraction and deformation of Laura Bolin Simons' womb at the birth of her son James. The cursed land thus precludes creativity and (re)productivity.

It is important to pay attention to Morales' expanding use of names. *Bolin* and *James* are significant names for the first novel that Morales writes entirely in English. In English history, Anne Bolin produces the all-so-important heir for Henry VIII: Elizabeth. Bolin thus insures stability for the English monarchy and enables England (through Elizabeth) to establish itself as a colonial power. It is Elizabeth who is credited with defeating the Spanish Armada and her successor,

James who continues the work of expanding trade and mercantilism into the late 16th century. By the time of Gibbon, it becomes necessary to construct a history that not only catalogs the decline and fall of Rome, but also to assert Britain as the new Rome. Morales' use of the ever-dilating mandala—a trope of expansion and exploitation—in combination with these character-names in a historicized narrative of capitalist empire and resistance that eventually ends in decline for the Simons but a new beginning for Octavio and Nana Revueltas, suggests an aesthetic that undermines the idea of a received history. Just as Anne Boleyn represents the creation of the Anglican Church, a break with the Catholic Church, and marks the beginning of a social, economic, and ecclesiastical revolution, the decline of the Simons empire and the rise of the Revueltas family's fortunes marks a de-colonization of the Mexican people who have been imported and exploited in the Simons brickyard. Further, the fabrication of an Americanized *hacienda* is no longer capable or practical in a society where the separation of Church and state renders Old-world hegemonic forms impotent. Morales continues to play the intertextual lines against the progression of history by having a white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant character, Walter Simons, import the central economic device of Mexico as a means of profiting in the capitalist, individualistically centered U.S. Thus, very much like the Romans, adopting the beneficial aspects of colonized culture without perceiving its curses (its fragility) and the repercussions of the archetypes intertwined in those ancient customs and practices leads to his own destruction.

In *Brick People*, the received history is ultimately refuted by Arturo Revueltas, the heir-apparent for Octavio. Octavio will grow into the role of grand patriarch, the new Caesar in this narrative construct, but it is Arturo who represents the author. Arturo's sense of aesthetics, purity, and unique linguistic constructions form a metanarrative suggesting the author's creative vision. Arturo Revueltas, is, in fact, the author in revolt; he is what the priest and the teacher identify as the "bad boy" because his struggle with language and authority represent a threat to the carefully balanced social structure that the church and the school have been set up to maintain in Simons:

Compared to the way other Mexicans lived in Los Angeles, Walter Simons' Mexicans were living in paradise...in the industrial areas the Mexican bad boys were more difficult, if not impossible to control. In Simons it was a lot easier to control the youth. But to control the youth in Simons he had to watch bad boys like Arturo Revueltas carefully. (248)

Arturo fails to meet the linguistic and semiotic demands of the religious and educational ideological state apparatus conscientiously established by Walter Simons for the very purpose of maintaining social order and preventing unionization among the workers. In sum, Arturo is his father's son. He cannot bring himself into complete subjection to the colonizing power of the brickyard; Arturo prefers silence to the dominant discourse, and when he must

communicate, his language is all but incomprehensible to those who are not immediate members of his family.

Paradoxically, the “bad boy” yearns for purity, for goodness. His desire is to be immaculate:

Ever since Arturo was five years old, people had noticed his extreme neatness and cleanliness...he accepted responsibility willingly and manifested great satisfaction in helping his mother and father. By the time he was twelve he was in charge of the garden and he swept and maintained the yard. He kept the fences, grounds and walls of the house immaculate. (278)

This passage helps the reader to identify Arturo as the narrator, for it becomes clear that the narrator-subject yearns for an immaculate garden just as Arturo does. The narrative commentary explicitly longs for Eden: “life was a constant search for Eden. And always, when Eden was thought to be found, Eden became subverted. Life was transformed into a chain of subverted Edens...” (259). This longing of the narrative voice parallels Arturo’s desire for aesthetic purity and renders the task of representation almost impossible because

putting ink on paper invaded the nothing, the pure color of the paper. He believed that words should be warehoused in a form other than paper and books. Words to him manifested themselves into pictures and images, and these entities that he saw should be expanded and not locked in words, in sentences, on pages, in books. Ink violates a space; words imprison themselves within themselves.... (282)

For Arturo, textuality becomes linearity itself and demands linear constructions—constructions that Arturo’s aesthetic defies. It is not surprising when he expresses his disdain for writing to his mother: “The colored ink breaks off the paper its purity” (282).

However, in witnessing the burning of Simons, the “Mexican paradise,” the transformation of this putative Eden into what Arturo understands it to be—El Hoyo, El Infierno—his language is transformed and his ability to make sense of himself and his world is no longer circumscribed by the boundaries of the brickyard. For Arturo, language becomes a narrative space in which meaning and metaphor can be created in shapes that are not mass-produced like bricks. This may, in fact, be what Rosendo Guerrero’s sacrificial episode signified, for in order for his directional mandala to expand beyond the limitations of the brickyard and defy the ideology of the linear narrative, it seems necessary for the authorial subject to break a curse.

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