

**IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND THE MOTHER: MOURNING,  
MEMORY AND IMAGINATION IN THE POETRY OF José Kozer, Tamara**

**Kamenzain, and Eduardo Espina**

A Dissertation

by

DIANE MCGAVOCK ROLNICK

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Chair of Committee,	Eduardo Espina
Committee Members,	Hilaire Kallendorf
	Richard Curry
	Alessandra Luiselli
	Paul Christensen
Head of Department,	Irene Moyna

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## ABSTRACT

While often taken as sentimental in nature, poetry about death provides poets and readers an artistic space for processing grief. The Latin American Neobaroque, a way of writing poetry known predominantly for its intellectual approach to language, has to date provided no understanding of an emotional component as a feature of its creative conception. The manner in which the formally recognized Neobaroque poets, José Kozer, Tamara Kamenszain, and Eduardo Espina avoid sentimentality in new poems written on the deaths of their parents is a question on which preliminary research shows little to no exchange of ideas. For this reason, it is suggested that these three poets create a caesura within the understanding of the discourse on the Neobaroque. In so doing, this investigation becomes essential as the first serious line of inquiry with significant intellectual value on this subject, and is advanced through the creation of a framework for anti-sentimentality in the Neobaroque. As a result of this investigation, it is ascertained that the concept of *poetic areté* provides a much-needed response to this and other questions regarding “how” these poets, and possible others as well, filter their emotions through the intellect, and is the foundation for this study.

## **DEDICATION**

To my Mom and Dad, Laura Jo Kirby and Alvin Powell McGavock, whose memory and those of my childhood are still with me. I think both would be proud.

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## CHAPTER I

### PREFACE AND INTRODUCTION

*In the Name of the Father and the Mother: Mourning, Memory, and Imagination in the Poetry of José Kozer, Tamara Kamenszain, and Eduardo Espina*, investigates the mourning poetry of three Latin American poets and the ways in which the matters of mourning, together with memory, emptiness and absence, exile, and aging, have transformed their approach to language poetry. How three Neobaroque poets avoid sentimentality in poems written on the deaths of their parents, in a style of poetry known predominately for the significance it places on the linguistic aspect of poetic creation, is an essential question that until now has remained unresolved. In response, this dissertation validates the claim that Kozer, Kamenszain, and Espina create a caesura within the Neobaroque through their engagement with emotion by creating a new understanding of the function of sentiment within the Neobaroque style of poetry.

Chapter I presents a comprehensive overview of the progression of the Neobaroque from its historical origins to its current status, along with the presentation of theoretical terms and theories necessary in preparing the reader for the analysis of the selected mourning poems. Poems that are sourced from the life experiences of each poet are taken from José Kozer's *ACTA* (2010), Tamara Kamenszain's *El eco de mi madre* (2012), and Eduardo Espina's *Todo lo que ha sido para siempre una sola vez (Poemas a partir de la muerte del padre y de la madre)* (2014).



Chapter II presents the argument for why sentiment in verse must be filtered through the intellect to be engaging, along with the principal terms used throughout this dissertation. Included is Friedrich von Schiller's essay *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry* (1789–95), which argues for the profundity of the sentimental despite its inherent imperfection and incompleteness. A brief synopsis of the lives and works of José Kozer, Tamara Kamenszain, and Eduardo Espina is then presented which has traditionally located these poets within the tradition of Latin American Neobaroque aesthetics.

The literature review as it pertains to mourning poetry is taken from a broad spectrum of theories and ideas, serving to define the terms involving sentiment, sentimentality and emotion. In addition, theories by Ludwig Wittgenstein and Marjorie Perloff on the concept of language games are explored in order to uncover the seemingly opaque language forms found within the Neobaroque. Expanding on the concept of difficulty in poetry, works by Charles Bernstein, George Steiner, Roberto Echavarren, and Enrique Mallén provide elucidation in which strategies are offered for breaking through many of the perceived obstacles in the interpretation of the poems by Kozer, Kamenszain, and Espina.

From the field of psychology, Sigmund Freud's and Julia Kristeva's ideas are detailed in order to express the importance of mourning and melancholia to the poems analyzed. From literary theory, explorations on mourning by Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida help to solidify the need to articulate one's sentiments regarding grief. And lastly, the ever changing trends in genre studies and the use of subjectivity in poetry are explored in order to illustrate the diversity and originality necessary to a broad

understanding of the various means open to poets in the writing of, and to readers in, the interpretation and appreciation of mourning poetry.

The necessity to clarify the importance of the idea that poetry about death is an attempt to reach an abstraction beyond our comprehension, originating first and foremost from the need to voice the sentiment of sorrow, is suggested. By writing poems that go beyond sentimental remembrances of lives now passed, Kozer, Kamenzain, and Espina record not only the passing of loved ones, but, more importantly, the meaning of lives once connected to others for a moment in time.

Chapter III provides a framework for *anti-sentimentality* [defined in this investigation as the intellectualization of emotion] used to analyze selected poems by each poet. This research reveals four principal areas in which *anti-sentimentality* works as a means to diffuse the emotions surrounding grief, originating with ideas from the fields of Language, Memory, Visualization, and the Metaphysical. Each of these four areas contains sub-areas, which highlight in detail the overall structure of this framework. As will be noted, while some of the representative structures are found within the Neobaroque aesthetics, others are taken from additional frames of reference.

The area of language, referred to as “Language Technology” presents the various linguistic and semantic tools utilized by Kozer, Kamenzain, and Espina to discharge the emotional subject matter of mourning, including the self-referential properties of poetry, and the ways in which syntactic and semantic indeterminacy function. The use of humor theory as a means to foil the effects of grief, along with the Neobaroque devices of carnivalization, parody, and irony [and related forms of wit] are shown as important

strategies for moving sentiment toward the real of the intellect. The relationship between *cursi* and sentimentality becomes a poetic device in which Kozer, Kamenzain, or Espina use the codes of “ordinary everyday language” to discuss these relationships and their resultant loss. And lastly, *ostranenie* or defamiliarization is used to change the reader’s habits of perception as they interrupt the emotions experienced within the mourning process.

The next area, “Memory and Mourning,” includes ideas by Svetlana Boym from *The Future of Nostalgia* (2002), which proposes ways of understanding the role nostalgia plays in modern civilization. Boym’s notions help to illustrate the presence of nostalgia in the poems selected as it relates to themes associated with longing for a home that no longer exists, or perhaps never did. As well, Evelyne Ender’s claim in *Architexts of Memory* (2005) that remembrance is an act of imagination created by the introspection of past events is used to explore the understanding of the important role of memory when memory-loss is close at hand.

*The Poetics of Space* (1994), Gaston Bachelard’s elaboration on the meaning of the spaces poetry examines, shows the house to be the most characteristic object of lived experience and the place where personal experience reaches its apotheosis. For Kozer, Kamenzain and Espina, the presence of home and hearth, as well as its absence due to exile, memory-loss and bereavement, are important themes in their mourning poetry. And lastly, Suzanne Nalbantian’s *Memory in Literature* (2003) shows clinical proof that life experience is relevant to the artist’s work, supporting the undeniable link between poet and text in each of these works.

“Visualizing the Difficult” establishes a two-pronged approach toward the advancement that poetic language is extended through the poet’s use of a visual component to his or her poems. This idea in turn leads to the claim that Kozer, Kamenzain and Espina achieve their anti-sentimental approach by creating a space in which to re-imagine and re-configure not only poetry, but mortality as well.

With the first perspective Omar Calabrese’s Neobaroque citation is explored as an instrument by which Kozer, Kamenzain and Espina rewrite the past. Argued here is how each poet renews the past, not as a form of reproducing it, but by working with previous forms and contents in order to create an original poetic effect. This process lends itself to new interpretations of the present works. Calabrese’s second perspective provides the basis for the understanding of the language and images found in mourning poems that create a visually colored world through language in motion. Bruce Stiehm’s terms, “imagen multivalente” and “oración calidoscópica” are further enhanced as a way to visually extend language, allowing the reader to become an active participant in the creation of new interpretations of these recent mourning poems.

And lastly, the fourth key area in which anti-sentimentality works as a means to filter the emotion is found within the questioning of the afterlife in “El Más Allá”. The use of a rational as well as imaginative approach to emotion and death are reflected in each poet’s metaphysical approach to poetry; Kozer’s roots within Judaism and his later interest in Zen poetry and its underlying philosophy; Kamenzain’s belief in the traditions of Judaism as well as poetry itself; and Espina’s deeply rooted connection with Catholicism. And finally, the Sublime’s historical and contemporary roots are utilized

through ideas by Gilles Deleuze, in which the complex unity of each poet's vision of the universe, folds and unfolds like a labyrinth to reveal new possibilities in each turn of their innovative poetry.

Chapter IV is the discussion of Kozer's approach to mourning and is achieved through the strategies, techniques, and devices outlined in the proposed framework, along with two interconnected strategies that make up the poet's endemic approach of *sensibility*. *Sensibility* here has two meanings; firstly as it refers to the poet's common sense approach to death and secondly as it pertains to the ability to feel and understand emotion. The first is a strategy of *hyper-rational art*, which allows Kozer to focus on language in a commonsensical approach to write about the process of mourning. The second strategy is referred to as Kozer's aesthetic of *nothingness*, and is based on the emotive facets of his mourning poetry. These unified practices, as with those of Kamenzain and Espina, are revealed as part of each poet's poetry of mourning.

*ACTA* is shown to be the fragmented reflections upon four areas of the poet's life experience that include, the Occidental/Eastern voices of the Father and Mother; the relationship between the Construction/Destruction of Death; Absence/Presence within and outside of the home space; and the development of the opposition between *Cursi*/Sublime. These juxtaposed oppositions, which on first glance appear as dualities, upon further investigation are shown to be hybrid in nature, as the poet uses a complex and often difficult poetics to articulate an incomprehensible concern.

Chapter V presents poems by Tamara Kamenzain that draw attention to the relationship between mourning poetry and the significant role of memory. Kamenzain's

direct method deflects and deters sentimentality through the elimination of personal details disproportionate to those necessary for absorbing meaning as they humanize her experience through the language of poetry.

Notable in this shift is Kamenzain's process of laying aside many of the devices of the Neobaroque, which she refers to as the *neoborroso*. This approach reinforces the poet's decisive shift away from the Neobaroque and is constructed through the poetic strategies of *experiencia*, *presentification*, and *espiritismo*. *Experiencia* is a strategy the poet uses to reduce the emotion often created through the poetic "I". In place, the poet strives for a universalizing effect that gives her mourning poems a more inclusive nature as a result of this process. *Presentification* is Kamenzain's innovative strategy for renovating past creative practices in order to create new forms of poetry. And *espiritismo* is the poet's practice that allows her a means of metaphorically communicating with the dead to prevent the eventual fading away of her mother's voice. For Kamenzain, death is not to be excused or glorified as a part of life through poetic authentication. Instead, the above strategies, along with the technique of *ostranenie* lays bare the reality of death in a manner that demonstrates the absurd side of life and death, and displays no fear of mortality.

Chapter VI explores Eduardo Espina's mourning poems, which go beyond empirical reality to describe the invisible interstices between memory and desire, life and death, absence and presence. The investigation of these spaces begins with an exploration into the unique ways in which Espina uses language games and ordinary,

everyday language to redirect sentiment through a concerted emphasis on the syntactical features of the poetic process.

Following this discussion is an examination of the visual component of Espina's poems, in which "difficulty" relates not only to the difficult subject of death, but also to the complexity of the Neobaroque style. Through ideas in this chapter, ways to overcome both forms are proposed. And lastly, Espina's metaphysical approach to life's ephemeral grasp of time is investigated in order to complete the appreciative detection of the concept of intellectualization of poetry as an anti-sentimental approach to grief.

Espina's *ne plus ultra* attitude is defined as the unified practice he utilizes to create his mourning poems. *Ne plus ultra* represents the poet's immense level of excellence and is composed of three strategies that contribute to its formation, the first being *syntactic thought* which situates this objective as one based on the self-referentiality of language as opposed to the emotional component of poetry. Espina's use of *horror vacui* becomes the poetic principle that allows him to explore the physicality of death, both as subject matter and as the formal construction of the poem on the page. And *fractured thought* [*fractured mind*] originates within the poet's state of mind as a result of bereavement and the realization of death's close proximity to his own mortality.

Chapter VII's conclusion synthesizes the findings of the research on the subject of sentiment in the Neobaroque. Kozer's poetic rendering of fragmentary reflections, Kamenszain's remarkable mastery of the techniques of memory, and Espina's imaginative focus on time and all its complexity, each share the common feature that while each does engage with emotion, he or she also places mourning in the realm of the

intellect in order to ask the “big” questions regarding life and death. The use of *poetic areté* becomes the discovery by which each poet expresses grief and is fundamental to understanding the role sentiment plays within the rational analysis each poet uses to assay issues essential to life. The importance of distinguishing between sentimentality and intellectuality in the mourning poems of Kozer, Kamenszain, and Espina is supported by the insistence that while a good poem moves the reader, grief is a dignified emotion; and however painful it may seem, mourning poetry which focuses on the true nature of death, without excessive sentimentality, better prepares us for laying bare the mournful moments of our lives.



## Contextualizing the Neobaroque

Neobaroque poetry speaks to that which transcends time and space, while at the same time drawing from the social and cultural context of the world for which it was written. In such a way, this way of writing poetry may also be used as an appropriate form for negotiating the complex subject of mourning. *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (2012) (*The PEPP*) includes for the first time among its entries Neobaroque, which it defines as “a style of poetry common in the late 20<sup>th</sup> c. in Latin America, in which artifice, figuration, and a consciousness of textuality are highly developed” (927). *The PEPP* further describes the Neobaroque as often containing explicit or covert reference to the baroque poetry of the early mod. period. (...) (927).

According to PEPP the Neobaroque is found in:

Lezama Lima’s poetry, (Severo) Sarduy’s essays, Rodolfo Hinostroza’s (1941) *Contranatura* (1970), the...antipoetry of Mexican Gerardo Deniz (b. 1934), and in Brazil, the work of (Haroldo de) Campos and the *concretistas*”as antecedents for a new generation of poets linked to the Neobaroque. As part of this this group, Néstor Perlongher (1949–92) coined the term *Neobarroso* to link it to the dirt or mud of the River Plate. Eduardo Espina (b. 1954) spoke in the same playful tone of *barrocó* (obviously a play with *baroque* and *rococo*). In 1996, *Medusario*, a major compilation of neobaroque poetry, circulated widely in Latin America, and this type of poetry became one of the dominant trends in Latin Am. lit, at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> c. (927).

While growing in recognition both in Latin America as well as internationally, many scholars see the Neobaroque as a literary movement like Futurism, Dadaism, or Surrealism. However, as a critic, José Kozer (*Medusario*) states that as a school of

poetry with an *ars poética*<sup>1</sup> and manifesto, “the Neobaroque is unlikely to be classified as a poetic movement.” Instead Kozer claims that the Neobaroque “is really a way of writing, basically poetry, that only a minority of poets in Latin America practice. But to take that fact and turn the Neobaroque into a school of poetry, with an *ars poética* and manifestos, I don't see that”.<sup>2</sup> To this extent, along with Kozer, and in keeping with the definition provided by *The PEPP* the Neobaroque is thusly referred to in this dissertation as a style of poetry.

One of the contributions this dissertation makes is found in the correction of the notion that the Neobaroque is opposed to sentiment. What is shown instead is that the Neobaroque, through its mourning poetry does in fact engage with sentiment. Arriving at this conclusion first requires the expansion of the Neobaroque beyond any one dominant theory, and toward more consequential ideas on the breadth of its development. This Introduction, therefore, presents a concise but systematic history of the development of the Neobaroque, starting with the suggested Baroque beginnings, and takes into account

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<sup>1</sup> The search for an *ars poética* within the Neobaroque failed to revealed a treatise on poetry in the style of Baltasar Gracián's (1601–1658) *Arte del Ingenio*, which serves to explain the modes and different concepts of the literary theory of Spain's conceptista movement.

Espina's poem “Arte por ética (*Qué palabras dicen más que las demás*)” from *Mañana la mente puede* is published in his anthology *Quiero escribir, pero me sale Espina* (2014), in which the poet lyrically addresses poetry itself and the process of writing a poem, shown in the opening lines, “Lo que lees, es el primer poema / Lees y además, el verso ves. / Este ya no, aunque por poco casi / si no fuera porque, tampoco lo es” (195–197).

<sup>2</sup> In a personal email with the author of this dissertation, José Kozer further explains this stance as follows: “You may say that my article, [“The Neo Baroque: A Converging in Latin American Poetry”] which is descriptive, is a kind of manifesto, but that was not the intent nor do I think it's programatic (I have nothing else written in that respect) or you may say that some of the material written for *Medusario* by Kamenzain, Echavarren and Perlongher, participate of that concept but not as ideology or *Ars Poética* or manifesto, not even what originally was written by Sarduy would fall into that category since the Neo Baroque excels in breaking away precisely from categories, (March 5, 2015).

current ideas as they have developed over time, not only in Spain and Latin America, but across the globe as well.

### ***Spain's Baroque***

The Baroque, first used to designate a stylistic period in Western Europe from approximately 1580 to 1680, came between the decline of the Renaissance and the rise of the Enlightenment. Most critics attribute Heinrich Wölfflin with the first application of the term “Baroque.” The publication of his *Renaissance and Baroque* (1888) sets the date as the beginning of interest in the Baroque as a literary style. With regard to Baroque poetry, Wölfflin asserts that it reveals a clear change in mood toward “seriousness and dignity” along with “pompous, rustling splendor” as opposed to the Renaissance style’s adherence to “light and easy grace” (84).

In Spain, the term *Siglo de Oro* is still in use, while the term Baroque has taken hold in most Western literature. Central figures such as Miguel de Cervantes (1547–1616), Lope de Vega (1562–1635), Francisco de Quevedo (1580–1645), and Luis de Góngora (1561–1627) are considered Spain’s most prevalent Baroque writers and poets. The Spanish poets known as the Generation of 1927<sup>3</sup> renewed interest in Góngora upon the tricentennial of the poet’s death. These poets were the first to recognize Góngora’s kinship with modernity through the rigor of his poetic technique and the expression of

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<sup>3</sup> Members of this group include Jorge Guillén, Pedro Salinas, Rafael Alberti, Federico García Lorca, Luis Cernuda, Vicente Aleixandre, Manuel Altolaguirre, and Emilio Prados.

ideological disenchantment, which was an interest that would extend beyond Spain as well as beyond the Generation of '27.

The Baroque results from a search for new modes of expression stressing grandeur, sensuous richness, drama, vitality, movement, tension, and emotional exuberance. In addition, the Baroque tendency is to blur distinctions between the various arts. An added feature of the Baroque style is its transgression away from established styles of writing by the use of extravagance, artifice, and a perversion of the established order. For this reason, Baroque is contrasted with classical and mannerist styles. Thus, while classical writers aim to write clearly, one tendency of Baroque writers is to obfuscate through the transmission of multiple meanings.

As with the Middle Ages, the Baroque places a great deal of emphasis on the concepts of death and man's transitory place in the world. While the apprehensions of death and life's mutability were not new themes for this epoch, what changed was the intensity with which poets and writers expressed their intellectual and emotional concern with death and time's transitory nature. As L. Elaine Hoover claims in *John Donne and Francisco de Quevedo: Poets of Love and Death* (1978), poets like John Donne in England and Francisco Quevedo in Spain "began to reflect a mentality that took less and less for granted, while emphasizing man as a mutable and temporal creature who is guaranteed only the certainty of his inevitable non-existence" (xvii).

This poetry is characterized by the tension between the sensitivity to time's movement toward death and the poetic interpretation of this self-awareness. Again, as Hoover points out, these themes are not unique to the Baroque period, they "simply

assumed greater significance and dominance in the literature of the day”, where *desengaño*, the dissipation of false ‘illusions’ was to become as Leo Spitzer<sup>4</sup> wrote in “El barroco español,” ‘el tema barroco fundamental’ (21). The concepts and ideas outlined here on the themes of death, love, and time’s mutability will be expanded on in Chapter III as the subject of the metaphysical becomes an important strategy for averting the sentimental.

In order to emphasize its cultural significance in recent times, Irlemar Chiampi<sup>5</sup> in *Barroco y modernidad* (2000) places the Baroque within four cycles of Latin America’s literary modernity. This trajectory, spanning one hundred years, includes 1890, 1920, 1950, and 1970, and also coincides with the poetic rupture and renovation that it summarizes. The first period, 1890, came out of the *modernista* poetry of Rubén Darío. The second phase includes the *vanguardista* period of formal experimentalism of Jorge Luis Borges, Vicente Huidobro, Pablo Neruda, and César Vallejo, who are all recognized for their radicalized modernist methods. The third period of the Baroque influence in Latin America belongs to the writings of José Lezama Lima and particularly to his essay “Americanización del Barroco.” And lastly, Chiampi recognizes the fourth period as the postmodern Neobaroque period, which highlights Haroldo de Campos’s *Galáxias* (1964–1976).

A cursory examination outlining the inception of the trajectory of the Neobaroque includes the Catalanian philosopher and art critic Eugenio d’Ors (1861–

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<sup>4</sup> Spitzer’s quote is used by Hoover from his essay, “El Barroco Español.” (1959).

<sup>5</sup> See Chiampi’s *Barroco y modernidad* (2000) for more on this subject.

1974) who played a key role in the recovery and revaluation of the Baroque. Contrary to the widely held belief that the Baroque was an invention of the seventeenth century, Eugenio d'Ors was the first to consider the Baroque as a *human constant* when he developed his trans-historical system of cultural resemblance during the late 1920s and 1930s in France with his study *Du baroque* (1935). D'Ors saw the Baroque as "metahistorical" in that it represented a category of the spirit, formed by constants that he referred to as "*eons*," thereby extending this notion to any historical art movement, apart from any particular movement, period, or geographical location.

This formalist approach is problematic for Omar Calabrese<sup>6</sup>, who sees d'Ors' classification system of the Baroque into genus and species to be inconsistent and unending due to the fact that almost any element of any Baroque can be the focus of study (20). D'Ors later became useful to Alejo Carpentier (1904–1980), who in turn rejects the idea that the Baroque style was restricted only to the seventeenth century, proposing instead that the Baroque is a "constant of the human spirit" which is capable of reappearing at any time...because it is a *spirit* and not a *historical style*"(95).<sup>7</sup>

### ***Birth of the Neobaroque in Latin America***

Alejo Carpentier challenged Latin American artists to examine the cultural and historical connections and differences between the Old and New World. Carpentier developed the theory that the New World Baroque moved from Cuba to Mexico to

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<sup>6</sup> See Calabrese's *Neo-Baroque: A Sign of the Times* (1992).

<sup>7</sup> In "The Baroque and the Marvelous Real," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community* (1995).

Europe then back to Latin America, where its response to the local circumstances and expansive spaces accommodated America's plural histories and cultures. From the late 1950s to the 1970s, the concept of a New World Baroque culture began to take hold in the writings of Carpentier, along with those of José Lezama Lima and Severo Sarduy. Seen as moving beyond previous ideas which located the New World Baroque as a manifestation of white *criollo* discontent and estranged identity, these Neobaroque theorists began to reverse these ideas by articulating a more inclusive, ethnically—and socially—mixed scenario of cultural production by giving equal importance in their analyses to the pictorial and architectural arts. In addition, the three Cubans were poets-novelists-essayists of eclectic education and background who deployed in their thinking an interdisciplinary and fluid notion of culture and made frequent references in their works to ethnology, archeology, cosmology, architecture, musicology, linguistics, and in the case of Sarduy, semiotics and poststructuralist theory.

José Lezama Lima, Alejo Carpentier, and Severo Sarduy each placed the New World Baroque in its art historical niche and transformed it into an ideology and aesthetics of cultural difference. Haroldo de Campos' contribution was to extend the development of the Baroque to include Brazil,<sup>8</sup> while Lezama Lima's and Alejo Carpentier's trans-historical rebirth of the European Baroque into the Latin American

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<sup>8</sup> Lois Parkinson Zamora and Monika Kaup's *Baroque New Worlds: Representation, Transculturation, Counterconquest* (2010) proves to be useful in tracing the changing nature of Baroque representation from its seventeenth century European origins as a Catholic and monarchical aesthetic and ideology through to its transition to today's Neobaroque, thus highlighting the ways in which the Baroque continues to influence artistic expression in literature, the visual arts, architecture, and popular entertainment worldwide.

Baroque worked to fill the dynamic spatial void between abundance and absence as found in the world. Lezama argued that the Baroque offers “una nueva integración surgiendo de la *imago* de la ausencia”.<sup>9</sup>

### ***José Lezama Lima***

Irlemar Chiampi points out that Lezama Lima participated in two consecutive stages of the twentieth-century revitalization of the Baroque. The first stage came about with the post-1927 revival of Góngora’s poetry, and the second phase included Lezama’s essays collected in *La expresión americana* (1957), in which the essayist described the cultural and ideological dimensions of the Baroque. In “La curiosidad barroca” Lezama Lima begins his essay by playing on Wilhelm Worringer’s, Heinrich Wölfflin’s, and Oswald Spengler’s characterizations of the Baroque in Europe.

Lezama Lima contrasts European Baroque art, describing it as operating from “passive, mechanical accumulation” and “sedate asymmetry” with the New World, or American Baroque, which he describes as a proliferation of dynamic “tension” and an asymmetry. In addition, Lezama Lima makes the claim that the European Baroque was a “derivative style” of increasing degeneration and the American Baroque a vigorous, “plenary” style, which in no way is a decadent or depleted reformulation of classical, Renaissance, or Gothic modes. Lezama saw the American Baroque not as mannerist mimicry of the European, but rather as a creative mode in which Old World styles are

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<sup>9</sup> My translation: “a new integration emerging from the *imago* of absence.” In Lezama Lima: “*Sumas críticas del Americano*,” in *La expresión americana*: 192.



*acrecentados*—“cultivated, mutated, grown, coaxed—into New World forms of expression” (Salgado, 316–31).<sup>10</sup> Lezama Lima’s ideas exemplify the New World reformulation and proliferation as a characteristic of the Neobaroque.

The tension within American Baroque art that Lezama Lima speaks of rises from the many social, ethnic, and cross-cultural confrontations and resentments of the colonial experience. Lezama Lima describes the American Baroque as an “art of the Counter-Conquest” (80–81), and postulates that it has an invigorating healing capacity that runs opposite to the debilitating decadence found in the old. The reason for this is that its hybridity or creation of new transcultural forms seeks to lessen the psychic wounds of the conquest and bridge caste divisions through a negotiation of cosmologies in which the participation of “alien symbols” is guaranteed through what he refers to as a “*pacto de igualdad*” (104).

Lezama extricates New World Baroque art from Weisbach’s institutional notion of baroque aesthetics as a propagandistic state or church-guided form of discourse. An “art of Counter-Conquest,” he writes, can only be fiercely anti-dogmatic, inclusive, and counter-hegemonic” (Chiampi 80–81). Brett Levinson argues that Lezama Lima’s cultural thought does not cut off the New World Baroque from its European sources, but rather shows how the western “paradigma” is itself replenished, transfigured, diversified, and ultimately, reconstituted through the proliferating inscription of “alien” systems of meaning. Lezama Lima’s “plutonic” theorizing of the hybrid shows how there is always

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<sup>10</sup> For more on this topic, see César A. Salgado’s article “Hybridity in New World Baroque Theory”: 316–331.

an “other” within the “same” (324).<sup>11</sup> Neobaroque theorists remind us that European culture after the Renaissance was the direct result of Western expansionism into the Americas after the Conquest. Hence, the multiple forms of the Baroque brought to the Americas would see a reversal through the Neobaroque that would lead to the emblematic flow of the Baroque would proceed as much from America to Europe as it did from Europe to America.

### ***Severo Sarduy***

Severo Sarduy (1937–1993), third member of the Cuban triad along with Carpentier and Lezama Lima, opted for exile from Cuba in 1960 after the revolution and relocated to France where he rebuilt the American Baroque. One of the first critics to employ the term Neobaroque in his essay *El barroco y el neobarroco* (1972), Sarduy makes a distinction between the Baroque, or “el barroco europeo y el primer barroco colonial latinoamericano” (Talley 184).<sup>12</sup> Sarduy consciously embraced the Baroque as a revolutionary form, capable of countering the dominance of capitalism and socialism (Sarduy 1975; Beverley 1998, 29). In “The Baroque and the *Neobaroque*” Sarduy points out that, whereas the Latin American Baroque [seventeenth and eighteenth century] was a colonial extension of European/Spanish Baroque, the Neobaroque embraces a more critical stance by returning to the European as opposed to the colonial origins.

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<sup>11</sup> For more information, see Brett Levinson’s *Secondary Moderns: Mimesis, History and Revolution in Lezama Lima’s “American Expression”* (1996).

<sup>12</sup> From Virginia Talley’s “Expanding the Neobaroque: Severo Sarduy’s Unique contribution to the Debate.” in *Crossing Over Redefining the Scope of Border Studies* (2007): 179–190.

Sarduy's focus on the nature of Baroque space in *Barroco* (1974) traces the undoing of Renaissance geocentrism in the seventeenth century by the German astronomer Johannes Kepler, whose theory of the elliptical movement of the solar system unseated the idea of circular movement around the sun and with it, according to Sarduy, the balanced structures of Classicism: "*El paso de Galileo a Kepler es el del círculo a la elipse, el de lo que será trazado alrededor del Uno a lo que está trazado de lo plural, paso de lo clásico a lo barroco*".<sup>13</sup> Referred to as the "great irregular pearl," the Spanish word *barruECO* came to represent ambiguity and semantic diffusion. Sarduy points to the notion of the Baroque as a return to the primordial, namely, back to nature. In his study of the Baroque, Sarduy links aspects of science and art as he connects the form of Kepler's discovery of the elliptical orbit of planets to similar traits found in Góngora's poetry, Caravaggio's paintings, and the architecture of Francesco Borromini.

As Sarduy points out, artificialization and the process of masking, layering over, and mockery is present in Latin American poetry through three mechanisms: *substitution*, *proliferation*, and *condensation*. *Substitution* is defined by Sarduy as the replacement of the signified by a term semantically removed by the original, but which corresponds to the original in the process of signification (273); *proliferation* is the obliteration of the signified without a proper replacement of another, choosing instead to use a chain of signifiers that progress metonymically, thus circumscribing the absent

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<sup>13</sup> Severo Sarduy, *Barroco* (1974) in *Ensayos generales sobre el barroco*.(1987): 151–152, n.5. Sarduy makes Kepler's ellipse a metaphor for Neobaroque decentering and "a figure for twentieth century destabilization".

signified so that it must be inferred by the reader (273–274); whereas *condensation* consists of several oneiric processes including permutation, optical illusion, fusion, and interchange among elements—phonetic or plastic—of at least two of the terms in a signifier chain, from which a third term emerges and summarizes semantically the first two terms (277). Tension emerges between the two signifiers as a result of the *condensation* from which a new signified emerges. In summary, within *substitution*, another signifier replaces the signified, in *proliferation* a chain of signifiers circumscribes the original, and in *condensation*, the unification of two signifiers comes together in the medium or in the interior of memory.

Sarduy points out that the Latin American Neobaroque uses Russian formalist Mikhail Bakhtin's definition of parody<sup>14</sup> as it functions through the symbol of the carnival, in which the abnormal is multiplied through confusion, profanation, eccentricity and ambivalence, and where apotheosis hides mockery. Carnivalization works as parody, and to extend it is equal to confusion and confrontation, to interaction between different strata, between different linguistic textures, and to its intertextuality. In this way, the Baroque, through the space of dialogism, polyphony, carnivalization, parody, and intertextuality becomes a set of connections whose graphic expression is described as large, spatial and dynamic as opposed to lineal, bi-dimensional or flat. In Carnivalization, the mixing of genres, the intrusion of one type of discourse into another,

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<sup>14</sup> From Mikhail Bakhtin and Caryl Emerson's *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*.

as well as the interspersed usage of different languages of the America's culture with the European are common.

Sarduy suggests the creation of a formalized system for deciphering and decoding elements of the Baroque in order to avoid generalizations and confusion in its application. In forming this semiology of the Latin American Baroque, Sarduy looks within intertextuality and its forms including the *quotation*,<sup>15</sup> the *reminiscence*,<sup>16</sup> and *intratextuality*<sup>17</sup> made up of Phonetic grams,<sup>18</sup> Semic grams<sup>19</sup> and Syntagmatic grams<sup>20</sup>. Sarduy describes the Baroque space as one of superabundance and overflow, where taking pleasure in this excess crosses paths with the frustrated search for what Freud refers to as the *partial object*, or the Lacanian concept of object: the *thing* alien to

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<sup>15</sup> (In Zamora and Kaup). "Quotations are inscribed in the field of the Baroque since in the act of parodying, deforming, emptying, dismissing, or distorting the code they belong to, they refer only to their facticity. The parodic use of the code to which a work belongs—its apotheosis and mockery (Bakhtin's coronation and "dethronement) in the interior of a work itself—are the best means for revealing these conventions, that deception." Sarduy's "Baroque and Neobaroque": (283).

<sup>16</sup>(In Zamora and Kaup). "Without appearing on the surface of the text, but always latent, determining the archaic tone of the visible text...are present, in the form of reminiscence From Sarduy's "Baroque and Neobaroque: (283).

<sup>17</sup> (In Zamora and Kaup). "Texts... which are intrinsic to the production of writing, to the operation of encoding – tattooing – of which all writing consists; they become an integral element, whether consciously or not, in the act of creation itself." Sarduy's "Baroque and Neobaroque" (283–84).

<sup>18</sup> (In Zamora and Kaup). Examples include; anagrams, crossword puzzles, the acrostic, the boustrophedon, and all the verbal and graphic forms of anamorphosis, dual and incompatible viewpoints, cubism – forms whose deceptive practice would be alliteration. Alliteration, that "posts" and unfolds, that displays the traces of a phonetic work but whose result is nothing more that the display of the work itself." Sarduy's "Baroque and Neobaroque": (284).

<sup>19</sup> (In Zamora and Kaup) ...the signified to which the manifest discourse refers has not allowed its signifiers to ascend to the textual surface: repressed *idiom*, a sentence mechanically cut off in oral language...rejected... but whose latency somehow disturbs or enriches all innocent reading." Sarduy's "Baroque and Neobaroque": (285).

<sup>20</sup> (In Zamora and Kaup) "The nucleus of signification between quotation marks...this tautology consists in pointing out the work within the work, repeating its title, recopying it in reduced form, describing it, employing any of the know procedures of *mise en abîme*." Sarduy's "Baroque and Neobaroque": (286).

everyone that man is capable of understanding. In eroticism, Sarduy writes that “artificiality, the cultural, is manifested in the game with the lost object, a game whose objective is within itself and whose intention is not to convey a message—in this case, reproduction—but of their waste as a function of pleasure” (288). As with Baroque rhetoric, eroticism presents itself as the total rupture of the denotative, natural, direct level of language that every perversion of metaphor and figure implies (288).

While the European Baroque and the Latin American Baroque present themselves as images of a decentralized universe yet one that is still harmonious, the Neobaroque structurally reflects the disharmony, and the rupture of the logos as unqualified. The Neobaroque of disequilibrium is the structural reflection of a desire that cannot reach its object, for which the logos has organized a screen that hides this lack. The object has been converted from a partial lack into a lost object. The Neobaroque becomes a pulverized reflection of the knowledge that it is no longer “peacefully” closed within itself, but has become the art of dethronement and of discussion.

In *Escrito sobre un cuerpo* Sarduy writes, “En los clásicos, la distancia entre figura y sentido, entre significante y significado, es siempre reducida: el barroco agranda esa falla entre los dos polos del signo” (180). So, whereas Classical writers aimed to write clearly, one tendency of the Baroque writers is to emphasize difference and transgression (Kaup 107). Contemporary Neobaroque critics adhere to Sarduy’s assertion that Neobaroque texts transgress the established cultural norms in order to promote different ways of thinking about cultural identity. Additionally, the syntax of the Neobaroque sentence would create a transformation in twentieth-century Latin American

poetry. Subsequently, the development of ideas by Brazilian poet Haroldo de Campos would expand those of Alejo Carpentier, Lezama Lima, and Severo Sarduy, thereby extending the reach of Neobaroque influence throughout the Americas.

### ***Haroldo de Campos***

The key figure in the recovery of Brazilian Neobaroque and a founding member of the Brazilian concrete poetry movement of the 1950s was Haroldo de Campos (1929–2003), author of *Galáxias*, a collection of prose poems written between 1963 and 1976, which was considered a defining work of Neobaroque poetry in which Baroque features are prominent even before and after the concrete poetry of the 1950s. In “La obra de arte abierta” (1955), de Campos coined the term Neobaroque for which Severo Sarduy has generally been credited. In it he argues for a decentered “open work of art as a kind of modern Baroque” (Parkinson, Zamora and Kaup, 222) and used the term Neobaroque in his attempts to define the fragmentary poetics of poets Stéphane Mallarmé, James Joyce, Ezra Pound, and e.e. cummings.

The Baroque is also the subject of many of Haroldo de Campos’s essays. He has similar ideas to Carpentier with regard to the symbiosis of cultural *mestizaje* being basic to the New World Baroque. Furthermore, de Campos establishes important links between the decentering strategies of twentieth-century Neobaroque literature, referring to such writers as Carpentier, Carlos Fuentes, Mario Vargas Llosa, Joao Guimarães Rosa, and Sarduy. In Section Three of his book “The Baroque: The Non-Infancy”, de

Campos writes that Brazilian poetry never experienced a true infancy, but instead was born adult—fluently speaking the symbolic language of the Baroque:

For us the Baroque is the non-origin, because it is a non-infancy. Our literatures, which emerged with the Baroque, had no infancy (*infans*: he who does not speak). They were never aphasic. They were born adults (like certain mythological heroes), speaking an extremely elaborate international code: the Baroque rhetorical code (with late medieval and Renaissance traces, already distilled in the case of Brazil, by Camoensian Mannerism... to articulate itself as a difference, in relationship to this panoply of *universalia*: this is our “birth” as a literature, a sort of parthenogenesis without an ontological egg (we could see—the difference as origin or the egg as Columbus...)<sup>21</sup>

As Haroldo de Campos first acknowledged, writers of the Latin American Baroque began to connect with one another through the gaps in a common understanding of the spirit of the times, and evolved through dialogue that has today resulted in the Neobaroque as an aesthetic that continues to re-define and re-establish itself by adapting its ever-changing poetics.

By developing a historical and geographical perspective on the trajectory of the Neobaroque, we can begin to place this movement in its current context. The five forerunners presented above—Eugenio D’Ors, Alejo Carpentier, José Lezama Lima, Severo Sarduy, and Haroldo de Campos—each helped shape this progression from its Baroque origins through its transition and into the twentieth and now twenty-first century. Haroldo de Campos’s contribution to the aesthetic and ideological development of the Neobaroque to further include Brazil helped create solidarity between the countries of the Americas. Lezama Lima located the Baroque in *Latin American* time

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<sup>21</sup> In Parkinson Zamora and Kaup: (325).



and space, while Carpentier placed the Baroque in *all* cultures and periods. Sarduy's focus tended more toward the uses of seventeenth-century Baroque rhetorical devices in contemporary literature instead of using cultural self-characterization.

Carpentier, along with Lezama Lima and Sarduy, removed the New World Baroque from its art historical niche and transformed it into an ideology and aesthetic of cultural differences. While Sarduy's version of the Baroque dialectic between abundance and absence refers to astronomical space, the connection with that of Carpentier's geographical initiative is apparent. Carpentier, Lezama Lima, and Sarduy are linked in their use of the Baroque space to constitute Latin America as a fusion of cultural and historical groupings. Though they vary in their assessment of the nature and feasibility of the enterprise, each recognizes the Baroque impulse to displace and decenter, as well as to amplify and include.<sup>22</sup>

As different as these writers are, they are alike in that they transformed the Baroque into a process of cultural recuperation and revitalization. Neobaroque, within the historical context described above, can be summed up as writing that undermines order and stability by incorporating transgressive elements, including parody, carnival, intertextuality and hybridity. Thus, Neobaroque writers move away from traditional structure, homogeneity, and reason in order to lead their readers through a multiplicity of meanings while questioning traditionally established norms and authorities. The desire to break down order and authority adheres to Sarduy's definition of the Neobaroque as the

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<sup>22</sup> Irlemar Chiampi in *Barroco y modernidad* (2000).

“Barroco de la Revolución” (Baroque of the Revolution)” (185). The recovery of the Baroque is but one important way of seeing the manner in which Latin American poets engage in a wide range of struggles in the division between established politics and aesthetics.

### ***Friedrich and Maravall***

In his chapter “Spanish Poetry of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century” of *The Structure of Modern Poetry* (1974), Hugo Friedrich writes that the stylistic change that began to take place in 1900 in Spain was initially due to the desire for a change from the rhetorical, sentimental, and accepted verse of the time. As previously stated, the underlying interest in a return to Luis de Góngora y Argote (1561–1627) and the Baroque style was first initiated by the celebration of the tricentennial of the poet’s death, as well as the interest in his work for its similarities with modernity. Friedrich establishes that this connection was based on Góngora’s faculty for both cerebral and imaginative conceptualization of remote ties between things in nature and myth; his language as a continual shift of phenomena into “metaphorical ellipses” (Diego); the allure of his artistically dark style (which erected poetic counter-worlds to the real world); the rigor of his poetic technique (especially his practice of dislodging the syntax to produce high tension in the lines); and, finally, the reconciliation of his intricacies with the fascination of his sounds. Thus, Spanish poets under Góngora’s influence turned away from earlier styles because a poetry working with selective linguistic means was sought in order to regain the

mysteries and psychic subtleties suppressed by cultural disenchantment (Friedrich, 110–111).

José Antonio Maravall in *Culture of the Baroque: Analysis of a Historical Structure* (1986) pointed out that the extremity that constituted the basis of the Baroque and the suspension that it strove to manipulate as a resource led it to make use of the notions of difficulty and obscurity (220–21), a characteristic still seen within Neobaroque aesthetic today. As Maravall writes: “The technique of suspense relates to the utilization of resources that are mobile and changing, resources of unstable equilibrium, of incompleteness, of the strange and the rare, of the difficult, of the new and never before seen” (220). Just as with the Baroque, difficulty in Neobaroque poetry makes readers aware of the surface of the text and makes them focus on it in order to demonstrate how the delay in understanding energizes the pleasure of the text, thus rendering an alternative reading experience that uses poetic convention to help us to know something “other.”

### **New Readings of the Neobaroque**

As mentioned previously, most established scholarship places the Latin American Neobaroque as a continuation of the Spanish Baroque, which is most often represented by the poetry of Luis de Góngora. However, rereadings are beginning to emerge that put this opinion into doubt, particularly as it implicates the comparison between the Latin American Neobaroque of the 1980s phase with that of the “trobar clus,” a closed poetry form used by the poets of the Spanish Golden Age (dating back to

the troubadours in the Middle Ages). Proposed instead is the idea that the Latin American Neobaroque was a development in and of itself and not a consequence of the Spanish Baroque, although evidence for the relationship between both aesthetics can be found as argued above.

Monika Kaup, in her article “Neobaroque: Latin America’s Alternative Modernity,”<sup>23</sup> concurs with current ideas in the belief that the twentieth-century recovery of the Baroque as Neobaroque was a transatlantic phenomenon. Kaup claims that this event resulted from the Baroque’s multiple cycles of recovery by modern and postmodern writers, which spread in a non-linear fashion across physical and non-physical barriers, including languages, countries, and disciplines. Kaup expands the Neobaroque beyond Latin America to include the following figures: philosophers (Oswald Spengler, Wilhelm Worringer, and Eugenio d’ Ors), poet-critics of the avant-garde (T.S Eliot, Octavio Paz, German Expressionists, and Spain’s Generation of ‘27), modernist novelists (Djuna Barnes and William Faulkner), Latin American historians of the 1940s (Ángel Guido, Pedro Henríquez-Ureña, and Mariano Picón-Salas), Cuban essayists (José Lezama Lima, Alejo Carpentier, and Severo Sarduy), postmodern Latin American “Boom” novelists (Carlos Fuentes and José Donoso), contemporary New World writer-critics (Martinican Edouard Glissant and Brazilian Haroldo de Campos), and French philosophers (Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and Christine Buci-Glucksmann).

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<sup>23</sup> Monika Kaup’s article, “Neobaroque: Latin America’s Alternative Modernity” (2006): 128–130.

In the works of each of those named, Kaup writes that the Baroque “is summoned as a device to disrupt the wide range of established aesthetic, social, and intellectual modern structures these twentieth century critics wish to transform” (130). Kaup points out that no longer seen as a seventeenth century historical period, style, or ideology, the Baroque has been reappropriated as the Neobaroque, which acts as a “structure-transforming operation” (130) or, rephrased, a productive force with the potential to create alternate forms and new paradigms.

A significant suggestion is that another thinker besides José Lezama Lima was the inventor of the initial impulse for the Neobaroque movement. In his groundbreaking book *Julio Herrera y Reissig: Prohibida la entrada a los uruguayos*<sup>24</sup> (2010), Eduardo Espina suggests that a rereading of the literary historiography is beginning to point to evidence that before José Lezama Lima, the Uruguayan poet Julio Herrera y Reissig was using radical techniques that highlighted traces of the Neobaroque aesthetic, later found within the writings of other poets such as César Vallejo, Pablo Neruda, and Oliverio Girondo. As Espina explains, “Un buen pedigrí tomaba forma en nuestro idioma, porque de la casa lingüística de Herrera, tal cual se dijo, provienen directamente varios libros fundacionales como *Trilce*, *Residencia en la tierra*, y *En la masmédula*” (41).

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<sup>24</sup> My translation: A good pedigree took shape in our language thanks to the linguistic house of Herrera, of which was said that various founding books such as *Trilce*, *Residencia en la tierra*, and *En la masmédula* proceeded.

Espina claims that “La torre de las esfinges”<sup>25</sup> is but one clear example of a poetics of the Neobaroque that surfaced before the ideas that established Lezama Lima as the founder of the Neobaroque aesthetic. As he clarifies, “Herrera y Reissig fue el primer neo-barroco y no José Lezama Lima, como erróneamente ha repetido, sin demasiados argumentos definitivos, la crítica literaria” (41). He points to Herrera y Reissig as the first to exercise a type of lyric “intrigante y autotélica que acentúa el protagonismo de la sintaxis y del abarrotamiento auditivo, lírica a la cual los poetas estadounidenses con seguridad incluirán dentro de la llamada ‘poesía del lenguaje’, porque lo es” (41).

Additionally, current research that supports the consideration of the Neobaroque as autonomous from the Baroque leads to the work of T. S. Eliot, who in 1911 started to write what was to be considered the first modern poem, “The Love Song of Alfred J. Prufrock,” published in Chicago in the journal *Poetry* in 1915. As Marjorie Perloff proposed in *21<sup>st</sup>-Century Modernism: The “New Poetics”* (2002), the “artifice of absorption” (Charles Bernstein’s term) has less in common with Allen Ginsberg—or even with Frank O’Hara—than with the early poetic experiments of the eminent High Modernist, T.S. Eliot” (4). In *21<sup>st</sup>-Century* Perloff wrote in the form of a manifesto about foundational poetic changes that point to a second wave of modernism, which includes important poets from various points around the world, including Latin America. Perloff writes in favor of the powerful avant-garde poetry that she believes again takes up the

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<sup>25</sup> From “Prohibida la entrada (al que no sea lector)” *Julio Herrera y Reissig: Prohibida la entrada a los uruguayos* (2010): 17–81.

experimentation of the early twentieth century. Through the analysis of “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” Perloff delineates the ways in which Eliot created his particular effect using:

...syntax or the “attenuated hypostaxis”, “sound structure”, “zone of consciousness” “counter-pointed pronouns,” as well as the tendency of images to balloon away from their referents to form a life of their own, the abrupt tense and mood shifts (25), juxtapositions of ordinary speech rhythms with passages in foreign languages, and especially the foregrounding of sounds and silences... as “laying bare the device” of using material form—in this case language—as an active compositional agent, impelling the reader to participate in the process of construction. (26)

Many of these same characteristics exist not only in the Neobaroque but in US Language Poetry as well. Enrique Mallén in *Antología crítica de la poesía del lenguaje* (2009) writes that during the late 1970s and 1980s, as changes were occurring in Latin America that contributed to the development of the Neobaroque, another simultaneous movement was occurring in the US. This movement, created in the name of a new “postmodern” sensibility centered around several journals, most importantly L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E, edited by Bruce Andrews and Charles Bernstein. Language Poetry would become the most prominent vanguard poetic movement of the 1980s and 1990s in the United States.

In the mentioned anthology, as well as in the book *Poesía del lenguaje de T. S. Eliot a Eduardo Espina* (2008), Enrique Mallén writes that poets from both schools focus closely on the role that lexicon plays in general poetic composition as well as its importance in the utilization for aesthetic purposes. In addition, the blurred correspondence between parts of connected structures, results in a complex “poly-

referential text.” In this way, the lexicon grows in richness and variety, as do the relationships between the intermediate levels generated.

The interconnections between phonological and semantic roots allow the sentence to be composed of multi-referential entities, where all possible links must be explored. The reader goes from the mimesis of external reality to the mimesis of the present moment of perception of an object, in which case the emphasis is on the emergence of “literature” as if it were an independent reality, as something that has no need to represent any other objective reality in order to justify its existence. Its attention is no longer concentrated on a universal experience, but rather on the process of experimentation of each present moment to be connected to all the features of the intermediary level of consciousness itself.

Both poetics convert traditional syntax (grammatical or special) into a game of complexities, focusing attention on the art object as an object in its own right, each to be observed in its opacity. The symbol (semiosis) gives way to pure representation that must maintain its power by rejecting the easy integration into daily experience that we normally impose on perception. The close connection between Language Poetry and the Neobaroque will be the subject of more discussion throughout this study.

Jill Kunheim in *Spanish American Poetry at the End of the Twentieth Century: Textual Disruptions* (2004) proposes that recent South American poetry is very much alive and active in the fundamental cultural debates of the day. These debates involve the division between politics/aesthetics, ethnic/national issues, as well as sexual/urban identities, and the ways in which poetry works to incorporate technological innovations



and elements from mass media into its domain (1). Kunheim defines “textual disruptions” as the ways in which poetry crosses the boundaries of canonical literary and generic conventions in order to not only rewrite them, but also to undermine and renovate them.

Kunheim does not propose these disruptions as the end of literature, but instead sees them as reinforcing literature’s work by questioning the “literary” as a detached and impermeable category. Poetry, Kunheim writes, “represents examples of both change and continuity, proffering possible new roles for literature that break the culturally determined conventions and codes they also depend on.” “This is poetry,” she writes, “in keeping with the plural or multiple formations of Latin American societies today” (7).

The complicated Neobaroque style of writing, Kunheim continues, exemplifies the poetic use of other structural elements (space, line break, sonority) to create an alternative “language” that brings the issue of representation to the forefront. In addition, Kunheim points out that one of the links between the Baroque and the Postmodern is that both styles constantly remind us that we cannot have unmediated access to reality: “These Neobaroque writers revalue complication, making their self-conscious inaccessibility and the difficulty of their writing part of its fascination and seduction” (11). By writing against the mass-market models of consumption and by advocating a slower, more attentive and measured reading, the critic writes that the Neobaroque poet highlights the particularity of poetry and extends the limits of language (11).

What can be seen from the sources cited here is that Latin American Neobaroque has international roots that stretch beyond its ties to a continued process of the Golden

Age Baroque. As a result, this aesthetic takes its place within the international realm that connects it to cultures outside its own and points toward a new internationalism and the sensibility of a new era of poetry for Latin America. New ideas are beginning to surface that speak of the Neobaroque in terms of its next phase, the “High Neobaroque Era.”

### **Neobaroque as a “*Sign of the Times*”**

In order to examine author and semiologist Omar Calabrese’s ideas in *Neo-Baroque: A Sign of the Times (NBSOT)* (1992), a brief background on the terms “postmodern” and “Neobaroque” is useful. Since the 1960s, the term “postmodern” has been used as an over-inclusive catchall phrase for very different functions. For this reason, Calabrese proposes a different label for many cultural entities that are often described as “postmodern,” choosing instead the signifier “Neobaroque,” primarily because of its form that recalls the Baroque (14).

Calabrese recalls three cultural contexts in which the term “postmodern” is often misused. First, as used primarily in the United States in the 1960s, “postmodern” was introduced in a cinematic and literary context to refer to literary products that were not based on the experimentation of “modernism” but on new techniques that included reelaboration, pastiche, and the deconstruction of the most recent literary or cinematic tradition (12). From a philosophical perspective, the term “postmodern” refers to the philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard’s *The Postmodern Condition* (1979), a report he wrote for Quebec’s Council of State in which he cited the development of knowledge within advanced Western societies.

Adopted and reformulated as an original philosophical notion by US philosophers, Calabrese notes that Lyotard himself describes “postmodern” as “the state of a culture and transformation undergone in the rules governing science, literature, and the arts since the end of the nineteenth century.”<sup>26</sup> In regards to architecture and design, Calabrese notes as the starting point the 1979 catalogue *Postmodern* from the Venice Biennale.<sup>27</sup> Here, “postmodern” takes on an ideological meaning that represents “the revolt against functionalism and rationalism that characterized the Modern Movement” (13). Referring to the link among the three cultural contexts mentioned above as existent, Calabrese points to three greatly disparate results.<sup>28</sup>

Dissatisfied with “postmodern” as a consistent, unified framework of analysis for explaining aesthetic sensibilities, Calabrese suggests that the “Neobaroque” offers a more productive formal model with which to characterize the renovations taking place within and around the cultural phenomenon in all fields of knowledge of our epoch, due to its continued equivocal nature. Calabrese takes as his thesis the idea that “many important cultural phenomena of our time are distinguished by a specific internal ‘form’

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<sup>26</sup> Here Calabrese exemplifies the case of the crisis in narrations, referring back to Lyotard’s *The Postmodern Condition*, pointing out our incredulity with metanarrations as “postmodern” (13).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> In literature, “postmodern” signifies antiexperimentalism; in philosophy, it means casting doubt on a culture founded upon narrations that become prescriptive; in architecture, it describes a return to citation from the past, to decoration, and to the surface of the object being conceived in a way that contradicts its structure or use. Calabrese points to these differences with great results, yet undefined due to the great disparity in terms lumped beneath over inclusive labels. Calabrese notes the example of citation as being a distinctive feature, without explanation as to what type or the concern with the surface effect of a work, with no specification offered; or the hostility toward “modernism” without recognizing the value of experimentation in the “avant-garde” (13–14).

that recalls the Baroque in the shape of rhythmic, dynamic structures that have no respect for rigid, closed, or static boundaries” (15).

Borrowing from Sarduy, Calabrese defines “Baroque” not only as a specific period, but also as a general attitude and a formal quality of those objects that express this attitude. Along with Sarduy, Calabrese recognizes that the Baroque is found in any epoch or civilization and may be characterized by an appetite for virtuosity, frantic rhythms, instability, and change. As an “aesthetic of repetition,” the Neobaroque characterizes current contemporary taste as “binding objects and phenomena that go from the natural sciences to phenomena of mass communication, from art products to every day habits” (Calabrese xi).

Having seen the Neobaroque and the Postmodern as emerging from a conscious effort on the part of writers to manipulate seventeenth-century Baroque techniques for contemporary, avant-garde purposes, and after evaluating the affinities that exist between the Baroque—or the Neobaroque—and the Postmodern, Calabrese concluded that it is as a formal quality of the Postmodern that the Neobaroque was able to gain stability as it emerged from a wider cultural context.

How social and cultural phenomena relate to the subject and the environment and affect language, which the poet then interprets and subsequently transforms into poetry, is paramount to the understanding of the primary questions in this dissertation. In *NBSOT*, Calabrese demonstrates in a philosophical and theoretical manner how the properties of the Neobaroque manifest themselves throughout most areas of culture and tend to hold true for describing a contemporary Latin American Neobaroque aesthetics.

In his analysis of the Neobaroque, Calabrese covers a wide range of topics, from chaos theory and the theory of catastrophe to the experiences of consumption as well as to several specific philosophical elaborations of contemporary times. In this way, he sees all fields as united by a recurrent *motif* that grants them an *air of familiarity* (xii). He defines the Neobaroque as simply a “spirit of the age” that impregnates many of the cultural phenomena in all fields of knowledge, simultaneously making them familiar to each other, yet distinguishing them from others in a more or less recent past (xii). *NBSOT* is organized by the formalization of a Neobaroque concept with that of a particular scientific expression, which makes each concept analogous to the scientific theory with which it comes into contact. This organizational style becomes a useful tool for understanding the works throughout this study, and is summarized by these principles and its reception in the following section.

“Rhythm and Repetition” revolves around basic principles that Calabrese refers to as the “aesthetics of repetition.” Until Calabrese, repetition had been thought of as being in opposition to originality and the artistic; however, the author calls for the reconsideration of this idea<sup>29</sup> and proposes three types of repetition: (1) the industrial notion of repetition as a way of producing a series from a single matrix, (2) repetition as a structural mechanism for generating texts, (3) repetition as a condition in the public’s consumption of communicative products (27). With regard to the use of repetition for

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<sup>29</sup> Calabrese sees this idea as out of date with contemporary practices in which citation and pastiche in postmodern art are acclaimed within this new aesthetics.

purposes here, the second concept of repetition as a structural mechanism for generating texts is useful.

On a discursive level, the use of repetition in many of the poems to be analyzed follow Calabrese's idea of two opposing formulas of repetition or *variations on a unique element* and *the uniqueness of different elements*. The dialectic between uniqueness and difference, not in the sense of how it relates to *what is repeated* but rather the relationship between variable and invariable, will be explored here as a means for creating an aesthetic of anti-sentimentality. A second method by which repetition can be observed in selected poems has to do with Calabrese's reference to Umberto Eco's term "consolatory" (33). Repetition can be seen as reassuring to the subject through rediscovering that which he or she already knows, or to which he or she is already accustomed.<sup>30</sup> The aesthetics of repetition, part of Neobaroque aesthetics, emerges through organized variation, polycentrism, regulated irregularity, and frantic rhythm, all considered as part of a "universal" Baroque (45).

"Limit and Excess" focuses on the spatial notion of the structure and a distribution of knowledge into systems and subsystems, accordingly divided into local regions built on some form of geometry or typography for its organization. Calabrese uses "border" in an abstract sense to describe these boundaries, defined as "a group of points belonging simultaneously to both the inner and outer space of a configuration."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Umberto Eco's *La struttura assente* (Milan: Bompiani, 1969), quoted in Calabrese: 33.

<sup>31</sup> Calabrese uses Yuri Lotman's idea on the forces of expansion within geopolitical borders with decentralized and asymmetrical organizing centers as a model. Here, the forces within testing the limit of the border-boundary create the value of the tension. Stretching the limit tests the elasticity of the border

Examining the use of “Limit and Excess” is useful to the poems under study here as it relates to literary genre. As will be discussed in Chapter II, the poets here destabilize the genres of poetry by refusing to identify with any particular one and by the mixing of a variety of genres in concert.

Calabrese defines the term “Excess” as “the overcoming of a limit in terms of an exit from a closed system” (49). Referring to its linguistic usage, “excess” reveals how spatial images are applied to cultural facts, through tension, limitation, or the overcoming of the restrictive borders of social or cultural norms (49). “Excessive acts” differ from those which stretch the limits or which test the elasticity of a border without destruction as they “escape by breaking through, crossing the threshold by making an opening, a breach” (49). It is through experimentation with Neobaroque “excess” as defined by Calabrese that these poets approach the topic of death, grief, and mourning as a destabilizing element, either “too much” or “too little” when compared to life before or after the demise of the loved one.

In addition, the “aesthetic of the ugly” (61) can be seen in the description of the physicality of death through decomposition and corporal decay, creating what Calabrese calls an “ugliness that is beautiful” (61). The Neobaroque excess found within the poetic works here, as well as within our epoch, as Calabrese points out, exist not only within the content, but also within its form and discursive structure.

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without destroying it. The age and cultural characteristics defined as “neo-baroque” Calabrese surmises, belong to the category of Limit and Excess”: 47–67.

With “Detail and Fragment,” Calabrese suggests that from a linguistic viewpoint, the part–whole pair is a typical example of Gil and Petitot’s “interdefining terms”<sup>32</sup> in which one cannot be defined without the other. By examining the criteria of relevance based on procedures involving details and fragments, Calabrese claims we are better able to analyze the epochal preference for textual strategies in both descriptive and creative contexts (69).<sup>33</sup> Useful as a means for the analysis of poetry, detail (from the Latin *de-tail*, to cut from) and fragment (from the Latin *frangere*, to break) lend support to various analytical procedures in producing meaning. One can use the whole process as a set of interpretive tools to observe their relevance from selected poems and find the resulting aesthetic effects of creative textual strategies.

By approaching the details of a poem after having approached it as a whole, we may discover what Calabrese means by “[w]hen we ‘read’ any kind of whole by means of its details, it is clear that our purpose is to see more” within the “whole” under analysis, to the point of discovering elements that are imperceptible “at first sight” (72). The use of “detail–fragment” thus becomes useful as a means of examining creative textual strategies in which interpreting what many have called “difficult poetry” requires of the reader to “see more” within the “whole” to the point of discovering elements that, at first sight, are imperceptible. The reconstruction of a poem of which the detail is a part allows the reader to see the whole, which may have otherwise never been discovered.

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<sup>32</sup> Gil and Jean Petitot quoted in Calabrese, 69. From “Uno/multi,” in *Enciclopedia* (Turin: Einaudi, 1982).

<sup>33</sup> The divisibility of a work or any object into a detail or fragment is first explained in terms of two main types of divisibility: the cut and the rupture. Each opposed to the other, corresponding to different effective acts, signifying practices, epistemological procedures, and separate aesthetics: 68–90.



With “Instability and Metamorphosis,” Calabrese offers two examples of instability: one through the theme of the monster, the other through the involvement with video games. Regarding “monsters,” Calabrese makes a comparison of the range of the use of monsters each epoch has produced consisting of the Neobaroque, the Baroque, the late Roman epoch, the late Middle Ages, the Romantic Era, and the period of Expressionism. The monster has represented both the marvelous and the enigmatic and is based on the study of irregularity as it concerns *excess* (92) in its challenge to the regularity of the nature and intelligence of the human experience.<sup>34</sup>

Within the Neobaroque, the phenomenon of instability appears within objects on three levels: the first level is that of the themes and figures *represented*; level two concerns the textual *structures that contain the representations*, and level three covers the relation between figures and texts *and the way in which these are received*. As will be seen, the Neobaroque is illustrated in the poems under study here in the inventive way they frame a number of different poetic voices. The reader is asked to abandon former thoughts and ways of reading in the metamorphoses and instability of these poetic works.

“Disorder and Chaos” is presented in philosophical terms claiming that the origins of philosophical and scientific thought throughout Western history have been contraposed between two orientations: one based on order, regularity, cause, cosmos,

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<sup>34</sup> Calabrese writes that the central principle of teratology “or the science of monsters, is concerned with *excess*.” Since ancient times, monsters have been excessive in their size or in the number of their body parts. The idea of natural perfection is based on a mean and anything that oversteps its limits is imperfect and monstrous; as well, anything that oversteps the limits of the mean of spiritual perfection is also regarded as imperfect or monstrous. See system of correspondences of value: (92–117).

finiteness, and so on, and the other on disorder, irregularity, randomness, chaos, and indefiniteness (118). Both are contraposed because they provide two distinct orientations to the same problem. They either explain phenomena that have already occurred, (in order to establish their cause), or predict those that have not yet happened (in order to establish their occurrence). Seen as qualities of unpredictability and unintelligibility, this series can be interpreted in terms of disorder, irregularity, randomness, chaos, and indefiniteness, among others, leading to what Calabrese offers as, at the least, three “classical” definitions within the history of Western thought.<sup>35</sup> What is also important to look at in reference to this investigation is within what Calabrese refers to as the “science of culture” (120) in which the “ineffability” or “unsayableness” of death fits into a “principle of complexity” or the *challenge of complexity*.<sup>36</sup>

With “The Knot and the Labyrinth,” Calabrese writes that the labyrinth’s most typical figurative representation is that of *intelligent complexity* that represents two intellectual features when confronted with its presence: the pleasure of becoming lost (followed by fear) and the taste for solving it by the use of reason (131). Again, using the Baroque as an example of this representation that includes the knot, the curving line, and

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<sup>35</sup> The first Calabrese terms the idea of the “beginning and the end” of phenomena, consisting of the notion of order as a principle of regularity that has been superimposed upon an indistinct original, or inversely he writes, a condition that tends toward final dissolution. The second position, more deterministic, tends toward the notion that any phenomenon is sustained by a necessary order, and thirdly, the most contemporary and relativistic, is the notion that the principles underlying irregularity, randomness, chaos, and indefiniteness are based on the description of a phenomenon (and therefore its interpretation and explanation) depend on the system of reference into which it is inserted (118–130).

<sup>36</sup> A term introduced by Niklas Luhmann in the seminar proceedings *La sfida della complessità* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1985).

the braid, what is at stake is the principle of the loss of an overall vision of a rational path and the use of intelligence in order to solve the problem and a return to order.<sup>37</sup>

Returning to complexity as seen within chaotic forms that are not labyrinthine in nature, what drives the knot and labyrinth is the pleasure of getting lost in the search for a solution. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's six principles of the rhizome: multiple connectability at every point, heterogeneity of all components of the system, multiplicity without a generating unity, rupture without significance, cartographability, and transfer<sup>38</sup> will be useful here in analyzing the selected poems of these three poets.

Continuing with the final of the three principles of complexity, "Complexity and Dissipation," Calabrese declares that today's world is one in which irreversibility and indeterminism have replaced reversibility and determinism as the rule, thus leaving human beings living in a fragmentary universe composed of local behaviors differing in quality (144). Referring to dissipative structures, Calabrese details the paradox in which new structures dissipate energy over time. However, this dissipation does not lead to entropy, but toward a new formation, a new order, and new structures (145) based on bifurcations, fluctuation, and rupture.<sup>39</sup> Calabrese's ideas on "Complexity and Dissipation" help to substantiate the claim in this dissertation that there is a new

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<sup>37</sup> Calabrese uses a variety of texts from literature, mass media, art, and music to exemplify the current interest in the motif of the labyrinth and knot.

<sup>38</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Rhizôme* (Paris:Minuit, 1976); and also Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, eds. *Nomades et vagabonds* (1976).

<sup>39</sup> Calabrese here references the introduction to *The New Alliance* by Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers.

formation within the Neobaroque as a result of mourning that now engages at the least, the three poets with sentiment.

“Approximate and the Inexpressible” must begin with defining the different levels of the meaning of Approximation.<sup>40</sup> Additionally, Calabrese outlines that the universe of the imprecise, indefinite, and vague is shown to be very seductive to our contemporary mentality, and that within this context the growth of approximation is related to the appearance of a “mentality” (156). Calabrese proposes the philosophical ideas of Vladimir Jankélévitch<sup>41</sup> as a specific theoretical practice that challenges the laws governing representation in an attempt to represent what cannot be represented, to express what cannot be expressed, and to reveal what cannot be seen, especially during these Baroque periods such as the one now being experienced. Calabrese questions whether this approximation is achieved through the increasing diffusion of artificial approximation and the techniques of its discursive production, as it is only through discourse that operations of style and taste are realized to the fullest extent.

Also important to this study are ideas on naming the unnamable, expressing the inexpressible, and seeing poetry as a consolation for the mourning process. The tension between these two modalities creates the sublime in its most classical definition as the

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<sup>40</sup> ...including *One*: the most common level, as “not completely true” when defining an object. *Two*: as an object is defined as “between two extreme thresholds,” a level of collocation, as in replacing a precise element with an interval (154). *Three*: as defined in relation to the “level of precision required by the question being asked of the object” (154), known as “successive approximations,” and “based on which approximation can be arrested or advanced in relation to the pertinence of the question” (154). *Four*: when the “tolerance level is replaced by the “faith interval.” This case arises when the hypothesis states that an object can be approximated between two given thresholds, and on the belief that such a hypothesis has a chance of being true.

<sup>41</sup> Vladimir Jankélévitch qtd in Calabrese. *Le Je-ne-sais-quoi et le Presque-rein* (1957) and *Philosophie première: introduction à une philosophie du “Presque.”* “Je ne sais quoi.”

conflictual convergence of opposing passions. Obscurity, vagueness, the indefinite, the indistinct, irony and nothingness, all characteristics of the Neobaroque, are themes, styles, and techniques used by the poets as expressions of the process of mourning.

“Distortion and Perversion” derives from Calabrese’s search for a different arrangement of *cultural space* (172). “Distortion” the semiologist claims is where, “the space in which culture is represented now seems to be subject to forces that bend and curve it, treating it as though it were elastic” (172), due to perversion “because the order of things (in scientific models) and of discourse (in intellectual modes) is not merely disordered, but rendered perverse” (173). Previous orders are changed in such ways that they are no longer recognizable, so the science of culture, Calabrese writes, is now faced with the challenge of finding a new logic (173). He uses the term “citation” to elaborate his point regarding the relationship between true and false, which he refers to as “the poetic of perverted authenticity” (173–74).

In “Dystopias of the Past,” Calabrese also elaborates on the use of citation as an important instrument for writing about the past, articulating that the artist “renews” the past by working with previous forms to restore ambiguity, density, and opaqueness as well as to transmit or “shift” its meaning to the present.<sup>42</sup> This idea leads as well to Calabrese’s understanding of “simulacra” defined as “a slight, unreal, or superficial likeness or semblance,” in which he points out that at the time of the text’s publication in

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<sup>42</sup> This process can work in two ways: citation can authorize a past interpretation or valorize the present in its reformulation of the past, producing very different results: 179–182.

1992, the world was experiencing an epoch that could best be described as one of simulacra rather than documents.

The simultaneous placement of present and past objects creates the illusion that all is contemporaneous “by means of its ‘total visualization’ of the imagination.” Objects that have been reimagined from a Neobaroque perspective have the aura of “having always been there,” Calabrese writes, “[c]omprising all of history in its entirety, and in such fashion, has the appearance of a *modernity* conceived from all epochs and coexistence of the probable with the real” (182). Through the textual effects of citation, ambiguity, and the distortion of time, from childhood into the present and questioning the beyond, these poets distort or pervert the relationship between the past and the present, rewriting their own personal histories in the process.

Critics, including Jacobo Sefamí, point out that the problem with Calabrese’s book is that it gives the impression that anything can be included in the category of the Neobaroque, and he questions whether the New York Marathon with its many participants, for example, could be counted as Neobaroque. In addition, Sefamí questions whether the Neobaroque should, by its very nature, be responsible for rejecting established guidelines by which the exchanges between people or institutions of society are governed (Sefamí 226).<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> From Jacobo Sefamí’s article “El llamado de los deseosos: Poesía neobarroca latinoamericana.” (1994): 219–237.

## Recent Latin American Theories of the Neobaroque

As mentioned in the Introduction, the innovative anthology *Medusario: Muestra de poesía latinoamericana* (1996), edited by Roberto Echavarren, Jacobo Sefamí, and José Kozler, has been characterized as the first authoritative sampling of a select group of Neobaroque poetry and is useful in presenting many of the originating members of the Neobaroque aesthetic, including Tamara Kamenszain, Eduardo Espina and José Kozler.

The introductory prologues written by Echavarren and Néstor Perlongher, two Neobaroque critics and poets, provide a historical perspective on the development of the Neobaroque, including its relationship to the seventeenth-century Baroque as well as the twentieth-century Latin American vanguard (489). The Neobaroque finds poetry in all things, and instead of rejecting the traditional and the linear in poetry, chooses an all-inclusive style leaning more toward a “distorted, mocked, revitalized, re-appropriation” of this work centered on language itself, as Roberto Echavarren summarizes in the following way:

This tendency, which we call *Neobaroque*, as different from the old avant-garde, does not bet on a single method of experimentation, be it chaotic enumeration, the suppression of syntax, or any other more or less exclusive stylistic device. It does not become prisoner of a definite procedure. In this sense, *Neobaroque* poetry has no style. It verges sometimes on the essay, sometimes on apparently mindless phonetic games. It can be ironical, at moments colloquial, at moments metapoetical. In reaction against “engaged” colloquialism and propagandism of the populist kind, it does not accept a “middle level” of poetic communication, and is not afraid of becoming obscure and overcomplicated (60–61).

Echavarren's reaction against the precursors of the twentieth-century Latin American vanguard and against compromised colloquialism as cited above demonstrates that while the Neobaroque shares with the vanguard a tendency toward experimentation with language, it avoids its occasional didacticism as well as its preoccupation with the image as icon. Instead, the Neobaroque works to replace the grammatical connection with the anaphora and a more chaotic enumeration. As Echavarren writes, "[s]i la vanguardista es una poesía de la imagen y de la metáfora, la poesía neobarroca promueve la conexión gramatical a través de una sintaxis a veces complicada..." (14).

In addition, as Echavarren points out, unlike the vanguard, the Neobaroque rejects the notion of a "middle ground" in poetic communication and the expressed colloquialism of this group, which limits itself to a specific strategy and a preconceived notion of what is said. Sefamí writes that in spite of many differences between the selected twenty-two poets, there are at least four traits they all share in their poems:

1) énfasis en el aspecto fónico del lenguaje y, por ende, de la superficie, como modos de acceder al "significado" de las cosas, (2) rebelión en contra de los sistemas centrados y simétricos, (3) uso de múltiples registros del lenguaje, acudiendo a códigos que vienen de la biología, las matemáticas, la cibernética, la astrología etc., y a la vez usando jergas dialectales, palabras soeces, neologismos, cultismos, 4) uso de una sintaxis distorsionada, donde los signos de puntuación se emplean mayormente con finalidades prosódicas.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> From Sefamí's article, "Los poetas neobarrocos latinoamericanos y el modernismo" (1999): 204.



## **Neobaroque Then and Now**

The purpose of this chapter has been to give a comprehensive overview of the progression of the Neobaroque from its historical origins to its current status. Chapter II presents the theoretical backbone of this study including relevant theories on poetry and mourning. In addition, background information on the selected poets, along with a historical perspective on those Latin American precursors who have also written on mourning is provided. The combination of these two chapters consequently lays the foundation for Chapter III, which presents the recommended framework for anti-sentimentality.

## CHAPTER II

### SENTIMENTALITY, MOURNING, AND MODERN DEATH

Social practices of mourning have had a massive affect on our association with death. During most of the twentieth century, it became accepted practice for an individual to die at home or in a hospital with only limited family, close friends, and clergy present. It is a practice that Philippe Aries, in *Hour of Our Death* (1981), calls “the place of the solitary death” (571). Advancements in comfort, privacy, personal hygiene, and sterility have made most Western cultures more sensitive to and less tolerant of the suffering and sickness associated with death. Octavio Paz<sup>45</sup> writes on this this deliberate convention in *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (1961):

Everything in the modern world functions as if death did not exist. Nobody takes into account, it is suppressed everywhere: in political pronouncements, commercial advertising, public morality and popular customs; in the promise of cut-rate health and happiness offered to all of us by hospitals, drugstores and playing fields. But death enters into everything we undertake, and it is no longer a transition but a great gaping mouth that nothing can satisfy. (57)

However, in the past 30 years death movements have challenged this alienation from and exclusion of death. A mix of traditions from both Eastern and Western cultures have taken root to include hospice, palliative care, and other alternatives that take into consideration not only the physical but also the emotional and spiritual well being of the dying. The former impersonalization and dehumanization of death in hospitals has begun to be challenged by the search for alternative solutions to insular institutional death.

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<sup>45</sup> From *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (1985).

On a public scale, the visibility of social media has encouraged both performative displays of grief along with portrayals of the deceased. Italian semiologist Omar Calabrese, in his book *Neo-Baroque: A Sign of the Times* (1992), notes his concern with the way in which contemporary society expresses “social aesthetics”(which he defines as its intellectual artifacts autonomous from their function or value), and points out that their commonality is the spirit by which they are “expressed, communicated, and received” (xiv).

Current grief-producing events in the US as well as around the world, including the 1997 Oklahoma City bombing, the 1997 untimely death of the Princess of Wales, the 2001 US terrorist bombings, and the more recent 2012 Sandy Hook and 2013 Boston Marathon casualties, not to mention the many catastrophic natural disasters, have all led to extensive academic interest on a public as well as a private level as to how human beings mourn. Social media has added to the many changes in our acts of mourning as it provides a site for public displays of connection and grieving.

Through the expression of mourning poetry, poets attempt to speak the unspeakable by naming the unnamable. This engagement is not only with the life and death of the poem’s subject but involves itself as well with the poet’s own existence and mortality. As with other artists, poets strive to express complex emotions and often lose their way in the process. The challenge poetic verse places on the poet to grasp the reader’s attention is that for it to work as poetry, there must be more to its understanding than just an emotional statement within the verses.

While at times this approach has on the one hand been regarded as sentimental,

often utilized for the sure purpose of arousing gratuitous emotions, on the other, the endeavor to express the emotions associated with grief has served to bring art and mourning to a shared purpose. As with the tools associated among the elements of painting, poetry must be considered within the wider elements of language—sound, rhythm, and coincidences of language that arouse in the reader the experience that only lyric provides and offers an awareness to all readers beyond what they already comprehend.

Whether simple or complex, words and images struggle to ameliorate the experience of consolation, as feelings of emptiness overshadow any effort to put death in its place. It is for this reason that readers continue to value poetry and why poets continue to write. Accordingly, the awareness of inadequacy becomes the poet's collaborator through the creation of compelling and contemplative art that stems from the not knowing of what to say when faced with the unsettling urge to convey meaning.

While often taken as sentimental in nature, poems about death provide poets as well as readers a space to work through the process of grieving. How Neobaroque poets José Kozer, Tamara Kamenszain, and Eduardo Espina avoid sentimentality in poems written on the deaths of their parents is a question that remains unresolved within Neobaroque poetics. For this reason, this study is important as the first serious line of inquiry with significant intellectual value that offers a premise for emotion within Neobaroque aesthetics through its framework for what is referred to here as anti-sentimentality, defined as the intellectualization of emotion. This proposal is furthered by the belief that Kozer, Kamenszain, and Espina create a caesura within the

Neobaroque—a poetic style known for its intellectual approach to language, but which has, to date no understanding of this specific feature of its poetics.

### **Sentiment in Verse**

Richard Aldington in “Personal Notes on Poetry”<sup>46</sup> writes, “[a] poem is a mood or an emotion in verse, an emotional reminiscence which one disengages carefully from all extraneous matter” (108). He proposes that the primary consideration of the poet is to concentrate on a “precise expression of that mood, the emotion or that reminiscence, using every verbal means in his power to force his intellectual and emotive conceptions upon the senses of the reader” (108).

Seeing the poet’s role as one that properly expresses emotion, Aldington continues with, “mere unorganized emotionalism is not poetry” but “slush” (110), and he further mandates that emotion be filtered through the intellect with both intellectual as well as emotional meaning. It is the discourse on “how” Neobaroque poets filter the emotional through the intellect that is found lacking in the research done to date on Neobaroque poetry and it forms the foundation of this study.

On the whole, most critics agree that sentimentality is a fault, often considered a sullied word to be avoided, not “at all” costs, but at least in most philosophical discussions. Historically, Friedrich von Schiller (1759–1805) brought the subject of sentimentality to the forefront, when, motivated by his ambivalent feelings of envy and admiration for his contemporary, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), he wrote

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<sup>46</sup> Richard Addington’s “Personal Notes on Poetry” quoted in *Texas Quarterly Journal*, 1974.

the essay *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry* (1795). Noting the dichotomy between the two, Goethe with the nature and style of the naïve genius and Schiller who saw himself as a sentimental type, he came to see both as superlative, each in his own category. Schiller conjectured that in contrast to the naïve poets whom he believed *are* nature, he thought that the sentimental poets *love* nature. They seem to “love nature” “as something they feel they lack, as something that compliments their character” (25).

Schiller theorizes that the genres of sentimental poetry take shape from the poet’s response to this lack created by *loving* nature as opposed to the naïve poets *being* nature. According to Schiller, if the sentimental poet takes as his subject alienation from nature and the contradiction between actuality and the idea (117), then he is satirical, and his poetry will be some form of *satire–punitive* (Schiller suggests like that of Juvenal or Swift; p.119); whereas if the poet “dwells in the realm of the will,” conscious of the need to make things better, or *playful* (like that of the Horace and Sterne), the poet dwells in the “realm of the understanding,” where the world’s problems can be contemplated without battling over them (119).

Since both the naïve and the sentimental poet have associated temperaments and genres, Schiller surmises that it is possible for a sentimental master to work in a naïve genre, and for a naïve genius to take up sentimental themes and genres (274). If, following Schiller, the poet was to write about the ideal rather than the real, the result would be *elegiac* poetry (125). Schiller believes that true *elegy* is produced when the subject is the idea of the past compared with the fallen present. Examples of sentimental elegies for Schiller include works by German poets Albrecht von Haller (1708–1777),

Heinrich von Kleist (1777–1811), and Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock (1724–1803).

Schiller explains, “[t]he character of their poetry is sentimental; they touch us by ideas, not by sensuous truth; not so much because they are nature as because they are able to inspire enthusiasm for nature” (129). From a poem by Haller:

Shall I sing of thy death?  
O mariane, what a song!  
When sighs contres with words  
And one idea flees before the rest, etc.<sup>47</sup>

Schiller finds the poet has not quite communicated his feelings, but instead offers to the reader his thought about the matter. In this way, Haller moves us more “feebly” because “he must himself have been very much cooler to be an observer of his own emotion” reader his thought about the matter. In this way, Haller moves us much more “feebly” (130–31). Still, at his time, the elegy is considered didactic, and for Schiller, the didactic can only be conceived as dwelling in two realms: “either it must dwell in the world of the sense or in the world of ideas, since it absolutely cannot flourish in the realm of concepts or in the world of understanding” (207).

In general, Schiller’s theory is important as it argues for the profundity of the sentimental despite its inherent imperfection and incompleteness, thus tying it to subsequent ideas discussed throughout this dissertation. The proposal of elegy as didactic has changed since Schiller’s time and will be important as to how it affects the works under investigation. In addition, the duality of idea/concept will appear later as a theme, particularly in the works of José Kozer, in which duality takes on a more hybrid

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<sup>47</sup> From *Naïve and Sentimental Poetry* (130).

form. The next section takes on the task of defining the various terms associated with sentimentality, sentiment, and emotion in order to provide the reader with a clear understanding of these terms as they are developed in this study.

Elucidating the distinction between various terms related to sentimentality, including sensibility<sup>48</sup> and emotion,<sup>49</sup> the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*<sup>50</sup> (Fourth Edition, 2012) (*PEPP*) explains that sentimentality in poetry is:

...along with the related forms *sentimental* and *sentimentalism*—often carries negative connotations, but some historical and critical uses of the term have also served a more neutral, descriptive function. While *sentimentality* may simply refer to the quality of possessing emotion or feeling, in calling poetry *sentimental*, a reader may mean to identify and condemn an emotional treatment in excess of its object, a false or contrived response that is not convincingly suited to an occasion. (1293)

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<sup>48</sup> Sensibility is closely related to its cognate sentimentality, though according to The *PEPP*, sentimentality increasingly takes on negative connotation from the nineteenth century forward. Beginning as an A.Eur. and Am., phenomenon in the late seventeenth century, sensibility as such emphasized passionate experience and linked materialist concepts of the body and mind to a moral system based on sympathy. Crossing all genres, including those referred to literary, to works of natural and moral philosophy, divinity, political economy, and medicine. Sensibility thus promoted ideas of individual liberty (William Godwin) and abolition (Harriet Beecher Stowe) (1290).

<sup>49</sup>With regard to emotion, the *PEPP* refers to emotion as involving two people, the writer and the reader, and notes the division as being chronological as well as logical in that until the end of the eighteenth century, emphasis fell upon the reader's emotions. However, since romanticism, that emphasis has shifted to the poet's emotions based on the calculation and reasoning behind these feelings. The central difficulty in any view of art as the expression of emotion is to determine if, while in the grip of an emotion, the poet in this case is also in control of it.

<sup>50</sup> Whether in poet or reader, sentimentality is defined as a form of emotional redundancy and thus a fault of rhetoric as well as of ethics and tact. It often suggests the presence of self-pity and the absence of mature emotional-control. The poetic sentimentalist appears to be interested in pathos as an end rather than as an artistic means or as a constituent of broader, less personal experience. Sentimentality in poetry tends to register itself in the tags of popular journalism: adjectives are frequently clichés and emotions remain vague and oversimplified, never becoming transmuted into something more meaningful. (In popular artifacts may be seen as kitsch). Historically, sentimentality (in the modern sense) seems not to have entered poetry much before the eighteenth century; its appearance may have been due to a strong current of philosophical optimism popularized by Shaftesbury and Rousseau (1145).



Continuing, Edward Hirsch<sup>51</sup> in *A Poet's Glossary* (2014), provides a lengthy discussion on sentimentality, and refers to I.A. Richards (*Practical Criticism*, 1929) who brought the term into twentieth-century critical discourse on poetry when he claimed that “a response is sentimental if it is too great for the occasion,” clarifying, “We cannot, obviously, judge that any response is sentimental unless we take careful account of the situation” (567). As shown, sentimentality often carries a negative connotation due to its preference for the expression of feeling over intellect or reason. However, in recent times, scholars interested in emotions, and those interested in the understanding that social behaviors and feelings are in part socially constructed, have generated a new interest in and respect for the term.<sup>52</sup>

If the emotional expression in a work is found to be insincere, the accusation arises that the fake feeling in the poem is self-seeking at the expense of another's pain, as in the case of a small animal. In William Cowper's *The Task*, a verse written to his pet rabbit exemplifies the traits of sentimental poetry easily ridiculed: “If I survive thee I will dig thy grave; / And when I place thee in it, sighing say, / I know at least one hare that had a friend”).<sup>53</sup> In this sense, the literary critics' employment of sentimentality (in a condemnatory sense) often does more to expose the taste of a particular critic, as the expression of sentimentality by one individual can often be the sincere expression of

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<sup>51</sup> In *A Poet's Glossary*.

<sup>52</sup> According to the *PPEP*, scholars of eighteenth century and nineteenth century American literature, sentimentalism has been championed as an alternative feminine aesthetic and an effective mode of social reform (1293).

<sup>53</sup> *The PEPP* (1293).

authentic emotion by another (*PEPP*, 1293).

Spanning all genres, sentimentality in poetry is generally considered to have originated in what Northrop Frye refers to as the “Age of Sensibility” (1293), that period located between the Augustan and Romantic periods. Poets of that time include Thomas Gray, Charlotte Smith, William Blake, and Robert Burns, among others. During the nineteenth century, inheritors of the tradition include William Wordsworth, Lydia Sigourney, John Keats, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. As seen in more recent times, sentimentality in poetry renders “legible the ways that emotions are both external and internal to the individual” as well as the way in which feeling “constructs and mediates between the categories of literary convention and personal experience” (1293), making the concept of sentimentality definable as the perfect confrontation between both.

Scholar Robert C. Solomon’s *In Defense of Sentimentality* (2004) argues that the sentiments in philosophy as well as in aesthetics have taken a bad rap, so to speak, and that “sentimentality” in both is a term of harsh abuse. Solomon suggests that for well over a century the status of sentimentality has declined, paralleling the decline and loss of status of the sentiments in moral philosophy. The key figure in this philosophical transformation was Immanuel Kant, whose attack on sentiment and sentimentalism, Solomon writes, was in part a reaction not only against the philosophical moral sentiment theorists but also against the flood of romantic women writers in Europe and

America that tended to “equate virtue and goodness with gushing sentiment.”<sup>54</sup> As a result, sentimentalism was forced into a confrontation with logic and became the weakness of appealing to emotion. Solomon writes that to be accused of *sentimentalism* “meant that one had an unhealthy and most unphilosophical preference for heartfelt feeling over hardheaded reason” (8).

Scholars posing new questions dealing with issues related to sentimentality published symposium papers from “Hot/Not,” a panel on sentiment co-chaired by poets and scholars Joy Katz and Sally Ball at the Denver AWP conference in 2010.<sup>55</sup> Kevin Prufer suggests that sentimentality is bad when it undermines emotional complexity, and he proposes that a good test for useful sentiment in a poem is to gauge whether it complicates, rather than simplifies, our emotional response to the world. Sally Ball proposes that poets have reason to distrust sentiment, but that some degree of openness is necessary if poems are to register what thrills or scares us. Rachel Vap talks about the danger of sentiment for women poets, describing the need for poets to risk shame in order to avoid succumbing to a “great dulling force” that pulls poetry toward a safe center. For Jennie Browne, poems without an emotional component are unmemorable, they sidestep the “mess of being human;” as for Joy Katz and the return to the seemingly cold, experimental poems, she prefers to understand how they move her. Coming up

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<sup>54</sup> Prigogine and Stengers quoted in Solomon (6).

<sup>55</sup> Articles published in *Pleiades* @ <http://www.ucmo.edu/pleiades/> Joy Katz, “A Symposium on Sentiment: An Introduction”: 68–69; “Rachel Zucker, “Terribly Sentimental””: 70–73; Sarah Vap, “Poetry, Belligerence, and Shame”: 73–77; Kevin Prufer, “Sentimentality, the Enemy?”: 77–80; Joy Katz, “When ‘Cold’ Poems Aren’t”: 81–86; Jennie Browne, “Call Me Sentimental””: 86–90; Sally Ball, “Lyric Solace, Lyric Evasion””: (91–94).

with the term “muscular sentiment,” the scholar and poet allows that all types of poems, experimental or otherwise, are able to access openness without sinking into what she refers to as “icky sweetness” (69).

The decline of romantic theories and the rise of structuralism have focused attention on the move away from the question of emotion, focusing instead on the resulting experience, as with Kozler, Kamenszain, and Espina. These structuralist theories tend to treat literature with methods that concentrate on the activity of language rather than on the resulting experiences. Theories on the dispersed or decentered subject (Althusser, Lacan, Barthes) that eliminate or at least minimize individual creativity, thus deemphasizing the importance of emotion, are based on the fact that no longer is there an autonomous subject. Apart from the theories and ideas suggested here, this study maintains the notion that emotion continues to be an important concept and that every poem has an author who draws on their emotions of personal experience and a reader who is moreover moved by that emotion. Consequently it follows that this volume’s contribution lies determining how a poetry engaged in mourning is not “anti-sentimental”, but one which it is engaged with that sentiment.

### **Kozler, Kamenszain, and Espina: The Case for Three Poets**

The response to the proposed lack of discourse about how Neobaroque poets filter emotion and sentiment through the intellect lies in determining how José Kozler, Tamara Kamenszian, and Eduardo Espina express strong emotions in a postmodern, poststructuralist world in which death is recognized through similar observations but

from divergent viewpoints. In their collections of poetry, Kozer's *ACTA* (2010), Kamenzain's *El eco de mi madre* (2012), and Espina's *Todo lo que ha sido para siempre una sola vez (Poemas a partir de la muerte del padre y de la madre)* (2014), each poet writes about concerns with life and death matters including, mourning, memory, desire, emptiness and absence, loss, exile, and aging, and the relationship between language poetry and these themes. Their search for the *poetization* of emotion in the face of bereavement leads to a new paradigm within the Neobaroque aesthetic by taking poetry to new levels in terms of linguistic conventions that until now have lacked an emotional component. These features define this new paradigm as a *Neobaroque aesthetic of mourning*.

Ludwig Wittgenstein's interrogation of language as cultural and social practice, "the limits of my language mean the limits of my world" (Tractatus 5.6), illustrates the case made in this study that the current trajectory of the Neobaroque's unsettled poetics (towards an as yet to be determined designation) is more inclusive of sentiment. Omar Calabrese writes that Neobaroque consists of "a search for, and valorization of, forms that display a loss of entirety, totality, and system in favor of instability, polydimensionality, and change" (xii). Kozer, Kamenzain, and Espina find themselves a part of a change that includes a rapidly expanding circle of lyricists who are connecting with other cultures outside their own. As well, they are connecting with those who are reaching out to know more about them, their culture, their ideas, and their work.

Kozer, Kamenzain, and Espina have been selected for this study because of their wide range of similarities as well as their differences which thus offer a unique balance

in areas that include: origin and heritage, generation and gender, and religion, philosophical perspectives, and their relationship to the subject of sentimentality. The aim of the following discussion is to shed light on how these three poets are representative of a growing number of Latin American and American writers including Isabel Allende, Toni Morrison, Charles Bernstein, Susan Howe, Joyce Carol Oates, Phillip Roth, Elie Wiesel, Roger Rosenblatt, and Joan Didion, who are all searching for new ways to embody the complex and painful feelings of grief and mourning through the multifaceted and creative use of language.<sup>56</sup>

José Kozer (b. Havana, 1940)<sup>57</sup> is the son of parents who migrated to Cuba from Poland and Czechoslovakia in the 1920s. The poet also immigrated to the United States in the 1960s, where, after a career teaching literature and language at Queen's College in New York, he retired. He is the preeminent Cuban poet of his generation and well known for influencing younger generations of poets in Latin America. Kozer's poems combine life experiences taken from his Cuban nationality, his American experience,

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<sup>56</sup> Additional examples of works on mourning by critics, novelists and poets reviewed in this study include: Critics Roland Barthes' *Mourning Diary* (2009); Jacques Derrida's *Circumfession*; Simone de Beauvoir's *A Very Easy Death* (1966). Novelists include C.S. Lewis' *A Grief Observed* (1961); Isabel Allende's *Paula* (1996); Toni Morrison's *Home* (2012), (written during the time of the death of her son); Phillip Roth's *Patrimony* (1991); Elie Wiesel's memoir *Open Heart* (2012); Roger Rosenblatt's *Kayak Morning* (2012); and Joan Didion's *The Year of Magical Thinking* (2005), followed by *Blue Nights* (2011). Poets include Charles Bernstein's *All the Whiskey in Heaven* (2010); Susan Howe's *That This* (2010). Anthologies on loss and mourning include: Editor Kevin Young's *The Art of Losing: Poems of Grief and Healing* (2010); and the Spanish anthology *Cantos a la madre en la poesía latinoamericana* (1999).

<sup>57</sup> Kozer has written one poem a day for the past four decades, amassing a body of work comprising fifty books published in Cuba, Spain, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Argentina, Chile, and the United States; portions of his work have been translated into English, Portuguese, Greek, Italian, French, German, and Hebrew. Reflecting the diverse influences of his biography, Kozer's poetry has complexly explored the limits of meaning, the experience of exile, and the uncanny territory of the autobiographical.

and his interest in Asian culture and literature in order to create works he considers to be transnational and multicultural.

The poet's religious practices include Judaism, as well as the influence of Zen Buddhism. Kozer has written previously about his parents, David and Ana Katz Kozer (*Carece de causa*) (1988), and the familial relationship they shared. He is the first living Cuban of the diaspora to have a book published on the island of Cuba and is considered to be one of the defining poets of the Neobaroque movement. Kozer is the recipient of the 2013 Pablo Neruda Ibero-American Poetry Prize. His poetry, in all its complexity, explores the limits of meaning, the experience of exile, and the unpredictable field of the autobiographical.

Tamara Kamenszain (b. Buenos Aires, 1947) is the lone female in the group. After a year in New York following the appearance of her collection *Los No* (1977), Kamenszain began teaching at the University of Buenos Aires and the University of Mexico. She left Argentina and lived in Mexico until 1984. Her poetry is most often associated with other Argentine poets Néstor Perlongher, Arturo Carrera, and Héctor Piccoli. Kamenszain has been awarded a number of prizes such as the John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship and the Pablo Neruda Presidential Medal, among others. She also received the poetry prize of the National Arts Fund of Argentina for *From this Side of the Mediterranean* (1973), her first book of poems, published in Buenos Aires in 1973. In addition to teaching, Kamenszain has also worked for the National Endowment for the Arts in Mexico and at the Ministry of Culture in Argentina. Her poetry embodies

the domestic world, particularly as found in other works including *La casa grande* (1986) and *Vida de living* (1991) and her book of essays titled *Texto silencioso* (1983).

In 1980, Eduardo Espina (b. Montevideo, 1954) was the first Uruguayan writer invited to participate in the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa. In June 2011, he was awarded the Guggenheim Fellowship for Poetry. In a book review for *El cutis patrio* in April 2007, fellow poet José Kozer described the imaginative Espina as: “quizás el poeta vivo más imaginativo en lengua castellana”.<sup>58</sup> The driving force in Espina’s poems has been directed by his creative linguistic representation and guided by what he refers to as “barrococó”,<sup>59</sup> to describe the convergence of two aesthetic strategies: “rococo” and “Baroque,” which are found within his poetics. Both of these ideas will be discussed in depth later in this study.

Between Kozer (1940) and Espina (1954), there is a separation in age of approximately fifteen years. Within this expanse, there exists a level of poetic production and teaching experience that spans not only beyond time, but also geographical boundaries to include the United States, Mexico, the Caribbean, South America, and the world at large. Kamenzain was selected as part of this group for the quality of her literary output that includes the recent *La novela de la poesía* (2012), which was awarded best creative work to be published in Argentina in 2012.<sup>60</sup> And in

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<sup>58</sup> From José Kozer’s article “*El cutis patrio*, de Eduardo Espina” in “*Letras Libres*” (April 2007).

<sup>59</sup> For a full description of Espina’s use of the “barrococó” aesthetic see *Medusario. Muestra de poesía latinoamericana* (426).

<sup>60</sup> *La novela de la poesía* combines all of Kamenzain’s books, a total of nine titles, including *Los no* (1977), *La casa grande* (1986), *Vida de living* (1991), *Tango Bar* (1998), *El ghetto* (2003), *Solos y solas*



2015, *La novela de la poesía* was awarded Cuba's prestigious José Lezama Lima Award for poetry with *La novela de la poesía*. Kamenszain offers a significant counterbalance to the poetry of Kozer and Espina, by providing a female perspective on mourning. Kozer and Kamenszain are Jewish by birth, while Espina adheres to Catholicism, and attended Catholic school before leaving Uruguay. An important consideration in the overall selection of subjects is the fact that, when articulating the linguistic construction of loss and consolation, each in their own way resists and transgresses generic conventions. That is, linguistic indeterminacy is a place of resistance to the traditional conventions of genre.

An additional element taken into account in the argument that these poetic works create a caesura from a previous style of writing is the claim that the content and style represented are characteristic of works written from the perspective and experience found with the passing of time. These select three, Kozer (1940), Kamenszain (1947), and Espina (1954), are considered to be in a "mature" stage of their careers. Thus, their works fall more within the range of "poésie de la entre-deux" or even "late style," as coined by the late Edward W. Said in *On Late Style: Music and Literature against the Grain* (2006), who writes on the interest in aesthetic "lateness" and the issue of time and mortality, which he claims does affect creativity:

For it bears saying explicitly that both in art and in our general ideas about the passage of human life, there is assumed to be a general abiding *timeliness*, by which I mean that what is

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(2005), *El eco de mi madre* (2010), and *La novela de la poesía* (2012). In addition to the above titles, *La novela de la poesía* contains a group of previously unpublished poems that the author decided to incorporate into this edition.

appropriate to early life is not appropriate for later stages, and vice versa. (5)

At this time in their careers, for Kozer, Kamenszain, and Espina, ideas of old age, death, and mortality have become a concern. Generalizations to be explored include serenity and withdrawal, along with a consolidation of themes and techniques, as well as opposing views that include rage and resistance, innovation and experimentation. Linda and Michael Hutcheon, in the article “Late Style(s): the Ageism of the Singular”<sup>61</sup> present a periodization of the biographical stages of an artist’s life, which can prove useful as a means of orientation to the topic at hand. Linda Hutcheon reminds the reader that individual life circumstances (health, lifestyle, background, economics, public reception) as well as historical and social conditions (and role changes) are “bound to impinge” upon any attempt to try to universalize the writings (2). With this said, the topic of life stages is considered as it explores the possibilities of time-of-life influences on a particular artist’s works.

In addition to the subject of lateness, the nature of exile as it relates to the process of mourning has impacted these poets, as each, for political reasons (either forced or self-imposed), has lived away from their birth country. This is one of the principle

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<sup>61</sup> Hutcheon and Hutcheon designate the overarching term of “early style” (not of an individual artist, but *all* artists) as having both negative connotations (derivativeness, imitation, underdeveloped technique) and positive ones (of freshness, precocious inventiveness, impetuosity, and energy). Climaxing into middle works, the authors refrain from a description of “middle works,” claiming few theorists are “rash enough to generalize about “mature works.” With late style, the authors point out that one does not *grow* out of but rather dies into. For the individual artist, this time can become a final evaluative as well as a descriptive label and will often condition or even determine their actual posthumous reputation.  
[http://arcade.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/article\\_pdfs/OCCASION\\_v04\\_Hutcheons\\_053112\\_0.pdf](http://arcade.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/article_pdfs/OCCASION_v04_Hutcheons_053112_0.pdf)

commonalities that unite this creative grouping, along with their similar vocations as poets and writers. We again return to Edward Said, who on exile writes:<sup>62</sup>

Seeing the entire world as a foreign land makes possible originality of vision ... While most are aware of the world as one culture, one setting, exiles are aware of, at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that—to borrow a phrase from music—is *contrapuntal*. (366)

While a *contrapuntal* viewpoint is a positive aspect to exile, there is also a negative aspect to this condition as well. The experience of exile itself has been characterized as one of multiple bereavements, which Barbara Hart describes in terms of, “loss of country, status, activity, cultural reference points, social networks, and, above all, of family” (227).<sup>63</sup> Hart also points out that the, “external and internal reality in the experience of exile and the interplay between the two, and the impact of bereavement and the mourning process are similar in creating a negative affect as well” (227).<sup>64</sup> In both cases, the connection between the feeling of impotence and the irreversible losses that accompany the symptoms of long-term illness, old age, and death are part of what it is also like to go on without the presence of loved ones, whether from exile or bereavement.

For each poet, mourning and exile have resulted in the loss of memories of home and homeland, creating traces of absence and instability in their personal lives. Exile has also resulted in a transformation of their native language, adding to their experiences as

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<sup>62</sup> “Reflections on Exile” (357–366).

<sup>63</sup> Barbara Hart. “Exile and Bereavement” (227–241).

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

each has been forced to understand and be understood within a new environment surrounded by a foreign language. Edward Said describes this status as “a discontinuous state of being.” In this comparison, the intellectual maintains: “Like death, but without death’s ultimate mercy, exile has torn millions of people from the sustenance of tradition, family and geography” (358).<sup>65</sup> The parallel that exists between political exiles as a result of the rupture with their social, cultural, and geographical environment and the dynamics of grief caused by personal bereavement will play an eminent role in the analysis to be developed.

It is within this cultural and historical arena that these three Latin American poets echo the voice of a generation that speaks of the changing times and a changing poetics with a metaphorical hand on the pulse of the epoch in which they live. In so doing, we find that mourning is not restricted to a single era, and that our present standpoint is derived from an analogous preoccupation of those who have gone before in laying the theoretical foundation of an ongoing poetics of mourning. Theories on language proposed by Ludwig Wittgenstein and Marjorie Perloff have been useful to contemporary poets as these theories help to explain the ways in which these poets think and use language to create their own particular poetics.

### **Theoretical Approximations on Language and Mourning**

Kozer, Kamenzain, and Espina’s expression of grief is done through the creative use of language, and, as described in Chapter One, through techniques most often

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid, Said.

associated with the poetics of the Neobaroque. Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) examines the relation between meaning and the practical uses of language and between meaning and the rules of language and is useful as a means of understanding the ways in which these poets achieve such a high level of linguistic expression in their works.

Wittgenstein explains that vague or unclear uses of language may be the source of philosophical problems, and he describes how philosophy may resolve these problems by providing a clear view of the uses of language. Wittgenstein's work is often referred to as elusive in nature. Nicolas Xanthos, in his article "Wittgenstein's Language Games," claims this elusiveness is due to the various definitions associated with the term "language games."<sup>66</sup> Xanthos explains that each of these semiotic practices demonstrates the regularities in which language plays a critical role. Language game analysis can thus be used as a specific way to examine these semiotic practices that are not randomly selected words, but are rule-guided actions, made legitimate and relevant by a set of rules determining their use.

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<sup>66</sup> Nicolas Xanthos in "Wittgenstein's Language Games"

(<http://www.signosemio.com/wittgenstein/language-games.asp>) offers the following as reasons for the elusive nature of this definition: Sometimes it refers to children's language-learning games...sometimes to semiotic practices... the socially shared ways of using signs, of signifying and of representing. Secondly, the notion is never explicitly defined. Wittgenstein prefers to proceed by example, using fragments of short, dense analyses to convey what the language games are, including giving orders and obeying them; describing the appearance of an object or giving its measurements; constructing an object from a description (a drawing); reporting an event; speculating about an event; formulating and testing a hypothesis; presenting the results of an experiment in tables and diagrams; making up a story and rereading it; play-acting; singing catches; guessing riddles; making a joke and telling it; solving a problem in practical arithmetic; translating from one language to another; asking, thinking, cursing, greeting, praying. (11-12).

As Xanthos clarifies, not all rules for language games are explicit (as in the case of reporting an event, or making a joke, where the reader is required to infer the rules). In most cases we are in contact with actions in word-games that are yet to be revealed, which Wittgenstein refers to as “moves” in the language games. It is the move (or set of moves) that is traceable back to the language game and its grammar. The link between moves and the grammar is a close one; the moves only acquire meaning by existing within the area of discourse defined and delimited by the grammar (3).

Wittgenstein’s language games work much in the same way that we would approach an unknown game whose rules we do not know. We begin to understand that the rules are not random and that there is value in the pieces—both ideas that lead us to an understanding of the purpose of the game (4). Xanthos’ ideas help to put into place Wittgenstein’s ideas on language games, which Marjorie Perloff has used extensively in her interpretation of US poets.

Marjorie Perloff, in *Wittgenstein’s Ladder: Poetic Language and the Strangeness of the Ordinary* (1996) (*WL*), claims that it is “the curious collision of the ‘mystical’ with the close and commonsensical study of actual language practices that make Wittgenstein such a natural ally for the poets and artists of our time” (182). Taking Wittgenstein’s famous quote to task, “philosophy ought really to be written only as a form of poetry” (*Z* #160; *CV* 24), Perloff argues that Wittgenstein has provided writers with a radical new aesthetic for recognizing the “inescapable strangeness” of ordinary language (182).

Also in *WL*, the scholar proposes four different but interrelated perspectives taken from the concept of “language games” that are appropriate to the research here, including: (1) the emphasis on the strangeness, or the enigmatic nature of everyday language, (2) the struggle found in “bumping one’s head up against the walls” of one’s language limits in the need to understand one’s world, (3) the recognition of the self as a social and cultural construction, and (4) the articulation of an ethics outside the norms of causality or explanation. Perloff explores contemporary American poets including Robert Creeley, Gertrude Stein, Ron Silliman, Rosmarie Waldrop, and Lyn Hejinian. Perloff’s application of Wittgenstein’s ideas serves as a model for this study, as a means to ascertain how seemingly opaque language forms can make sense when we rediscover how to read them.

In addition to Marjorie Perloff, the approach of other contemporary critics to the elements of language including that of Charles Bernstein, George Steiner, and Ron Silliman, as well as from Latin Americans Roberto Echavarren’s, José Kozer’s, and Jacobo Sefamí’s landmark work on the Neobaroque, *Medusario. Muestra de poesía latinoamericana* (1996). Enrique Mallen’s *Antología crítica de la poesía del lenguaje* (2009) and *Poesía del lenguaje de T.S. Eliot a Eduardo Espina* (2008), are discussed in depth throughout this study, as they help explain the various properties of language fundamental to the assertions made in this dissertation.

Philosophical and existential questions regarding who mourns and how and the ways in which poets choose to represent this phenomena has powerful implications for our times. The framework for anti-sentimentality presented shortly results from the

combination of fields of studies in addition to language that include psychoanalysis, psycho-aesthetics, philosophy and genre studies.<sup>67</sup> Studies from and about Sigmund Freud, Tammy Clewell's reinterpretation of Freud's ideas on mourning and melancholia, and Julia Kristeva's authority in the area of psycho-aesthetics are useful applications for their approaches to mourning.

### **Psychoanalysis and Mourning**

Within Sigmund Freud's large body of work, his little-known essay "On Transience"<sup>68</sup> and his famous study on "Mourning and Melancholia"<sup>69</sup> are works explored in this dissertation. "In Transience" is selected for its poetic and creative message on beauty, love, and loss, and "Mourning and Melancholia" for its foundational significance related to mourning.

As a creative writer, Sigmund Freud composed poetry, stories, histories and translations. In *Freud's Requiem: Mourning, Memory, and the Invisible History of a Summer Walk* (2005), Matthew von Unwerth takes as his starting point "On Transience,"

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<sup>67</sup> The larger body of work being done on this topic includes ideas on the work of mourning from literary critic Jacques Derrida, from psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia," and Julia Kristeva's *Black Sun* (1989) and leads to the crossover from purely psychoanalytical theory into the psycho-aesthetic realm of understanding mourning and art. Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* (1964) provides valuable philosophical insight into the dissemination of the poetic impulse on the part of the poet and thus its reception on the part of the audience. In addition, understanding the various properties of language is fundamental to the assertions made in this work; thus the work of philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein's work is referred to, as it will greatly enhance this goal. Of course, it also includes Marjorie Perloff's efforts to put Wittgenstein's ideas into practice.

<sup>69</sup> Taken from *Freud's Requiem* (215–219).

<sup>69</sup> Freud's essay on "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917e [1915]) found in *On Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia."* Edited by Leticia Glocer Fiorini, et al., 2007.



written in the summer of 1915. The account describes a fictional moment in which Freud began to formalize his thoughts on mortality, nature, art, and life's meaning. Along with Freud are two conversation partners (unnamed real people believed to be the young poet Rainer Maria Rilke and his friend, Lou Andreas-Salome). In Chapter Two, Unwerth returns to the moment:

In 1915, the year of Rilke's visit to Berggasse 19 and the writing of "On Transience," Freud was completing work on his theory of mourning, which he would first set before the public in this essay. The concept of the work of mourning (*Trauerarbeit*) was a major advance in psychoanalytical theory, coming against a backdrop of gathering shadows cast by the war, and of other, more immediate losses and conflicts in Freud's world. (33)

Freud surmises that Rilke engages in a tortured form of protection against loss that diminishes the pleasures of life, as the poet's anticipatory grief seems to block his ability to do so. As all things must pass, rather than subtract from their beauty, this special quality should simply add to their value. While Freud frowns upon the poet's melancholy attitude, it is here that he uncovers its logic. Seeing the two friends as having "a revolt in their minds against mourning" due to the recognition of life's transience, they recognize the essential mortality of life, and that of their own, leaving them with the "inability to appreciate beauty except as something already lost" (3). Von Unwerth writes:

The poet was troubled by ghosts. Everywhere he turned, he saw beauty, but in this radiance the poet foresaw the coming of sorrow. All things were transient, fated to extinction; mocked by its own frailty, beauty was eclipsed by its negation, and had no value and no meaning. (1-2).

Taking on an almost sentimental tonality to the poet's melancholy and the fact that all things eventually perish, rather than diminish their beauty, Freud suggests that it is beauty's "scarcity value in time" that gives what is precious its worth. If we cannot celebrate our passage toward extinction, then we must at least face the fact that this is the only formation in which human life takes place (2). Puzzled by mourning, which he considered to be love's rebellion against loss, Freud saw that with the loss of a loved one our love is drawn back into us through a most painful process. And so, in losing love we suffer, and in that suffering, we again experience the pain of separation.

According to Unwerth, it is the progression of this experience from which Freud develops his theory. This essay makes the argument that it is separation and passing that make the world valuable; that once something or someone has died, the healthy thing to do is to mourn it and then make space within ourselves for other experiences. The opposite of this repudiation is melancholia, or depression. According to Freud, one of the characteristics of such attachments is the refusal of words, of speaking, of the symbolic world to mourn it with, without which there is stagnation and no renewal of our enthusiasm for life. The mourner knows what he has lost, the melancholic does not—for which the price is suffering. Our instinct to remember and commemorate the life of those who have filled it and to recognize aesthetic value in its own way really is to resist time and defy mortality.

The enduring use of Sigmund Freud's mourning theory in its refined form is useful for evaluating the poetic representations of loss and bereavement found in the works of Kozer, Kamenzain, and Espina. In "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud

explores the individual's reaction to a loss or a disappointment connected with a loved one and writes that "mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, and ideal, and so on" (244).

Melancholia, on the other hand, is identified by Freud as a pathological illness, which results from the inability to recover successfully from a loss. Whether the poets studied here are writing from a place of mourning or melancholia or perhaps from a combination of the two is important in determining whether their poems are a source of consolation to the poet or his audience. Through this continuous engagement with the lost objects, places or ideas, poets are in a position to use these emotional states of being as a method of transforming death into a creative process.

Since Freud's thesis on mourning and melancholia, others (including Freud) have revised many of the psychiatrist's original considerations, which allows for a more contemporary rereading of this essay. Important to acknowledge here is the question of whether the subject of death is more common as a topic within the arts today than in the psychiatrist's time and to what degree artistic representation of death has changed as a result of the post-modern era in which we now find ourselves. These questions and others will be gone into throughout this study to attempt to further understand the processes of mourning and its distinction from melancholia. This plays a primary role in the interpretation of the ways in which we go through the vital stages of separation and loss and how Kozer, Kamenszain, and Espina express these stages.

Another psychological approach to mourning is that of Tammy Clewell, who in “Mourning Beyond Melancholia”<sup>70</sup> points out that in “Mourning and Melancholia” Freud has been criticized for his model of subjectivity that is based on a bounded form of individuation that posits the idea that mourning comes to an end when the subject severs its emotional attachment to the lost one by reinvesting the libido in a new object. However, Clewell points out that in *The Ego and the Id* (1923), and as a result of the Great War, Freud redefines the identification process as an integral component of mourning. Therefore, in his later work, he registers the endlessness of normal grieving while including within mourning the violent characteristics of melancholia, and in the end begins to suggest more affirmative and ethical aspects of mourning.

Kristeva’s *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (1989) represents a crossover in the study from purely psychoanalytical theory into the psycho-aesthetic realm of understanding mourning and art. The author sees mourning as “the great riddle” and questions why it is that the detachment of the libido from its objects is so painful to humans, one the psychologist describes as “a mystery to us and we have hitherto been unable to frame any hypothesis to account for it” (98).

In this study, Kristeva addresses several topics including the discussion on the importance of aesthetic and particularly literary creation. Literary representation as a therapeutic device, she writes, “has been used in all societies throughout the ages, possessing a real and imaginary effectiveness closer to catharsis than to elaboration”

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<sup>70</sup> For a more in depth analysis of Clewell’s approach see her article “Mourning Beyond Melancholia: Freud’s Psychoanalysis of Loss” (2004) 43–67.

(24). Additionally, Kristeva's emphasis on the importance of the lost other, and in particular the maternal other, leads to clarification on the topic of violence done through melancholic depression. As she points out, the loss of the mother is a biological and psychic necessity and the first step in becoming autonomous. While highly criticized, her claim that matricide is a vital necessity, "the sine-qua-non condition of our individuation, provided that it takes place under optimal circumstances and can be eroticized" (27), is clarified by seeing this process as a healthy separation from the mother.

The scholar and psychiatrist explains that this process can successfully be achieved whether the lost object is recovered as erotic object (male heterosexuality or female homosexuality), or is transposed by some other symbolic effort, which eroticizes the *other* (the other sex, in the case of the heterosexual woman), or by transforming cultural constructs into a "sublime" erotic objects through social bonds, intellectual and aesthetic productions, etc. (28). The sublime as a structure within the framework of anti-sentimentality works through the belief that grief can be overcome by translating the lost other into a work of art; that success in expanding the limits of representation through the use of language unfolds the poet's inner resources while smoothing away the radical otherness of what it translates.

Another important point Kristeva makes is that naming the suffering, exalting it, and dissecting it into its smallest components is a way to curb mourning, and she provides several devices as ways for the artist to maintain a sublimatory hold over the lost "Thing," including:

First, by means of prosody, the language beyond language that inserts into the sign the rhythm and alliterations of semiotic processes. Also by means of the polyvalence of sign and symbol, which unsettles naming and, by building up a plurality of connotations around the sign, affords the subject a chance to imagine the nonmeaning, or true meaning of the Thing. Finally by means of the psychic organization of forgiveness, identification of the speaker with a welcoming, kindly ideal, capable of removing the guilt of revenge, or humiliation from narcissistic wound, which underlies depressed people's despair. (97)

Kristeva's ideas as outlined will be most useful in this study as ways to determine how Kozer, Kamenszain, and Espina use language, and particularly poetry, as a way to process the circumstances of mourning. In addition to using ideas from psychology, literary explorations on mourning, including works by Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida, are helpful to this study as the literary becomes the lived in which both critics create a lifetime of work based on their personal obsession with mourning.

The death of Roland Barthes' mother was a devastation from which the literary critic and essayist never fully recovered. The day after her death, Barthes began writing *Mourning Diary* (2009): the first entry dated October 26, 1977, inscribed as "First wedding night. But first mourning night?" (3). *Mourning Diary* is made up of diary entries ranging from thoughts on grief, depression, death, writing, and the expression of mourning. Barthes makes references to other writers, including Dante Alighieri (*Vita Nova*, 1295), Soren Kierkegaard (*Fear and Trembling*, 1843), and Marcel Proust (*À la Recherche du Temps Perdu*, 1956), all of whom used writing as a means of dealing with a close personal death. Barthes' sensibilities are expressed in his diary as he leads the

making of a literature of death toward a meta-language on mourning and the theme of memorializing as a part of the recovery process of death.

### **Literary Theory and Mourning**

Barthes followed *Mourning Diary* with *Camera Lucida* (1980), his last work, while still mourning his mother. Making references to a now-famous photograph of his mother known as the Winter Garden Photograph, Barthes writes that for him, this photograph was like “*the impossible science of the unique being*” (70–71). The frozen memories that exist in Barthes’ photographs of his mother show how the visual arts, and in his case photography, represent a good analogy for memory, a theme embarked upon by Kozer, Kamenszain, and Espina. Barthes demonstrates in *Camera Lucida* what Evelyn Ender in *Architexts of Memory: Literature, Science, and Autobiography* (2005) surmises that, “photographs can present the qualities of ‘temporal hallucinations’ and thus help us believe in the existence of something ‘that has been’” (115).

Besides social meaning and a sense of “having been,” photos have the capacity to prick one’s emotions, a *punctum* (termed by Barthes) as in a wound or a mark made by a sharp instrument, and is used by Barthes to describe a singular accident that joins the viewer and the image, revealing that the punctum is not that which is visible, but that which remains concealed. In this way, that which then makes an image so affecting is not the appreciation of the identifiable, but the recognition of differentiation. Susan Sontag writes that photography is:

an “elegiac art, a twilight art”... It is a *memento mori*, an inventory of mortality that inevitably sentimentalizes the past and the present. “The knowledge gained through still photography will always be some kind of sentimentalism, whether cynical or humanist. (15)<sup>71</sup>

Sontag’s chapter “Melancholy Objects” highlights the subject of death and photographs as an open “invitation to sentimentality” (71). Each of these poets refer to family photos around the home of their parents and speak of the value and place they assume before and after their deaths. Seen by Sontag, “every family constructs a portrait-chronicle of itself—a portable kit of images that bears witness to its connectedness” (8), a “rite of family life” (8). True to this are the sentiments Kozer, Kamenzain, and Espina express in the poems selected for this study.

Along with Susan Sontag and Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida’s work on mourning looks at a variety of issues including ideas on the loss and preservation of memory, and the articulation of grief. Editors Pascale Anne Brault’s and Michael Naas’ *The Work of Mourning* (2001) is a collection of fourteen essays by French philosopher and literary critic Jacques Derrida that speak to the work of mourning. Found within this tome are essays written by the critic on the deaths of friends and colleagues as he bears witness to their lives and work.

In his essay “The Deaths of Roland Barthes,” Derrida pays homage to his friend: “these thoughts are *for him*...yet they no longer reach him, and this must be the starting point of my reflection, they can no longer reach him...” (35). Perplexed at the inability to communicate with Barthes, Derrida questions the source of his friend’s particular

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<sup>71</sup> Susan Sontag. *On Photography* (1977).



aura, referred to as the “singularity of clarity” that “*emanated* from a certain point that yet was not a point, remaining invisible in its own way” (35). Derrida confesses he “cannot locate” the source of his friend’s uniqueness, highlighting the difficulty found in processing the act of mourning. In his essay, Derrida comments that Barthes’ description of his mother’s photo as the source of *the impossible science of the unique being* (46) highlights the clarity of Barthes’ ability to articulately convey his sentiments of grief upon the death of his mother in both *Mourning Diary* and *Camera Lucida*.

Written in 1981, this essay goes on to express Derrida’s concern with the relationship between the singularity of death and its inevitable repetition and with what it means to “reckon” with death, with the dead, or with all those who we were once close to who are no longer “with us” only as insofar as they are “in us” (54). The centrality of the importance of memory to life’s experience is clear in Derrida’s entire project, explaining that “if there were an experience of loss at the heart of all this, the only loss for which I could never be consoled and that brings together all the others, I would call it loss of memory” (151).<sup>72</sup> The first desire, he writes, “is not to produce a philosophical work or that of a work of art: it is to preserve memory, therefore I struggle against loss, this loss of memory” (151).

In “Circumfession” (1991),<sup>73</sup> on the death of his own mother (20), Derrida cites St. Augustine’s words: “Ego silebam et fletum frenabam” (“I remained silent and restrained my tears”) (20). While not so silent on the subject of his distaste of fame and

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<sup>72</sup> “Acts of Memory and Mourning: Derrida and the Fictions of Anteriority”: (150–160) in *From Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates* (2010). Edited by Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz.

<sup>73</sup> In Geoffrey Bennington’s *Jacques Derrida* (1991).

fortune at the expense of the loved one's death, Derrida writes of his guilt toward his mother's memory for "publishing her end," and "exhibiting her last breaths and, still worse, for purposes that some might judge to be literary" (25–26). The implications of the challenges within the need to articulately convey one's sentiments regarding grief, along with the emotional vacuum as a result of memory loss, are fundamental to the interpretation of the poetic works under analysis.

Theories that touch on the subject of death, and the scope and significance of the multilayered perspectives assembled by Kozer, Kamenzain, and Espina, in light of new articulations on the use and range of genre in mourning poetry, are explored next through a summary of current studies on literary genres that lead to the posited thesis. This thesis is that Kozer, Kamenzain, and Espina represent poets moving away from the Neobaroque aesthetic of poetic representation as they break new ground in the re-interpretation of traditional genres of mourning.

### **The Resistance of Genre and Subjectivity in Mourning Poetry**

Franco Moretti in *Graphs, Maps, Trees, Abstract Models for Literary History* (2005) offers a helpful description of genre that works as a starting point for understanding this term as utilized. Moretti defines genre as "temporary structures," as "morphological arrangements that last in time, but only for some time, before a new form arises to replace an old form that has outlived its artistic fullness" (14). From this definition we gather that a particular genre works for a period of time and then becomes another form through adaptation to a range of changes in current conditions.

Moretti explains that the reason for this change is the fact that for every genre there comes a moment when its inner form no longer represents the most significant aspects of contemporary reality, and that it is at this point that either the genre loses its form under the impact of reality and disintegrates or then betrays reality in the name of form. At this time, it becomes no longer possible for a single explanatory framework to account for the many levels of literary production and their multiple links with the larger social system.

Throughout literature, mourning poetry has traditionally been realized through the genre of the elegy. As a major principle of Neobaroque poetics, as mentioned earlier, Kozer, Kamenzain, and Espina often challenge the labeling of their work, blurring the distinction between poetic genres and making the presentation of a cohesive theory at the same time impossible, as well as undesirable. With that assertion in mind, the elegy as a lament is considered in this study, but also scrutinized, motivated by these poets' determination that continues, expands, and even turns on its head all expectations of this tradition.

Peter Sacks, like other scholars including R. Clifton Spargo and Jahan Ramazani, develops his understanding of what mourning or "the work of mourning" is from Freud's essay "Mourning and Melancholia"<sup>74</sup> and argues in *The English Elegy* (1985) that the elegy from Spencer to Yeats reflects a Freudian perspective in which consoling substitution is the primary focus. Sacks draws an analogy between the purpose of both

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

mourning and the elegy as he writes: “One of the major tasks of the work of mourning and of the elegy is to repair the mourner’s damaged narcissism” (10).

Like the mourner in Freud’s early theory, the traditional elegist overcomes grief by finding solace from a substitute for the lost object. Sacks offers elegy as a psychoanalytical framework for loss and recovery and provides such interpretations of images of consolation that include submission to substitutions, weaving, veiling and splitting techniques, repetitions and refrains, repetitive questions, staging devices, the creation of fictive addressees, the urge for voice, light and dark imagery, and the journey metaphor.

Although Sacks’ book deals with English poetry through the interpretive model of elegy outlined above, we are able to locate many of the prerequisites of the genre in the poems of each of the three poets, reflecting a continuing while expanding and diverging tradition. Chronologically, following the work of Peter Sacks is that of Jahan Ramazani, whose book *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy From Hardy to Heaney* (1994) examines the modern elegy as mourning turns melancholic, unresolved and anti-consolatory. Ramazani surveys the phenomenon of the refusal to mourn as a distinctive feature of modern literature. As he explains, mourning poetry assumes extraordinary diversity and range in the modern period by incorporating more anger and skepticism, more conflict and anxiety than ever before, as we see in the following excerpt:

As warfare was industrialized and mass death augmented, as mourning rites were weakened and the “funeral director” professionalized, as the dying were shut away in hospitals and death itself made a taboo subject, poetry increasingly became an important cultural space for mourning the dead. Sometimes

regarded as opposite, modern poetry and the elegy should be seen instead as inextricable. Despite the modern misconception that twentieth century poets forsake mourning and genre, many of them perpetuate and intensify the ancient literary dialogue with the dead.<sup>75</sup>

From Freud's "normal mourning," Ramazani adapts the term "melancholic mourning" to distinguish unresolved grief that can be violent and ambivalent. Poets writing elegy in this manner, unlike their forerunners or the "normal mourner" of psychoanalysis, following Ramazani, attack the dead and themselves, their own work, and tradition. Ramazani's study of melancholic mourners is particularly insightful into the works of several modernist poets including Wilfred Owen, Wallace Stevens, Langston Hughes and Sylvia Plath. Allen Ginsberg's *Kaddish*, Ramazani writes, is an elegy for the poet's mother in which mourning is a return to and separation from his parental origins (247):

Strange now to think of you, gone without the corsets & eyes,  
while I walk on the sunny pavement of Greenwich Village.  
downtown Manhattan, clear winter noon, and I've been up all  
night, talking, talking, reading the Kaddish aloud, lis-  
graph  
the rhythm the rhythm—and your memory in my head three  
years after—And read Adonais' last triumphant stanzas  
aloud—wept, realizing how we suffer—<sup>76</sup>

Ramazani writes that Ginsberg returns to his parental origins to re-originate himself poetically, but he returns to a literalized, maternal source, as Ginsberg, more

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Cited from Allen Ginsberg, "*Kaddish and Other Poems, 1958–1960*" in Ramazani.

than his contemporaries or precursors, “reveals the living body of the deceased, the living body from which he came, in opposition to traditional elegists who shroud the dead in allegory and dressed them up in abstraction, their poems reasserting the inevitable mediation separating them from the dead” (250). As with Ginsberg, Kozer, Kamenzain, and Espina search for some trace of the mother’s voice, which, except for faint traces, has disappeared into the abstract. Though the poet wishes to reencounter with his mother and the source of his origin, Ginsberg is often repulsed by what he sees, and identifies death not with an abstract mother, but with his own mother (250).

Within the last decade, Ramazani’s work has been called into question by scholars including Patricia Rae, whose collection of essays<sup>77</sup> challenges whether the completed “work of mourning” or the successful conclusion of freeing oneself emotionally from the departed is indeed “*possible*, and beyond that, whether it is ethically and politically *desirable*” (16). While containing elements of the elegy, poems by Kozer, Kamenzain, and Espina diverge from the elegiac genre as they focus not on death as the subject, but on the effects death has upon the narrator. The questioning of existence is one in which the poet is not clear as to what existence is: “I don’t know if I am totally alive. I know that I am not dead, but at the same time, I am writing from inside death.”<sup>78</sup> In addition to the elegiac form, many of the poems found in works by Kozer, Kamenzain, and Espina are formed by what can be considered epistolary or a variation of the prose-poem form of poetry.

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<sup>77</sup> *Modernism and Mourning* (2007).

<sup>78</sup> See Appendix C: Quote taken from a 2013 interview between Diane Rolnick and Eduardo Espina.

The epistle has a long history with a relatively flexible form, and on many occasions the elegy has been blended with some of the features of the epistle. In addition, the vague one-sidedness of the epistle, the way in which it directs itself towards another person, offers no guarantee that the speaker will receive a reply, creating the uncertainty of a prayer—questioning not only whether he can be answered, but whether or not he is even heard. John Redmond in *How to Write a Poem* (2006) explains that in modern times W.H. Auden’s “Letter to Lord Byron” represents an example of a flexible and friendly form of address as the verse-letters poet addresses the subject of the poem in a manner that shows no affectation:

Excuse, my lord, the liberty I take  
In thus addressing you. I know that you  
Will pay the price of authorship and make  
The allowances an author has to do.  
A poet’s fan-mail will be nothing new.

Auden was writing in 1936 to the ghost of the long-dead poet Byron to inform him of recent developments in poetry and politics. The style of Auden is more distant from the sentimental, more Romantic style of Byron, drawing attention to the moment of the composition and becoming a motif for humorous and dramatic effects. Using humor becomes a tool when the poet cannot find another way to draw together highly diverse subject matter, and in so doing, creates tension between the informality and its serious occasion—in this case Auden’s admiration for Byron as a means of obfuscating oblivion.

While in a lyrical poem, the general audience is theoretically present, listening in on the psychological drama of the poet the verse-letter is not taken in the same informal

fashion. Again, the use of humor tends to infuse the epistle with its inclusion of material that would seem out of place or irrelevant in a lyric poem as well as ambiguity as to the appropriateness of treating the subject and/or the topic in a humorous fashion, thus reflecting various states of mind. The condition of life and death occupies the same space and important in the verse-letter is the desire for connection. The consensus on poetry and prose and the mixing of these modes is still out. Michael Davidson<sup>79</sup> argues that as of yet, no clear distinction has been made between the “conventional prose poem” and what he suggests to be “the new prose,” “non- or inter-generic prose forms,” and “the prose of fact,” or, what Stephen Fredman<sup>80</sup> calls “poet’s prose” (95).

Fredman points out that it would be difficult to mistake works such as John Ashberry’s *Three Poems*, Robert Creeley’s *Presences: A Text for Marisol* or William Carlos Williams’ *Kora in Hell: Improvisations* for fiction or for purely discursive prose:

The texts evidence a fascination with language (through puns, rhyme, repetition, elision, disjunction, excessive troping, and subtle foregrounding of diction) that interferes with the progression of story or idea, while at the same time inviting and examining the “prose” realms of fact and anecdote, and reclaiming for poetry the domain of truth. (49)

Fredman offers the term “poet’s prose” as opposed to the French Prose Poem to cover the gamut of nonversified poetry, as he claims, “Prose Poetry remains redolent with the atmospheric sentiment of French Symbolism, and is a more encompassing term to cover all (not just lyric) poetry written in sentences rather than in verse” (49).

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<sup>79</sup> Michael Davidson quoted in Silliman’s, *The New Sentence*: 95.

<sup>80</sup> Stephen Fredman quoted in Silliman. Fredman’s term for this form is “prose-poetry.” Silliman leaves it to say that oppositionality may not so much be that of negation as one of two ends or limits of a continuous spectrum: 97.



American poets writing prose poetry refuse to separate imagination and intellect, inner experience and the world. David Ignatow explains that the range he finds in prose poetry offers freedom to emphasize the imagination rather than the form of the line:

...By imagination I mean the intelligence within the imagination... Of course it has a form, but it is a form, which constantly renews itself because the intelligence is restless. Emotions tend to repeat themselves over and over again, whereas the intelligence is constantly renewing itself, recreating itself. Therefore, I feel in the prose poems the emphasis is on the intelligence with an undercurrent of emotion. In the lyric form the emphasis was on the emotion and the intellect was the undercurrent. (56)

This distinction is explored further to determine if this is a possible new genre or sub-genre for these poets. Characteristics of prose poetry are visible particularly in poems by Kamenszain as it offers the poet a new impulse toward freedom and the desire to break the rules and rethink poetry. Along with the question of genre, the previously mentioned focus of theories based on the de-centered subject is important to understanding the sense of “self” and is the focus of the next discussion.

### **The Autobiographical “I” in Mourning Poetry**

Subjectivity, autobiography, and the “lyrical I” within the poems of Kozer, Kamenszain, and Espina fall within the trend in contemporary literature and psychoanalytic theories leading away from the formation of the deep self. Enrique Mallén in *Poesía del Lenguaje* on the subject of the poetic “I” writes that “En poesía, el ‘yo’ perceptivo llega a desaparecer en un ‘yo’ anónimo y descentrado que refleja la

‘poliglosia’ de la cultura popular” (19). Furthering this idea, Mallén explains that modernism explicitly rejected romanticism with its:

...idealismo epistemológico y metafísico de aquél, su enardecimiento del “yo” individual, su modelo orgánico para la realización de sujeto y objeto, de palabra y significado. La obra poética moderna no partía de una convicción en la continuidad o incluso correlación orgánica con la naturaleza, sino por el contrario, en la discontinuidad entre sujeto y objeto. La consecuente fragmentación del “yo” y de la experiencia requería una estrecha construcción del objeto artístico a partir de los fragmentos. La obra aparece a menudo como una desesperada insistencia en la coherencia frente a la desolación dejada por el tiempo: la inestabilidad de la naturaleza, la incertidumbre de la percepción, y lo trágico de la historia. Por lo tanto, tal movimiento surge en realidad como una intensificación de la ironía romántica. Quizás por ello, los análisis del periodo moderno se han concentrado en la ruptura con las convenciones formales como expresión de la desintegración de los valores tradicionales, y es este aspecto del modelo moderno que resalta como antecedente de la posmodernidad. (15)

Along with the topic of subjectivity, critics often take issue with the matter of the link between poetry and forms of autobiography. Quoting Paul de Man, Jo Gill and Melanie Waters argue that in seeking to define the characteristics of a distinct genre of autobiography, overlooked is the possibility that autobiography is “not a genre or a mode, but a figure of reading or of understanding that occurs, to some degree, in all texts” (921). Going further, De Man queries, “Can autobiography be written in verse?” (920). Jo Gill and Melanie Waters, following James Olney, answer this question in their claim that poetry is exactly what we should look to in order to understand what it is that defines autobiography: “Poetry, like psychology and philosophy, is about life, not about

part of it but potentially about all of it. The truth that poetry embodies [...] is a whole truth” (287).<sup>81</sup> From this perspective Gill and Waters conclude that:

...poetry because of its peculiar, self-conscious, often explicit negotiation with the dynamics and parameters of language, is precisely the place where some of the key issues, concerns, and debates in autobiography studies might be most keenly and useful played out. (2)

Often risky with poetry being defined as “autobiographical” is the threat of denying its creative or aesthetic value. Gill and Waters offer a solution to this impasse that comes from current theory on autobiography, which is:

in its detailed and forceful critique of the complexity of the genre (its constructedness, its self-consciousness, and its challenging, provocative and artful nature), offers a way of re-reading and re-evaluating similar elements in poetry. From this point of view, to claim a poem as “autobiographical” is to recognize its status as a writerly piece of work, rather than to dismiss it as derivative or limited. (3)

Supporting this notion, Marjorie Perloff pleads for a widening of our understanding of the forms that poetry might take as well as for a reorientation to the genre, and she disputes any readings of modern poetry that (1) deny the broader literary, historical, or political contexts; (2) assume that the poem can have “a specific identifiable meaning”; (3) assume that language is transparent; or (4) trust that there is a direct correlation between the experience of the poet and the “I” of the poem (Perloff 20).

And finally, offering additional support to the claims made here, Ann Fisher-Wirth in *William Carlos Williams and Autobiography: The Woods of His Own Nature*

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<sup>81</sup> Celeste Schenck quoted in Gil and Waters from “All of a Piece: Women’s Poetry and Autobiography.” *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women’s Autobiography*.

(1989) argues that “if the claim postmodern theory makes which is to esteem language over that which it looks to signify; if the self is nothing more than an illusion, then it is no more so than language, thought and the cycles of life and death” (13). Along with Fisher-Wirth, the argument here is that if all is illusory, then it is possible that all is just as equally real. (13). To explain further Fisher-Wirth writes that “... it frees the autobiographer illimitably, for the self, which is nothing and nowhere, is at the same time present at every moment and in every gesture of its dance; all of its manifestations are both illusory and revealing” (13).

In this way, the perspective taken and the interpretation of the poems here is summarized by Helen Vendler in *The Given and the Made: Recent American Poets* in which the critic writes that poetry uses “not a character but a voice,” it is a “script written for performance by the reader,” it represents “an inner life in such a way that it is assumable by others” (x, xi); and “[i]ts language is typically read as referential and as expressive of the poet’s own intimate—if veiled experience or emotion” (Gill and Water, 3).

Regarding the role of autobiographical memory, Evelyne Ender makes a philosophical case concerning the relationship between memory and subjectivity in which she argues that our ability to create a record of past experiences provides the foundations of human individuality (3), stressing the point made throughout her book that “[a]utobiographical memory is an act of imaginative construction that is constitutive of human subjectivity” (19). Ender points out that as human beings we are driven to remember because it is essential to make sense of our lives and to convey

feelings and emotions “...symbolically and formally in external objects such as poems, paintings, or symphonies... thus it follows that we need memory to ward off our fears and our tragic awareness of death, but it also attests to our remarkable resilience” (19).

Ender points out that the difficulty found for many in this belief lies in explaining the epistemological difficulties that arise in establishing genuineness, or what Gerald Edelman in *Bright Air, Brilliant Fire: On the Matter of the Mind* (1992) refers to as “first person matter” (14).<sup>82</sup> Our personal memories are inextricably bound up in the “grammatical” assumption of a first person and thus inherently subjective. Edelman uses the example that “just as no one can dream another person’s dream, no one can remember another person’s memories” to make his point (14).

In summary, useful to the analysis of poetry is the idea of maintaining flexibility when attempting to work within boundaries associated with genre, subjectivity, and Neobaroque or postmodern aesthetics. As demonstrated throughout, within shifting boundaries is often the location for best finding new directions and it is here where the selected three poets best situate themselves and the ideas they work to promote. This discussion has served as but a broad overview of the expertise they demonstrate to reach “beyond” the range of options within their chosen poetics. As a final step in the appreciation of the poetry of Kozer, Kamenzain, and Espina, it is important to expand on the tradition from which they originated. The following is a portrayal of five Latin American poets whose works reveal the depth of contemplation experienced by the challenging and heartrending experience of death.

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<sup>82</sup> Edelman quoted in Evelyn Ender’s *Architexts of Memory*.

## The Tradition of Mourning Poetry in Latin America Since 1900

In the anthology *Cantos a la Madre: en la poesía latinoamericana* (1999), the editors at Planeta include forty-three poems by poets who have dedicated verse to their mothers. The poems in this anthology range in style, temperament, and the era in which they were written, yet are exemplary of Latin American poems which eulogize the Mother. Among the poets found in this collection are César Vallejo and José Lezama Lima, who, along with Enrique Lihn, Juan Gelman, and Roberto Fernández Retamar have been selected for the following discussion on Latin American mourning poetry. The examination of these precursors is useful for their poetic influence, what Harold Bloom refers to as “intra-poetic relationships”<sup>83</sup> (5) that have informed the works of Kozer, Kamenszain and Espina.

In César Vallejo’s (1892–1938) first book, *Los Heraldos Negros* (1918), death played a primary role that would follow throughout his writing career. With the death of his first love, and later with that of his brother Miguel in 1915 followed by the death of his mother in 1918, these agonizing losses greatly affected the poet’s life. Jean Franco writes that it is with these events that the axis of Vallejo’s world “appeared to have been removed, sending for Vallejo “the globe spinning aimlessly on its course” (10). In *Trilce* XXVIII, in the first stanza, the mother is absent, and the poetic voice hungers for a family meal:

He almorzado solo ahora, y no he tenido  
madre, ni súplica, ni sírvete, ni agua,  
ni padre que, en el facundo ofertorio

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<sup>83</sup> From Harold Bloom’s *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (1997).

de los choclos, pregunte para su tardanza  
de imagen, por los broches mayores del sonido.

And the final verse,

Cuando ya se ha quebrado el propio hogar,  
y el sírvete materno no sale de la  
tumba,  
la cocina a oscuras, la miseria de amor. (223)<sup>84</sup>

Vallejo presents his lamentation not as a straightforward elegy, but as a complex arrangement in which the present and the past, memory and desire, the dead and the living exist simultaneously. Alain Sicard<sup>85</sup> comments that “the image of the absent, mourned mother casts its shadow over almost all of the poet’s utterances about love” (xviii) and points out that Vallejo sustains the memories of his childhood, much like Proust in *Recherche* throughout the entire *corpus* of his poetic works (53).

Like Vallejo, Kozer, Kamenzain, and Espina are greatly influenced by their connection to family and home. Tamara Kamenzain includes Vallejo’s poem “Hay golpes en la vida....” as the basis for the opening poem as well as a continued theme throughout *ECO de mi madre*. Eduardo Espina parodies the first verse of Vallejo’s “Intensidad y altura,” “Quiero escribir, pero me sale espuma” with *Quiero escribir, pero me sale Espina* (2014), as the given title of his first anthology of poetry. Death is with Vallejo on a surface level throughout his life, a fact that could not be truer of Enrique Lihn (1929–1988). Yet while Vallejo’s mourning was for the death of others, it is a form of self-mourning that occupies Lihn’s *Diario de muerte*.

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<sup>84</sup> Taken from Clayton Eschelman’s, *César Vallejo The Complete Poetry: A Bilingual Edition* (2007).

<sup>85</sup> Alain Sicard. *The Poetry and Poetics of César Vallejo: The Fourth Angle of the Circle* (1997).

In *Diario de muerte* (1989), Lihn goes beyond the limits of pure imagery written about death by Latin American poets up to this point and time. The death of the poet's parents was not to be the topic in this volume of Lihn's; instead, the poet chose himself to be the subject of mourning. *Diario de muerte* was written in the six weeks preceding his death from cancer while living in Santiago. On the evening before he died, it has been recorded that the poet corrected the proofs of the poems found within his diary.

Lihn's "situation" poetry places the poet as the subject of his own poems, that is, beyond poet as referent to writing poems about his own death as it is happening to him. Lihn's radical perspective of limited hope for escape from the situation acquires new significance as he confronts the reader with the unfolding of his advancing illness and impending death. Tamara Kamenszain has done extensive work on the poetics of Enrique Lihn, including the essay "Enrique Lihn en el diario de muerte." This essay describes Lihn's choices and the language of poetry as counter to the language of prose in the capacity to express the subject of death:

Reconocemos en él, intacto, el estilo de Enrique Lihn. Una fiesta de cara a la verdad. En primera persona todo, pero en todas las personas, la primera. Con recursos impúdicos dinamitar cualquier circunstancia narrativa hasta devolver la muerte a su verdadero lugar de pertenencia: la poesía. Solo el peso de un oficio semejante hundiendo la cama de hospital, solo el trazo de una letra viva implicando a mano con el cáncer podían pergeñar un verso de esta complicante simpleza semántica: "los vivos estamos muertos, los muertos estamos vivos." Utopía de dieciséis sílabas cuyo destino es detenerse al borde del abismo en la octava. Es que el lenguaje, capaz de matar vivos y vitalizar muertos, pone sus límites poéticos al borde de la cesura. Es la pausa que impide que todo acontezca al mismo tiempo. "Los vivos estamos muertos, los muertos estamos vivos," línea tonal que la prosa ni siquiera podría enunciar y que la



poesía debe partir en dos para hacerle un lugar definitivo en el verso. (82)

In Kamenszain's poetically written essay she proposes that it is only the living word that can construct such a simple, yet complicated sentence as "alive we are dead, dead we are alive" to explain the complex subject of impending death from cancer. The practice of poetic language is capable of eradicating the living and revitalizing the dead, and it is here where life meets poetry. As Lihn lived out the last few weeks of his life in a form of banishment, we can look to the Argentine Juan Gelman (1930), who, during a period of forced exile from his homeland, was as a result also exiled from his mother's deathbed.

Born the son of exiled Ukrainian Jews, Gelman's poetry is distinguished by themes of exile, loss, and social consciousness, along with religion and spirituality, each an important theme to the poets in this study. Defined by his relentless exploration of linguistic manipulation, by the density of his continuous construction and deconstruction of themes that touch on the "quotidian, the sentimental, and the ironic," Gelman's poems are "produced by the constant renovation of poetic language" (Burckhardt 39).<sup>86</sup> After the 1970's, Gelman's work became prolific in creative neologisms, question marks, and other innovative punctuation that made his poems unique at the time.

*Carta a mi madre* (1989), written during Gelman's extended exile, is an epistolary grief-filled elegy to his mother who died during the poet's exile. In the opening verse of the fragmented *Carta a mi madre*, the reader learns of the loss of the

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<sup>86</sup> Burckhardt, O. S. (2009).

poet's mother, a critical source of strength during the years of forced exile: "I received your letter 20 days after your death and 5 minutes after learning you had died" (*Carta a mi madre*). The autobiographical poem explores the mother-son relationship, and the intertwining connection that unites the two over their lives:

recibí tu carta 20 días después de tu muerte y cinco minutos después de  
saber que  
habías muerto / una carta que el cansancio, decías, te interrumpió / te  
habían visto bien  
por entonces / aguda como siempre / activa a los 85 años de edad pese a  
las tres  
operaciones contra el cáncer que finalmente te llevó /

Gelman uses the epistolary genre to explore and reconstruct his identity after the loss of his mother. The use of memory, an important device in Kozler, Kamenszain, and Espina's poems as well, is used by Gelman to explore the uncertain present, the impossible future, and the lost past. With no hope for a recipient in the letter/poem, Gelman manipulates language by the inversion of identities and in so doing disrupts time throughout the poem. Many believe Gelman's best poems, as with the next poet, Cuban Roberto Fernández Retamar (1930), to be those written on the death of a loved one.

As with Kozler, Kamenszain, Espina, and Juan Gelman, Roberto Fernández Retamar breaks genre boundaries in poetry that becomes an autobiographical record of ancestral, social, and human relations. Keith Ellis in *Where's Fernández? And Other Poems* (2000), describes Roberto Fernández Retamar (1930) as an:

... exemplary writer who measures up to the qualities that he wisely expresses by means of a poetry that penetrates the senses, not by an indiscriminate succession of images but by a mastery achieved after having dominated simplicity apparent in plain

language, both in the affective autobiographical poems and in the heroic poems of noble testimonial bearing. (13)

Retamar's poem "¿Y Fernández?" is a representation of familial as well as social and human relations, offering a complex elegy that portrays the relationship between parents and son (the speaker) and between the parents themselves. Ellis describes Retamar's as poetry that breaks from the tradition of elegy on several levels. One way it does so is that with the conventional elegy, the subject whose death and its cause customarily begins the poem, now appears later into the second part of the poem (15).

Another way in which Fernández Retamar breaks with the tradition of elegy is by his deep honesty in recalling his father's qualities in a portrayal of real life that creates the father as less than perfect and whose death is the result not of heroic action but from smoking and drinking too much. Ellis writes that by the juxtaposition of *pathos* and the use of straightforward semantic and syntactical usage, Fernández Retamar (as does Kamenszain) avoids the creation of difficulty in the reader's understanding of the poem as he speaks directly of the impact of actual emotions on the situation described (16).

And finally, as Ellis points out, the poem is also an elegy on the death of the poet's mother in which we see the minimizing of the elegiac tradition as the poem reduces its epic dimensions without referencing other elegiac works. As Ellis writes: "The subdued tone is befitting the attitude of a woman whose feet were on the ground and who put her hands to the tasks that needed to be done both in the framework of private and public spaces" (17).

Ellis points out that it is the proximity to certain events that provides the basis for the depth of emotion found in Fernández Retamar's poems. This is due to the fact that there is sufficient distance from the events to allow for the appropriate, tranquil appraisal of the experience (primarily of the Cuban Revolution) (17). The way the specific is linked to the general and the emotional to the intellectual allows for the resultant comprehensiveness, making for a telling range of emotions—from sadness to triumphant joy—giving stature to the speakers and accountability to the presented testimony. In contrast to the direct approach used by Fernández Retamar, the final poet in the presentation of additional Latin American poets who have written poems of mourning, José Lezama Lima (1910–1976), relies on a system based on complexity to express mourning.

The following mourning poem, written by the Cuban poet José Lezama Lima, demonstrates the grief the poet experienced upon the death of his mother. Lezama Lima writes, “[t]odo lo que hice está dedicado a mi madre. Su acento me acompaña en la noche cuando me duermo y en la mañana cuando me despierto” (7).<sup>87</sup> When Rosa Lima died, everything that had up to that point constituted the poet's world, he consecrated to her:

Vi de nuevo el rostro de mi madre.  
Era una noche que parecía haber escindido la noche del sueño.  
La noche avanzaba o se detenía,  
cuchilla que cercena o soplo huracanado,  
pero el sueño no caminaba hacia su noche.  
Sentía que todo pesaba hacia arriba,

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<sup>87</sup> Quoted in Yamilé Limonta Justiz: *Las mujeres en Lezama* (2009).

allí hablabas, susurrabas casi,  
para los oídos de un cangrejito,  
ya sé, lo sé porque vi su sonrisa que quería llegar  
regalándome ese animalito,  
para verlo caminar con gracia  
o profundizarlo en una harina caliente.  
(“La madre”, *Fragmentos a su imán*, 1977)

*Paradiso* (1966), Lezama Lima’s novel, is written in homage to his mother, Rosa Lima, who died two years before its publication. Lezama Lima’s biography and that of his family is expanded on in his next novel, *Oppiano Licario* (1977). As the protagonist of his novel, Lezama-José Cemi portrays his mother as the source of his knowledge and his security in life.

In spite of the political turmoil at the time in Cuba, Lezama Lima was able to maintain epistolary contact with family and friends that revealed the depth of his despair. The intellectual began to obsess about the death of his mother several years before its actual occurrence. Whereas during her lifetime, Rosa Lima was the bridge that united the writer with reality, after her death in 1964 Lezama Lima fell into great depression, mourning the loss of the person dearest to him. The poems of José Lezama Lima, along with those of César Vallejo, Juan Gelman, and Roberto Fernández Retamar, describe in countless detail a world of grief expressed through poetry; poetry that finds its origin in the need to speak or to write on the complexity of the experience of death.

## Inscribing Articulate Emotions

The development of a comprehensive overview of the progression of the Neobaroque from its historical origins to its current status, along with the theoretical conceptualization of terms and theories presented in this chapter have been an intrinsic first step in preparing the reader for the understanding of the mourning poems to come. Poetry as a form of mourning expresses the desire of the poet to inscribe and to articulate emotion. For the reader of poetry to listen to and to interpret these words serves as part of their own approach to dealing with grief. For both, poetry is a means of dealing with the emotional consequences of death when death remains an abstraction to be converted into a suitable notion of permanent absence.

The argument for why sentiment in verse must be filtered through the intellect to be engaging has been presented, along with the major terms and categories used throughout this dissertation. Important as a first step the presentation of Friedrich von Schiller, whose essay *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry* (1789–95) argues for the profundity of the sentimental despite its inherent imperfection and completeness. A brief synopsis of the lives and works of José Kozer, Tamara Kamenszain, and Eduardo Espina helped to situate these poets well within the tradition of the Latin American Neobaroque.

The literature review pertaining to mourning and poetry with its wide spectrum of ideas and theories included the definitions of sentiment, sentimentality and emotion as they apply to the works here. In addition, thoughts brought to light by Ludwig Wittgenstein and Marjorie Perloff on the concept of language games as a means to uncover seemingly opaque language forms were explored. Expanding on these theories

were initiatives on difficulty, poetry, and language by Roberto Echavarren and Enrique Mallén, along with proposed works by George Steiner and Charles Bernstein which will be shown to elucidate the issue surrounding complex poetry by offering strategies for breaking through obstacles in the interpretation of the poems by Kozer, Kamenzain, and Espina.

From the field of psychology, Sigmund Freud's and Julia Kristeva's ideas were detailed in order to express the importance of mourning and melancholia to this study. From literary theory, explorations on mourning by Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida help to sanctify the need to articulate one's sentiments regarding grief. And lastly, the ever-changing trends in genre studies and the use of subjectivity in poetry led to the determination that the diversity and originality of these areas require a broad understanding of the various means open to poets in the writing of (and to readers in the interpretation and appreciation of) mourning poetry.

Poetry about death is an attempt to reach an abstraction beyond our comprehension, originating first and foremost from the need to voice the sentiment of sorrow. By writing poems that go beyond sentimental remembrances of lives now concluded, our poets record not only the passing of loved ones, but, more importantly, the meaning of lives once connected to others for a fleeting instant in time. The next chapter is the presentation of the proposed framework for *anti-sentimentality* that details the function of various strategies, techniques and devices found within the fields of Language, Memory, Visual Imagery, and Metaphysics, which help to circumvent

sentimentality while still allowing for the engagement with emotion in the mourning poems of José Kozer, Tamara Kamenszain and Eduardo Espina.



### CHAPTER III

#### FRAMING *ANTI-SENTIMENTALITY*

As a way to work through the protracted process of mourning the death of their parents, José Kozer's, Tamara Kamenszain's, and Eduardo Espina's mourning poetry shows a clear engagement with emotion. Antithetical to the previous style of Neobaroque poetry, this constructive means of engaging with sentiment in a lucid manner is demonstrated through the act or process of the intellectualization of emotion,<sup>88</sup> advanced here as *anti-sentimentality*. In this way, this dissertation makes a significant contribution to the field of study by correcting the notion that the Neobaroque is disengaged from emotion, and proposes in place that recent mourning poetry by these three poets does in fact engage with sentiment.

With a focus on four key areas, this dissertation offers insight into how Kozer, Kamenszain, and Espina use *anti-sentimentality* to abstain from overt sentimentality in their poems of bereavement. Consisting of research done within the fields of language, memory, visualization, and the metaphysical, each of these four areas is broken down into several sub-areas that highlight in detail the overall structure of this framework. Many of the listed emblematic structures are characteristically found within Neobaroque aesthetics while others are more universal in nature. This framework is sourced from the life experiences expressed in the poems along with the particular poetics found within

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<sup>88</sup> Defined in <http://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/intellectualization>, as an unconscious defense mechanism in which reasoning is used to avoid confronting an objectionable impulse, emotional conflict, or other stressor and thus to defend against anxiety. (In psychiatry) a defense mechanism in which reasoning is used as a means of blocking a confrontation with an unconscious conflict and the emotional stress associated with it.

José Kozer's *ACTA* (2010), Tamara Kamenszain's *El eco de mi madre* (2012) (ECO), and Eduardo Espina's *Todo lo que ha sido para siempre una sola vez* (2014) (TLQ).

### **Language Technology**

The way in which a poet utilizes language in a self-referential way that then becoming a reflection on poetic language itself is a practice Enrique Mallén refers to as *syntactic thought*. This idea is key to understanding how Kozer, Kamenszain, and Espina manipulate the structures of language to dispel sentimentality. Specifically sought out through the use of this device is the way in which each poet uses syntactic and semantic indeterminacy to place the emphasis on language as opposed to more traditional poetic modes that focus on poetry's sentimental attachment to death.

The Neobaroque devices of carnivalization, parody, and irony (as found in word play and related forms of wit) is seen as a means of channeling sentiment away from the emotional and toward the real of the intellect. One or more of the poets rely on the interconnection between *cursi* and sentimentality as a poetic language device that works through familial codes constructed by members within the culture of family. And, lastly, through the use of *ostranenie* or defamiliarization, language is used to change the reader's habits of perception and interrupts the process of mourning. Various linguistic and semantic tools utilized by Kozer, Kamenszain, and Espina to discharge mourning and highlight poetic strategies that speak to poetry about poetry create an ambiguity that takes the emphasis off emotion and places it instead on the function and form of the poem itself.

### *Syntactic Thought*

Enrique Mallén, in *Antología Crítica de la Poesía del Lenguaje* (2008), writes that for Eduardo Espina, [*pensamiento sintáctico*] or *syntactic thought* is a way of thinking about poetic language<sup>89</sup> that occurs when the simplest meaning of the word is multiplied from the moment it is defined. Poetry in this way is a reflection on language itself. The language of poetry, then, for Espina, is written about language, “because the referential meaning of a ‘word or sentence’ is an object or event in the world, but referential meaning of ‘discourse’ is its universe: the totality of reality in its unity” (Mallén 25). Espina goes on to clarify this statement by pointing out that this does not mean that thinking is neither part of space nor time. As a result, Espina’s use of syntactic and semantic indeterminacy veers from established rules of usage, leaving the reader with the inability to assume that language is a fixed entity.

The structures of Espina’s poems test the limits of language by drawing out semantic meaning not normally attempted in non-poetic discourse. Thus, *syntactic thought* is that which multiplies the meaning given to the simplest of words through an auto-reflexive process, but it is the referential understanding of those words that expands the discourse of our existence as human beings. “Language technology,” as used in this dissertation, refers to the techniques and devices used by Kozer, Kamenzain, and Espina in order to create anti-sentimental mourning poetry that speaks to poetry about

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<sup>89</sup> From Mallén’s *Antología Crítica de la Poesía del Lenguaje* (2008). Original Spanish is: “Es así porque el significado referencial de una palabra o proposición es un objeto o un hecho del mundo, pero sentido referencial del discurso es su universo: la realidad total en su unidad. Lo cual no significa que el pensamiento no esté ni en el espacio ni en el tiempo.” (25).

poetry, thereby creating an ambiguity that takes the emphasis off emotion, and places the focus instead on the intellectual aspects of the poem itself.

The idea of *syntactic thought* originates with the French Symbolists. Stéphane Mallarmé (1842–1898) and Arthur Rimbaud (1854–1891), who brought about a radical split with the personal and confessional poetry still in use during their time. Hugo Friedrich in *The Structure of Modern Poetry* (1974) describes this sweeping change in Mallarmé’s poetry as one in which, “...no poem of Mallarmé can be interpreted as an expression of a joy that we all know or a melancholy that we all experience and therefore comprehend” (81). Friedrich claims:

Mallarmé wrote from a center of gravity that would be impossible to name. Calling it “Soul” might do, but only if it is understood to refer not so much to discernible feelings as to a total inwardness that comprises both prerational and rational forces, dreamlike moods, and steely abstractions, and whose unity is perceptible in the vibratory currents of the poetic diction. (81)

Mallarmé’s “meaning too precise is sure / To void your dreamy literature”<sup>90</sup> counsels others on the injury done to the imagination of the reader in offering too much in the way of information. This stylistic development would spread around the world through modernism and into current usage as a poetics of poetry, not only for the French, but US and Latin American poets as well.

Reviewing Severo Sarduy’s description of artificialization through the devices of *substitution*, *proliferation*, and *condensation* is another way in which *syntactic thought* works. With *substitution*, a new semiotic signifier with a meaning totally different from

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<sup>90</sup> From “All Summarised The Soul...”

the original replaces the original semiotic signifier (272). In *proliferation*, the signifier is removed and replaced by a chain of signifiers that progress metonymically, defining the absent signifier, by which the reader must infer its meaning (273). And lastly, *condensation* is a permutation, fusion, or interchange among elements (phonetic, visual, etc.) of two of the terms, in which a signifying chain collides and condenses, creating a third term that summarizes the first semantically (277). Each of these devices creates ambiguity by obfuscating meaning, thereby placing the reader's attention on the surface textures of the poem instead of its emotional subject matter.

The use of fragmentation as a tool for creating textual strategies that turn away from sentimentality requires the reader to look closer at the "whole" in order to discover elements that are indiscernible. Hugo Friedrich writes that even "a splendid poem like *O si chère de loin* (1895; 61), closely resembling the conventional homage to a lady, is spirited away from natural feelings of love by its difficult language" (82). Exemplifying Mallarmé's description of "abstractions and the lack of discernible features," Friedrich points out that knowing well that love is the basic theme of all poetry, the poet chooses instead "to place love on a level with such pretexts as an empty vase, a drinking glass, and a lace curtain" (82). Similar textual strategies work as well in the mourning poems of Kozer, Kamenszain, and Espina by turning poems about mourning into thought on language, or *syntactic thought*, that speaks of universal ideas instead of the lamentation of a single voice on the death of a loved one.

Using language as its own tool in the defense of intellectualizing emotion creates poetry that is often appreciated only by those readers willing to put forth the great effort

required to comprehend it. Through slow and precise reading and the awareness of technologies, including Sarduy's descriptions of artificialization, the use of the "part" to the "whole" as a means of understanding fragmentation, [the utilization of Steiner's four types of difficulty, and Bernstein's considerations for the positive reception of difficulty in poetry which we will discover shortly, the reader is made aware of the various devices utilized in an effort to place the intellect over the emotion in the contemporary mourning poems of the subjects of this investigation.

### ***Humor as Pharmakon***

The use of humor as a remedy for the anguish resulting from the complex emotions felt upon the death of a loved one is a useful device in overcoming grief. Since the time of Plato and Aristotle, much effort has gone into understanding equally what humor is and what makes something humorous. However, to date, no general theory of humor exists, much less a clear understanding of what a sense of humor entails. The approach in the following discussion includes the integration of a theory of humor that best facilitates the analysis of the poems examined in this study.

Ted Cohen in *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics* (2001)<sup>91</sup> writes that the lack of theoretical cohesion in defining humor derives from the difficulty in defining what makes humor "humorous." Notwithstanding, among the many concepts to consider, there are three generally accepted theories of humor: the *incongruity* theory,

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<sup>91</sup> Ted Cohen's article on "Humor" is from *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, (2001): 375–394. John Morreall's, *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor* (1987) is also useful in understanding the breadth of the topic of humor.

occurring when that which amuses clashes with the expectations in a particular circumstance; the *superiority* theory, in which humor arises when fun is being made of another, when one is seen as clumsy, inept, or unfortunate, etc.; and the *relief-from-tension* theory, which takes a more psychological approach by treating humor as the venting of excess nervous energy stored up as a result of social and psychological constraints, relieved by laughter.

Each of these theories proves useful to establishing a framework for anti-sentimentality as will be explained below. *Incongruity* occurs when the poet's expression is logically impossible (or paradoxical), odd, or somehow out of place or unusual. Under these circumstances, finding humor in the face of death, Kozer, Kamenszain, and Espina, are able to counteract emotion as the reader is surprised by the unexpected. This is most often accomplished through the play of words or language games, to be expanded upon shortly.

Cohen uses the quote by seventeenth-century philosopher Thomas Hobbes to explain the theory of *superiority*, which declares, "laughter is nothing else but sudden glory arising from some sudden conception of some eminency in us by comparison with the infirmity of others, or with our own formerly" (Hobbes 1928: 9.13). The idea of eminency leads these poets to the use of humor and irony in which death, in the superior role, makes them feel clumsy, inept, and incompetent in its presence. *Relief-from-tension* proves to be useful to our discussion as it provides an explanation for any number of

issues surrounding the topic of mourning due to moral, social-religious, or other strictures that deem the discussion of death to be out of bounds.<sup>92</sup>

It is important to note that each of these theories is useful for partial descriptions of some humor, especially if considered to be three parts of a single theme, but Cohen suggests instead that they be considered as narrow descriptions of types of *anomaly* (379) in which we must beg the question, what is the humor in anomaly—that is, when is an anomaly funny and why is it funny? As an answer, Cohen explains that anomalies can exhibit power over that which constrains us, as well as exhibit our powerlessness to comprehend and subdue the world in which those strictures exist (380).

The idea of power over something or someone, in comparison to feelings of superiority, extends into more subtle areas. Cohen points out that the use of word play, language games, and related forms of wit may be seen as the incorporation of the power to free oneself from the normal strictures of language. In this manner, the author suggests, “that it is perhaps the humor of *freedom* or “our freedom,” at least in our imagination, from the linguistic, social, cultural, and natural constraints that are the inhibitions of our normal lives” (380).

Less commonly noted, the humor of anomaly speaks not of power, but of powerlessness. When an anomaly has the form of extreme incongruity, exaggerated to

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<sup>92</sup> The *incongruity* theory is present in works by Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Hazlitt, and Kant, among others. Kant explains a theory of incongruity as in the case when laughter arises from a “strained expectation being suddenly reduced to nothing” (Kant 1928:199). The *superiority theory* corresponds to ideas on humor in works by Plato, Aristotle, Henri Bergson (1956), and Thomas Hobbes. Hobbes claims that “laughter is nothing else but sudden glory arising from some sudden conceptions of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmity of others, or with our own formerly” (Hobbes 1928: 9.13). The *relief-from-tension theory* is from Herbert Spencer and Sigmund Freud (1976) and is the best known theory.



the point that the situation becomes absurd, then the joke (or other form) becomes something incomprehensible, a situation described as one in which “one sees oneself without any form of power, yet able to find humor” (380). This mood occurs as neither exultant nor resigned, but as something more akin to acceptance, or a willing acknowledgment that certain aspects of life can be neither subdued nor fully comprehended. As will be shown, Kozer acknowledges that after his mother’s death, “Tal vez. Y se verá. No hay que precipitarse. Si algo hay ahora es tiempo” (the one thing his mother now has, is time).

The breadth of the subject of humor as mentioned is far-reaching, leaving no one theory as a model, principally due to the inability to form a consensus as to what makes a funny thing humorous. The above-selected theories provide a basis that allows for the consideration of humor in mourning. In addition to general theories, Neobaroque poetics offers various types of humor from which Kozer, Kamenzain, and Espina draw inspiration. Carnivalization, parody, irony, and satire, along with *cursi*, are all part of the Neobaroque sensibility of humor, in which the tendency is to distort, mock, deconstruct, and revitalize.

### ***A Sense of Neobaroque Humor***

Severo Sarduy points out that the Latin American Neobaroque uses Russian formalist Mikhail Bakhtin’s<sup>93</sup> definition of parody, as it functions through the symbol of the carnival, in which “the abnormal is multiplied through confusion, profanation,

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<sup>93</sup> From *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (1981).

eccentricity and ambivalence, and where apotheosis hides mockery” (280). Bakhtin’s idea of parody derives from the ancient “serio-comic,” related to carnivalesque folklore with its mixture of gaiety and tradition, while using contemporary speech seriously, as he writes, “freely inventing and playing with a plurality of themes, parody speaks about speech” (280). Working as parody, carnivalization by extension works on the level of confusion and confrontation, on the interaction between different strata, between different linguistic textures, and intertextuality.

In carnivalization, the mixing of genres, the intrusion of one type of discourse into another, as well as the interspersed usage of different languages of the American culture with the European is common. Intertextuality and its forms including the *quotation* and the *reminiscence* and *intratextuality* are made up of phonetic grammas, semic grammas and syntagmatic grammas (282).<sup>94</sup> In a world turned upside down by death, the abnormal becomes the normal for these poets. Loss of memory and memories creates confusion and ambivalence, leaving nothing else to fight the loss except poetry with a touch of humor engaged in a serious-humorous manner.

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<sup>94</sup> Sarduy refers to textual units as grams following nomenclature proposed by Julia Kristeva in “Pour une sémiologie des paragrammes” in *Tel Quel*, no. 29 (1967) as a system of deciphering and formalizing the operation for decoding the Baroque. Phonetic grammas are letters that form other possible constellations of meaning in other possible readings beyond linear “normal” scan of the page. Structures that include anagrams as an example as well as all verbal and graphic forms of anamorphosis, dual and incompatible viewpoints, cubism, forms whose deceptive practice would be alliteration that “posts” and unfolds, displaying traces of a phonetic work that is nothing more than the display of the work itself; the Chromaticism found in the phonetic mosaics of Haroldo de Campos’s *Galáxias*, based on the Portuguese language alliterations explored by the Gongorine poet Gregorio de Matos. p. 284. Semic grammas are the hidden meanings that lay beneath the line of the text, behind the discourse, its *repressed* idiom. p. 285–286. Syntagmatic grams as “[d]iscourse as syntagmatic enchainment implies the condensation of sequences that reading brings about, partial and progressive deciphering that advance by contiguity and refer us retrospectively to their totality as closed meaning” 285–287.

### *Irony and Sentimentality*

Irony first gained scholarly attention in 1841 when the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard published his dissertation *On the Concept of Irony with Constant Reference to Socrates*. Kierkegaard argues that Socrates' uses irony in order to give support to the use of prejudice in his interlocutors.<sup>95</sup> Because they were constantly forced to abandon their formulaic answers to Socrates' infuriating questions, they had to begin to think for themselves and to take individual responsibility for their claims about knowledge and value. Kierkegaard sought to provide a similar service for his own contemporaries using irony, parody, satire, humor, and deconstructive techniques in order to make conventionally accepted forms of knowledge and value indefensible.

Irony resists categorization, a perplexity that comes from the existence of the many different forms it takes. Verbal irony refers to saying one thing but meaning another while intending to be understood as meaning a third. Ambient or cosmic irony refers to our perceptions of the vagaries of the human condition, while postmodern irony is allusive, multilayered, preemptive, cynical, and nihilistic. John Winokur in *The Big Book of Irony* (2007) writes that it is difficult to distinguish among the many forms of irony and that irony is much better explained by what it isn't than what it is.

Irony, Winokur continues, "exists in nature, it is part of the human condition; and permeates reality. Irony happens, whether by God or Destiny or dumb luck. It results from the difference between what we want and what we get" (11). It is in this incongruity between what we want and what we get that Kozer, Kamenszain, and Espina

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<sup>95</sup> <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kierkegaard/>

use irony as a means of penetrating the mystery of death as they say one thing yet mean another.

In addition to Kierkegaard and Winokur, Linda Hutcheon in *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (1994) offers several ideas on irony helpful to understanding the works of Kozer, Kamenszain, and Espina. Hutcheon argues the idea that “irony happens as part of a communicative process, not as a static rhetorical tool to be deployed, but that which comes into being in the relationships between meanings, and between people and utterances and sometimes, between intentions and interpretations” (13). As our focus is placed strongly on language, it is useful to think of irony, as Hutcheon suggests, not as a “rhetorical trope or an extended attitude of life” but as a “discursive strategy operating at the level of language (verbal) or form (musical, visual, textual)” (13). Each poet studied produces poetry through this discursive strategy in which irony plays a significant role.

Continuing, Hutcheon explains that the major players in the “ironic game” are the interpreter and the ironist. The interpreter (whether or not the intended addressee of the ironist’s proposal) is the one who attributes irony and the one to interpret it, that is, “the one who decides whether the utterance is ironic (or not), and then what particular ironic meaning it may have” (11). This process occurs regardless of the intentions of the ironist, at which point Hutcheon poses the question as to who is the real ironist.

Hutcheon writes:

From the point of view of the *interpreter*, irony is an interpretive and intentional move: It is making or inferring of *meaning* in addition to and different from what is stated, together with an

*attitude* toward both the said and the unsaid. The move is usually triggered [and then directed] by conflictual textual or contextual evidence or by markers, which are socially agreed upon. However, from the point of view of what I too (with reservations) will call the *ironist*, irony is the intentional transmission of both information and evaluative attitude other than what is explicitly presented. (11)

Due to this complex relationship, irony means different things to different players, a point essential to Hutcheon's work. One last point to be made in Hutcheon's study of irony (from those who approve and disapprove of irony) has to do with what she refers to as its emotional ethics. Regarded as a mode of intellectual detachment (Schoentjes 1993: 153–86) (in Hutcheon 1994:14), the statement that “irony engages the intellect rather than the emotions” (Walker 1990:24;) (Hutcheon 1994:14) is countered by Hutcheon's suggestion that perhaps the opposite may be true, and she argues that there is an affective “charge” to irony that cannot be ignored:

...if it is to account for the range of emotional response (from anger to delight) and the various degrees of motivation and proximity (from distanced detachment to passionate engagement). Sometimes irony can indeed be interpreted as a withdrawal of affect; sometimes, however, there is a deliberate engaging of emotion. (15)

As Kozer, Kamenzain, and Espina navigate through their own responses to death, emotions range from a sense of the absurd to one of alienation, from awe to resignation. In each case, irony takes on many forms in their mourning poems as a means of engaging the intellect versus the emotions.

Jean-Pierre Mileur<sup>96</sup> suggests the exploration of the relationship between the

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<sup>96</sup> “Revisionism, Irony, and the Mask of Sentiment”: 197–233.  
[http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/new\\_literary\\_history/summary/v029/29.2mileur.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/new_literary_history/summary/v029/29.2mileur.html).

ironic and the sentimental, and also suggests the notion that at the very least “*the sentimental* is the type of which irony is a more specialized instance” (208). Due to the tremendous weight postmodernism puts on the difference made by awareness, Mileur reveals that the “irony of ironies, is, in fact, sentiment” (208) and points out repeatedly in his article the presence of an “unreflective sense that awareness makes a difference” which constitutes the sentimental at the heart of irony and that “life is both a sentiment and an irony” (212).

Reviewing Schiller’s essay on sentimental poetry, the philosopher proposes that the sentimental is reflective and self-conscious, “its impressions mediated by ideas and therefore always struggling with antagonistic concepts” (206). While the naïve is the mode of perfection within the definite limits of nature, “the sentimental is the mode of imperfection within the infinite of the ideal” (206). In Mileur, Leslie Sharp points out that Schiller’s theory, instead of being a nostalgia for all things Greek, is intended to vindicate the modern by defining an appropriate and distinctive response to a perception split between the ideal and the real that strongly anticipates subsequent versions of “world-history irony” (206). In so doing, it becomes de facto an anticipatory theory of the sentimental content of modern ironic writing.

In *Athenaeum Fragments 51*, Fredrich Schlegel exaggerates the difference between irony and the sentimental questioning, “to whom is the naïve naïve except to the sentimental”? Suggesting that Schiller is unaware that the naïve and nature are sentimental ideas of the “natural,” Schlegel remarks that “the naïve is the natural carried to the point of irony” and he comes close to admitting that the ironic and the *sentimental*

are, if not the same, then indivisible—“that irony will always be the effect of sentiments’ attempt to project itself in the form of the concept” (206).

Embracing, even celebrating, the incomplete and necessarily self-perpetuating nature of sentimental (now ironic) self-reflection, Schlegel, suggests Mileur, sees himself as appropriating a sentiment of the feelings and poetry to a new, ironic thought of the infinite associated with theory. The result is the practice (and theory) of the fragment, but also the new ideal of the work of literature that is also its own theory—a projection of sentiment in the form of the concept (207). This link between irony and sentimentality in Kozer, Kamenzain, and Espina is explored for similarities and dissimilarities and has far-reaching consequences in determining what sentimentality entails.

### **What’s Good, Bad, Kitsch, and “*Lo cursi*” Got to Do With It?**

Noël Valis’ *The Culture of Cursilería: Bad Taste, Kitsch, and Class in Modern Spain* (2002)<sup>97</sup> as it applies to Spain, offers much to the discussion in this investigation as it applies to Latin America. Difficult to define she explains *lo cursi* is better described as that which produces an anomalous awareness of the sentimentally incongruous and the obsolete (3). Valis quotes Jacinto Benavente on the inception of the concept of *cursilería* as,

The invention of the word *cursi* complicated life horribly. Before, you had the good and the bad, the entertaining and the boring...Now you have *lo cursi*, which is neither good nor bad,

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<sup>97</sup> This description of *cursi* is by Jacinto Benavente, in *Lo cursi* (1901), and translated into English by

neither entertaining nor boring; it's ... a negation: the opposite of distinguished; that is plain old everydayness. Because the minute there are six people who think or do the same thing, it's time to think and do something in order to be different; and to avoid *cursi*, sometimes foolish, outlandish, even bad things are done. (In Valis)

Valis detects *lo cursi* in signs that make the shift from the traditional to the modern in which pieces of an older culture survive, as they hold on nostalgically or even ironically (3). *Cursi* represents an out-of-sync sense of obsolescence that is often translated into images of *cursilería*, Valis writes, “[w]hether embodied as affectation, imitation, or triteness—in the manners of individuals or classes, or in the language of literary and nonliterary texts alike” (4). *Cursi* can be seen as a “wink and a nod,” as a gesture between those within a culture who laugh and those outside who do not.

Important to this dissertation is Valis’ suggestion that the language of *cursilería* is both intrinsically social and tied to history, and therefore able to be analyzed, but also remains private and intimate, posing serious difficulties in grasping its nature and meanings (20). This suggestion points to its relationship to sentiment arriving at the conclusion that sentiment functions as both knowledge and social practice.<sup>98</sup>

Chilean poet and critic Oscar Hahn<sup>99</sup> offers a Latin American perspective by suggesting that the starting point for understanding *lo cursi* is found in the expression,

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<sup>98</sup> This idea is explained in detail in Valis’ book as one of the major arguments, including the idea that “[c]ultural anthropologists have explored the role of feeling in social interactions as it transforms not only the inner but the outer worlds of individuals and groups, and in the process a structure of feeling is created, which is most often (appropriately) expressed through the metaphor, since metaphor bears within itself the idea of transformation” 20–21.

<sup>99</sup> Oscar Hahn’s “Herrera y Reissig o el indiscreto encanto de *lo cursi*” in *Texto Crítico*, 261–266 (1979). *Lo cursi* se hace presente cuando la distancia que media entre la pretensión y el logro es tal, que el desajuste se hace relevante y se carga de significación. La frase *cursi* incorpora en su estructura *la pretensión de* y la ausencia de aquello que se intentaba lograr. El fracaso no proviene de que el hablante se



*La pretensión de* (the pretense of). Referring to works by Julio Herrera y Reissig, these pretenses include a) elegance, b) amorous expressions or gallant feelings, c) erudition or philosophical profundity, and e) peculiarity. For Hahn, *cursi* is present when the distance between the pretense and the goal is such that the mismatch becomes relevant and loaded with significant meaning. The phrase *cursi* incorporates in its structure *the pretense of* and the absence of what is trying to be accomplished.

Failure, Hahn points out, does not come from the fact that the speaker has fallen short in the achievement of his objective, it comes from what has been exceeded, a phenomenon similar to what linguists call “ultra-correction.” As he explains, “[l]a frase *cursi* se sitúa más allá de lo que se proponía y puede ser descrita entonces como de mal gusto sentimental o de (*cursi* de origen romántico), filosofía a la violeta (racionalismo *cursi*) o como extravagancia, según exceda, respectivamente, lo elegante, lo emotivo, lo filosófico o lo raro” (263).

Ben Bollig in *Néstor Perlongher: The Poetic Search for an Argentine Marginal Voice* (2008) considers Néstor Perlongher<sup>100</sup> to represent one of the most poetic and

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haya quedado corto en la consecución (achievement) de su objetivo; proviene de que ha pasado de largo: de que se ha sobrepasado, en un fenómeno semejante al que los lingüistas denominan “ultracorrección.” La frase *cursi* se sitúa más allá de lo que se proponía y puede ser descrita entonces como de mal gusto sentimental o de (*cursi* de origen romántico), filosofía a la violeta (racionalismo *cursi*) o como extravagancia, según exceda, respectivamente, lo elegante, lo emotivo, lo filosófico o lo raro” 263.

<sup>100</sup> Perlongher published six books of poetry: *Austria-Hungría* (Buenos Aires, Tierra Baldía, 1980), *Alambres* (Buenos Aires, Último Reino, 1987; Premio “Boris Vian” de Literatura Argentina), *Hule* (Buenos Aires, Último Reino, 1989), *Parque Lezama* (Buenos Aires, Sudamericana, 1990), *Aguas aéreas* (Buenos Aires, Último Reino, 1990) y *El chorreo de las iluminaciones* (Caracas, Pequeña Venecia, 1992); collaborated in the magazines *El Porteño*, *Alfonsina*, *Último Reino* y *Diario de Poesía*; edited *Caribe transplantino: Poesía neobarroca cubana y rioplatense* (San Pablo, Iluminuras, 1991). Perlongher’s essay “Neobarroco y Neobarroso” was published as one of two prologues, (along with Echavarren) for *Medusario: Muestra de Poesía Latinoamericana* (1996).

important voices from Argentina, as well as the Latin American Neobaroque. Bollig suggests that in the works of Perlongher, any of the terms *barroco* or the related *neobarroco* or *neobarroso* are more accurately described as a form of avant-garde *kitsch* (157). Bollig uses the term *kitsch* as an aesthetic cultivated by Perlongher that “dynamically relates high art and low social classes and the attendant cultural manifestations and valorizes what one might feign as good taste, while calling into question the value of good taste itself” (157).<sup>101</sup> For Bollig, Perlongher’s poems create doubt about what is poetic through a double process in which, as the poetic becomes less poetic, the non-poetic (that which should be ignored or hidden by literature) becomes more poetic, the result being that “both are thrown into a zone of indeterminacy in a double process of becoming” (186).

Robert Solomon summarizes the relationship between sentimentality and *kitsch*, writing that sentimentality is viewed as *kitsch* by its “substitution of cheap manipulation of feelings for careful calculation of form or development of character” (5). Solomon’s six comparisons between sentimentality and kitsch include:

(1) both provoke *excessive* expressions of emotions, (2) both manipulate our emotions; (3) both express or evoke “false” or “faked” emotions; (4) both express or evoke “cheap” or “easy” or “superficial” emotions; (5) are both self-indulgent and interfere with “appropriate” behavior, and, perhaps the most dominate charge, (6) the claim that *kitsch* and sentimentality distort our perceptions and interfere with rational thought and an adequate understanding of the world. (5)

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<sup>101</sup> Bollig regards this kitsch as avant-garde due firstly by its attempt to investigate the metaphor in a similar way to certain historical avant-garde groups, secondly, “it allows for a focus on secretive and marginal groups, and thirdly, it “highlights and valorizes irrational behavior”<sup>157</sup>.

For Solomon, the charge against *kitsch* is that it gives us a false or fraudulent overly “sweet” and benign vision of the world and thus somehow blocks our knowledge of it. *Kitsch* and *cursi* are important to the analysis of the poetry here due in part to the areas of intersection that exist between the Baroque as well as the existent relation between the Neobaroque, irony, parody, and satire. Alienation as a means of determining who is in and who is out in a particular situation that involves the use of *cursilería* has a different meaning when used as a device for distancing feeling in the poems of Kozer, Kamenszain, and Espina.

### ***Alienation of Emotion***

In *Latin American Vanguard: The Art of Contentious Encounters* (1994), Vicky Unruh writes that José Ortega y Gasset’s landmark essay “The Dehumanization of Art” is not unlike the early Russian formalist idea of Victor Shklovsky’s *ostranenie* in his 1917 essay, “Art as Technique”, or Bertolt Brecht’s alienation or *Verfremdungseffekt* (80). Unruh<sup>102</sup> explains further:

In their emphasis on the change in reader or spectator habits of perception provoked by art that displays its own fabricated substance, all of these concepts are comparable on the simply formal level to what Bürger denominates in *Theory of the Avant-Garde* the “nonorganic” work of art...Bürger is talking about the kind of art that calls attention to its constituent parts and resists the receiver’s attempts to naturalize it or perceive it as a comfortably organic whole. (22)

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<sup>102</sup>But, Unruh points out Bürger, like Brecht before him, examines the estranging or distancing quality of vanguardist art and comes to conclusions about its effects differently from those found in “The Dehumanization of Art.” This is due to Bürger’s belief that the distancing effects of nonorganic art constitute far more than a matter of technique.

While Unruh and Bürger develop variations among the three concepts to other ends they are useful as a means of pointing out the lengths gone to for the purpose of recognizing the use of language as a tool to distance the emotions within the arts.

The Russian Formalist Viktor Shklovsky has most often been credited with coining the term *ostranenie*, translated into English as “defamiliarization,” “estrangement,” or “alienation.” Shklovsky asserts that by making things strange, the artist does not simply displace objects from everyday context into an artistic framework, he also helps to “return sensation” to life itself, to reinvent the world, to experience it anew.

Marjorie Perloff counters Shklovsky’s role as the major precursor, claiming instead that the concept of defamiliarization was not invented by the Russian Formalists that include Shklovsky, but instead names Goethe and Wordsworth along with Marcel Proust and Walter Benjamin among those who have written on the “power of particular linguistic forms to create the *ostranenie* that gives a literary text its particular aura.” This power, Perloff points out, replaces the *instrumental* (with its cognates “literal,” “propositional,” “logical,” “neutral,” “representational”) information-bearing language of “ordinary prose” (53). The inclination toward defamiliarization or decontextualization of language as a means to obfuscate sentimentality in the poems here is derived through various means of making everyday language strange. Gilles Deleuze’s concept of “deterritorialization” is similar to Perloff’s idea of the making strange the use of denotative, everyday language. As he proposes in *Dialogues*:

We must be bilingual even in a single language, we must have a minor language within our own language, we must make use of our own language in a minor way.... Not speak like an Irishman or a Romanian in a language other than one's own but on the contrary to speak in *one's own language* like a foreigner.<sup>103</sup>

It is within the space and experience of linguistic “deterritorialization” that according to Deleuze, the writer discovers his or her own voice. A new vision emerges from the understanding of the “otherness” of language, and the ways it may be stretched, twisted, or re-formed from something ordinary into something new and different.

Regarding the poetic “I,” Rimbaud’s poetry would come to no longer reflect the poet’s youth, as the process of dehumanization allows for “the abnormal divorce” of the poetic “I” from the empirical self, forbidding any interpretation as biographical statement (48). Regarding this new change, Hugo Friedrich describes a reading of Edgar Allan Poe’s *Angoisse* (Anxiety) (188), as follows:

The title seems to indicate a precise psychic condition. Yet there is none. Even anxiety has lost its familiar countenance. Is this really anxiety? We perceive mercurial intensity compounded of many things: hope, collapse, jubilation, grimace, inquiry—all spoken swiftly and passed over swiftly, until the text swerves into wounds, torments, tortures, whose origins and purposes remain unknown. There is a frenzy of vagueness in image and emotion, as hazy as the two female beings mentioned fleetingly. Emotion may mean anxiety, but it is so far removed from the normal shapes of emotion as to bear no longer the human label “anxiety” (48).

For Poe, verse speaks to no one and makes no attempt to curry favor from the reader while a neutral pulse replaces feelings. In the process of poetic dehumanization, no longer is a poem considered explicitly biographical. As with Rimbaud and Poe, the

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<sup>103</sup> Quoted from Bryden and Topping’s *Beckett’s Proust/Deleuze’s Proust*, (2009), 2. Original Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues* (Paris: Flammarion, 1977), 11.

distancing of the poetic “I” is but one technique used by Kozer, Kamenszain, and Espina to give new perspective to mourning poems that approach a difficult subject through a rational approach.

Concluding the discussion on “language technologies,” we see the multiple ways in which Kozer, Kamenszain, and Espina avoid gentle emotions regarding death and instead draw the reader into an attitude of critical judgment. With “syntactic thought,” poetic language is used in a self-referential way to work through grief. Kozer’s use of precision, Espina’s fragmentation, and Kamenszain’s direct approach, all place the focus on language as opposed to sentiment. Next, the use of word play, which makes the most of irony, wit, and humor as a technique for channeling sentiment away from the emotional level and toward the real of the intellect, was proposed. And, finally, the use of alienation was proposed as a means by which Kozer, Kamenszain, and Espina use language to change the reader’s habits of discernment in order to interrupt the process of mourning. In each of these technologies, we have witnessed the art of poetry about poetry. The poetics of Neobaroque mourning continues in the next section with the use of memory as a means of finding a place for guarding the remembrances of those who are now a part of that which went before.

### **Remembering and Mourning**

As the mother of the Muses, Mnemosyne, or memory, is found at the beginning of the invention of the human arts, and as such, is inextricably bound up with literary and artistic creation. Individual acts of recollection drive the narratives of works in many

genres, and the reader's memory must often be alert as well if a text is to be understood. While the interdisciplinary fields of memory research are inexhaustible in the divergent approaches that have been activated, the interest to this dissertation lies in understanding how memory works or fails to work, as the case may be in relation to the creation of literary works, and poetry in particular.

Ideas important to this study that focus on the topic of memory within the discipline of literature include *Berlin Childhood Around 1900* (1938),<sup>104</sup> Walter Benjamin's early 1930's memories of the space of childhood, and the physical form of memories, which is of equal significance as the act of recollection; *The Poetics of Space* (1994), Gaston Bachelard's well-known study on the importance of memory and the spaces it occupies; *Memory in Literature: From Rousseau to Neuroscience* (2003), Suzanne Nalbantian's studies using literature as a laboratory for the workings of the mind through the examination of major authors as "subjects" that sheds light on the functioning of human memory; *The Future of Nostalgia* (2008), Svetlana Boym's work on memory as it relates to nostalgia, collective memory, and exile; and *Architexts of Memory: Literature, Science, and Autobiography* (2005), Evelyne Ender's study on memory and emotion.

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<sup>104</sup> Memory is key for Benjamin, occupying him in many forms: Memory as re-evoked moment (*Erinnerung*), memory as physical organ (*Gedächtnis*), souvenirs (*Andenken*), recollection (*Eingedenken*), and voluntary and involuntary memory (*mémoire volontaire/involontaire*). This array of various forms of memory shows Benjamin's concern with constructing a science, history, and politics of memory. For more on this topic see editors Susannah Radstone's and Bill Schwarz's *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*. Fordham University Press: New York (2010).

### *The Habitus of Memory*

In *Future of Nostalgia*, Svetlana Boym searches for an understanding of nostalgia's role in modern civilization, its relevance to memory, and the literary and artistic landscapes it inhabits. The understanding of the artist in exile and the aesthetic lure of nostalgia demonstrate both the intellectual sense of nostalgia and its emotional tug. From *nostos*, return home, and *algia*, longing, Boym defines modern nostalgia as:

...the mourning for the impossibility of mythical return, for the loss of an enchanted world with clear borders and values; a secular expression of a spiritual longing, a nostalgia for an absolute, a home that is both physical and spiritual, the edenic unity of time and space before entry into history. (8)

The scholar writes that nostalgia is closely associated with the subject of estrangement in which defamiliarization and the sense of distance create the impulse for nostalgia to narrate a story that tells of the relationship among past, present, and future. The effect of time on memory is that time hinders memory's presence and blurs its details, and in this course, renders the familiar strange and causes the estranged to appear more familiar. When the fact that the past no longer exists is discovered, the past can act by "inserting itself into a present sensation from which it borrows the vitality to create the ability to awaken multiple planes of consciousness and possibilities of historic development" (50).

Boym posits two variants of nostalgia, restorative nostalgia and reflective nostalgia. Restorative nostalgia seeks a reconstruction of what has been lost, while reflective nostalgia bathes itself in the longing. The author refers to reflective nostalgia,



which she claims has elements of both mourning and melancholia,<sup>105</sup> yet, while loss is never completely recollected, it has some connection to the loss of collective frameworks of memory. Reflective nostalgia “is a form of deep mourning that performs a labor of grief both through pondering pain and through play that points to the future” (55).

However, Boym points out, nostalgia is different from melancholia, in that melancholia deals with the area of individual consciousness while nostalgia deals with the relationship between individual biography and the biography of groups or nations, between personal and collective memory (xvi). Reflective nostalgia deals with individual and cultural memory and focuses on the individual as it creates a narrative using irony, humor, and inconclusiveness as tools, thereby shattering the fragments of memory and temporalizing space instead of spatializing time. For the contemporary writer, nostalgic homecoming does not insinuate a renewal of identity, as Boym infers, “[a] modern nostalgic can be homesick and sick of home, at once” (50).

The author combines ideas on nostalgia with those she has formulated on collective memory as she believes that nostalgic recollections of a personal nature often intersect and intertwine with collective memories. The author writes that collective memory “consists of the common landmarks of everyday life that constitute shared social frameworks of individual recollection” (53) and points out that “frameworks of collective or cultural memory rest on reminiscences that represent multiple narratives”

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<sup>105</sup> Returning to Freud’s distinction between mourning and melancholia, mourning is linked to the loss of a loved one or an abstraction, such as a homeland or an ideal, that is overcome with the passing of time. On the other hand, melancholia involves a loss more unconscious and not clearly defined and does not pass with the labor of grief.

(54). Narratives, the author continues, “consist of evident syntax and common intonation but have no single plot” (54). Collective memory “defies disciplinary boundaries and invites us to look at artistic as well as scholarly works,” bringing back the reflections on “mental habitus” (Panofsky and Lefevre)<sup>106</sup> defining “mentally” as “what is conceived and felt, the field of intelligence and of emotion” (54). As will be demonstrated in the following chapters, we see how the individual becomes the collective through works written on a personal level that are then shared with other poets, individual readers, colleagues, family, and friends who are also interested in the subject of mourning.

Nostalgia, Boyn concludes acts as an intermediary between collective and individual memory where collective memory becomes the site for multiple individual recollections in which “the two begin to interact.” As she writes, “one becomes aware of the collective frameworks of memories when one distances oneself from one’s community or when that community itself enters the moment of twilight” (54). In this instance, collective frameworks of memory are rediscovered in the mourning of this loss from exile from one’s community as well, as is the case with Kozer, Kamenzain, and Espina.

Many of the ideas addressed in *The Future of Nostalgia* are relevant to Kozer, Kamenzain, and Espina. As previously mentioned, the relationship between exile and bereavement holds true with nostalgia. Myron Lichtblau in *La emigración y el exilio en la literatura hispánica del siglo veinte* (1988) writes that “[t]he concept of remembrance and nostalgia is inherent in all forms of exile literature” (11), as traditional notions of

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<sup>106</sup> Panofsky and Lefevre quoted in Boym: 54.

nostalgia once suggested, but can be seen as closer to an attempt at recreating the self as an excluded member of a community struggling with the sociological problems of post-modernization. In addition to exile, Boym also uses ideas based on Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia" in reference to reflective nostalgia, which were covered in Chapter Two and will be returned to throughout this dissertation.

French social scientist Maurice Halbwachs in *Les cadres sociaux de la memoire (On Collective Memory)*<sup>107</sup> points out that when it comes to memory, one of the most significant groups that allow for interchanges are the members of our immediate family—"the greatest number of our memories come back to us when our parents, our friends, or other persons recall them to us"—but as we grow up, as we go to school, to church or to the workplace, we associate with other groups and take part in various friendships or participate in public life: "[y]et it is in society that people normally acquire memories..."(85). Reflective nostalgia does not attempt to reconstruct the fictitious locality of home, recognizing the difference between identity and resemblance. As Boym confirms, "the home is in ruins or, on the contrary, has been just renovated and gentrified beyond recognition" (50).

Evelyne Ender defines nostalgia as the name given to "the desire for memory" as it "fuels our mental time-travel and impels us to imagine the sources of our identity," driving us toward a "biographical exercise in memory," which, she writes, "is a central part of our personhood" (142). Regarding nostalgia, Ender writes that the nostalgic mind

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<sup>107</sup> Quoted in Erika Apfelbaum's essay, "Halbwach's and the Social Properties of Memory", in *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*: 77–92.

seems to be “looking for a place belonging to some sentimental geography” (138), but agrees with Kant, who sees this state as more about time and a return to beginnings, writing that “what the subject suffering from nostalgia is looking for is less the places of childhood, than childhood itself.”<sup>108</sup>

The scholar’s thesis is that the writing process is a complex combination of thought, emotion, and words. The brain, she contends, is more than a storehouse; it is a site of continuous activity. Since writers recall an event from whatever their current state of mind is at the time, an event may be seen differently at different times. An individual’s sense of the past is crucially necessary as a connection to one’s own existing sense of reality. Seen repeatedly in the process of revision, poets often prepare multiple versions of their poems, as do Kozer, Kamenszain, and Espina, a suggestion which may help support Ender’s idea.

Regarding the relationship between memory and subjectivity, Ender stresses that “[a]utobiographical memory is an act of imaginative construction that is constitutive of human subjectivity” (19). As human beings, we are driven to remember because it is essential to make sense of our lives and to convey feelings and emotions “symbolically and formally in external objects such as poems, paintings, or symphonies... thus it follows that we need memory to ward off our fears and our tragic awareness of death, but it also attests to our remarkable resilience” (19). This dissertation supports this statement, witnessed through the process of writing poetry as a means of working

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<sup>108</sup> Quoted in Ender: 138.

through the grief experienced by Kozer, Kamenzain, and Espina occasioned by the death of their parents.

As a sentiment, nostalgia has been received to a certain extent with negative undertones. These currents are often associated with responses indistinguishable from disproportionate and excessive sentimentality and often brushed aside in today's postmodern world. However, nostalgia for the familiar can be seen as a fundamental dimension of human recollection, an emotion that compels us to look toward the past, and in so doing, uphold our need for memory. Placing sentiment in the realm of the psychological and philosophical, as proposed by Ender and Boym and achieved in the poems by Kozer, Kamenzain, and Espina, removes emotion from the focal point as memory sets into motion understanding through the linguistic portion of the brain.

### ***Inhabited Spaces of Remembrance***

In Gaston Bachelard's interrogation into the meaning of spaces that preoccupy poetry, he clarifies the issue of the poetic image, stating that the recourse necessary to do so lies within the imagination, "[b]y this should be understood a study of the phenomenon of the poetic image when it emerges into the consciousness as a direct product of the heart, soul and being of man, apprehended in his actuality" (xviii). By considering the dialectic of inspiration through the two poles of the soul and the mind, Bachelard claims both to be "indispensable for studying the phenomena of the poetic image in their various nuances" (xxi), especially with regard to following the evolution of these images from the state of reverie to execution.

Bachelard cites resonance and reverberation as the two reactions that produce the poetic image in the reader of poetry, naming resonance as that which appeals to the mind, while reverberation is the poetic power or soul. As he makes clear: “The exuberance and depth of a poem are a result of the resonance-reverberation doublet. It is as though the poem through its exuberance, awakened new depths in us...” (xxiii). He continues this line of thought by pointing out:

The reverberation brings about a veritable awakening of poetic creation, even in the soul of the reader, through the reverberations of a single poetic image. By its novelty, a poetic image sets in motion the entire linguistic mechanism. The poetic image places us at the origin of the speaking being. (xxiii)

This reader’s reaction to the level of consciousness not only of the poet, but also of herself, which arises in the reading of poetry, supports Bernstein’s early suggestion as to the appreciation of “difficulty” in poetry, both of which are necessary to fully understand the propositions set forth by Kozler, Kamenzain, and Espina in their poetic constructions to follow.

*The Poetics of Space* elaborates on the meaning of the spaces that poetry examines, and it emphasizes the interior of domestic spaces and its elements—the various rooms and the different types of furniture found within. The house as the “quintessential phenomenological object” is the place where the personal experience reaches its epitome. Bachelard sees the house as a kind of original universe, claiming, “all really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home” (5). Proceeding to examine the home as the manifestation of the soul through the poetic image and the literary as they are found in poetry, this most intimate of all spaces “protects the

daydreamer,” and in this way, understanding the house is for Bachelard a way to understand the soul.

Many of Kozer’s, Kamenzain’s, and Espina’s poems invoke memories of home and the families that inhabited them, resurrecting the past and connecting it with the present throughout their poetry. Bachelard makes clear that “we are never real historians, but always near poets, and our emotion is perhaps nothing but an expression of a poetry that was lost” (6). The idea that memories of the house and its various parts are not something remembered but rather something that is entwined with the present, is not only a part of the ongoing experience of our poets, but of our own understanding. To bypass and therefore to transcend history is to produce a space that suspends time, as Bachelard writes, “and is only achieved through imaging and hallucination” (7). Irretrievable history is fossilized, memories stand still, and therefore—Bachelard sees it— it is space, not time, which invokes memories.

Continuing on, Bachelard uses the term *topoanalysis*, in his search for the experience and not the process, the essence and not the contingent and fleeting. To his notions of *topoanalysis* and *topophilia* Bachelard adds the physical dimension, arguing that our house is engraved into our flesh. The body is better at preserving detailed memories than the mind is. Other memories are harder to trace and these can be revealed only by means of the poetic image. For Bachelard, poetry’s main function is to give us back a state of daydreaming, which is something history, psychology and geography are incapable of doing.

Evelyne Ender in *Architexts of Memory: Literature, Science, and Autobiography*

(2005), like Gaston Bachelard, makes a philosophical case that our ability to create a record of past experiences provides the foundations of human individuality. Along with an emphasis on the importance of recording past experiences is the importance of merging the literary with the scientific study of memory.

Suzanne Nalbantian in *Memory in Literature: From Rousseau to Neuroscience* (2003)<sup>109</sup> points out that scientific investigation, along with the writings of particular literary writers, can illuminate recent test cases of the memory process. Various topics including emotion and the brain, localization of memory traces, long-term episodic memory, voluntary and involuntary memory, and confabulation by researchers including Antonio Damasio, Edmund Rolls, Daniel Schacter and Jean-Pierre Changeux have opened up new areas and ways of thinking beyond the psychoanalytical in terms of memory applications.

The relation between art and its sources offers clinical proof that life experience is relevant to the artist's work and marks an undeniable link between author and text. Nalbantian claims that while the relationship between life and artistic work is resoundingly autobiographical, there is much to be gained by utilizing this tactic in the scrutiny of how memory functions with language, clarifying that "Memory is not re-imagined as experience, even disconnected experience, but rather, is enacted in figurative or mythic language" (6).

The emotional as well as physical death of the parent as experienced by Kozer, Kamenszain, and Espina, prolonged in several cases, painful in others, not only for the

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<sup>109</sup> For more on this subject see Nalbantian's *Memory in Literature: From Rousseau to Neuroscience*.



dying, but for the survivors as well—has led to the significance of memory as a key area for understanding sentiment within the poetics of mourning. The capacity these poets have to record in a poetic language the past thoughts, emotions, and pleasures of these lives lies at the heart of their creativity, as in some ways, their own words become the most animate of artifacts that remain for them after the dissolution of their parents' lives.

By understanding more about the spaces that memories occupy, we see the ways in which the topic of memory occupies the space of childhood through the eyes of Walter Benjamin. Gaston Bachelard's study on the importance of memory and the spaces it occupies serves to underscore the suggestion that the space of the home is a way to understand our souls. Evelyne Ender's work, drawing from memory studies, clinical psychology, psychoanalysis, and neurobiology, as well as literary studies, examines how memory not only has a factual basis, but is also inseparable from fictional and aesthetic elements. And lastly, Svetlana Boym's investigation of the sentiment of loss and displacement demonstrates that nostalgia is not an individual sickness, but a symptom of our age, a trait of global culture and its resulting oversaturation.

### **Visualizing the Difficult**

By crossing the boundaries of words with color, shape, line, and texture, poets and visual artists alike help to shape our post-modern view and cultural construct of what death means and how it looks, for it is not only the poet, but also the visual artist who searches for unique ways to approach this subject. The power of the image and the word makes the invisible visible and empowers us to think and to talk about death

differently. Baroque painters like Caravaggio, Rubens, and Rembrandt; the French impressionist Claude Monet; the English watercolorist William Turner; and the Dutch post-impressionist Vincent Van Gogh; along with recently deceased artists German Lucian Freud, French-born Louise Bourgeois, and North American painter Cy Twombly, as well as contemporary artists working today in a variety of media including photography and sculpture, (as does Jane McAdam Freud) daughter of Lucian, have all dedicated a body of work to the understanding of ways in which death fascinates, as well as stimulates, the imagination and the creative intellect.

By extending poetic language to include a visual component, Kozer, Kamenzain, and Espina move their poems toward an anti-sentimental approach to death through the creation of a new space in which to re-imagine and re-configure mortality. By generating communication between the inner and outer worlds of existence, a broader vision that may have otherwise been overlooked is created and explored. This discussion is therefore based on the interest in the interaction between the visual and the verbal, seen here not as a division or opposition, but rather as one of mutual inference and access, as we are reminded that writing is a visual medium.

The approach to this discussion is two-pronged: the first explores the graphic use of citations and references to other works of art as proposed by Omar Calabrese, and the second approach investigates the visual ways in which Kozer, Kamenzain, and Espina create descriptive Neobaroque images through poetic language.

Calabrese's use of the Neobaroque citation as an instrument for rewriting the past is useful as a means for understanding how these poets renew the past, "not as a form of

reproducing it but by working with the forms and contents of the past, scattered as though in a kind of warehouse, the artist restores ambiguity, density, and opaqueness, relating its aspects and significations to the present” (179). Referring to this operation as a kind of “shifting” means it does so by endowing an element from the past with a modern meaning or, alternatively, endowing a contemporary element with a meaning from the past (180).

Neobaroque citations that are ambiguous can produce an effect of truthfulness, or they have a falsifying effect, or they may possibly be true; each is undecidable and in some way suspended or distorted (178). Depending on the context of the citation, Kozer, Kamenszain, and Espina expand their repertoire of devices to include references to visual images that take poetic language to a new visual dimension. In “Cuando incluso el tiempo está de más,” Espina refers to Pieter Brueghel’s painting of Icarus (Landscape with the Fall of Icarus) in which the painter depicts Icarus falling from the sky into the water:

En el cuadro de Brueghel, Ícaro cae y  
con él en la caída aprende de memoria  
a morir por un pensamiento incumplido.

The subject of the poem, based on the fall of Icarus while still alive, and the death of the poet’s mother, suggests the his search for a new certainty in which desire and memory seek answers to clarify what is now lost and forgotten. The reference to an iconic visual image expressed in selectively chosen words produces a musicality that, when combined with visuality, works together to extend the use of language. With the image of the fall in mind but with the ambiguity of the lines “y con él en la caída

aprende de memoria a morir por un pensamiento incumplido,” the reader is left to create her own interpretation of the poet’s search for a way to speak about death.

The second perspective results from the use of language and images found in Neobaroque poems that create a visually colored world through language in motion. The formal properties of Neobaroque are often best viewed as with film on screen, in a horizontal manner, by which the storyline of the poem begins to expand in various directions. Albert Chillón<sup>110</sup> writes that, “[e]n su función simbólica,” “el lenguaje no sólo nombra y designa, sino que alude y sugiere”... “No es sólo concepto racional, sino imagen y sensación” (34). This idea suggests that the language of the Neobaroque “is” image and sensation. Affirming Chillón, Enrique Mallén adds that, “las palabras son además de ‘designaciones abstractas,’ ‘imágenes sensoriales’: que el lenguaje tiene ‘una naturaleza audiovisual.’”<sup>111</sup> Citing further from Chillón:

Ha de aclararse, no obstante, que las palabras no son “imágenes icónicas”, sino “imágenes mentales”. El vocablo “imagen” es, sin duda, mucho más complejo de lo que a primera vista parece (Lat. *imago* “imagen, idea, representación mental”); nótese que en latín, *idolum* vuelve a significar “imagen”; y en griego, *idea* se define como “imagen ideal de un objeto.” (34)

It is this “audiovisual” image created through Neobaroque poetics in the hands of talented poets that stimulates the mind of the reader, as with images in a visual work of

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<sup>110</sup> From Enrique Mallén, linguistics scholar and General-Editor of the *On-Line Picasso Project*, Professor Mallén, has written much on the visual aspects of the Neobaroque in his works *Con/figuración sintáctica: Poesía del des/lenguaje* (2002), *Poesía del lenguaje de T.S. Eliot a Eduardo Espina* (2008), and *Antología crítica del la poesía del lenguaje* (2009).

<sup>111</sup> From *Antología Crítica*: 33.

art. Bruce Stiehm<sup>112</sup> coins the terms “imagen multivalente” y “oración calidoscópica” to refer to works by Espina (applicable to Kozer and Kamenszain) as a means to visually extend language, as the reader becomes active in the creation of new interpretations of the poems (121). It is the belief held here that the designations of “imagen multivalente” and “oración calidoscópica” are also useful for explaining how these works extend language to include the visual, as Stiehm proposes in the following:

La imagen multivalente modifica la relación entre autor, texto y lector: el autor ya no presenta una imagen cierta (aunque sutilmente oculta en la materia verbal), sino una riqueza de imágenes posibles: el texto ya no forma una evocación única de algún aspecto de la experiencia común al autor y al lector sino que ofrece una serie de puntos índices en la experiencia del lector; el lector ya no obra para reproducir un “mensaje” determinado por el autor, sino que escoge espontáneamente entre todas las posibilidades de imágenes ofrecidas para crear por sí mismo un significado “suyo” del texto. (120)

As Stiehm explains, the verbal context does not “resolve” interpretation in favor of one of many possibilities. The result is that the reader perceives a multiplicity of distinct interpretations simultaneously without the poet giving any indication as to how to choose between them. The reception process is the question of the reader’s agency, the individual’s own role and activity in participating in the pleasures of the text. No longer is the reader idle, but instead becomes a writer of the text as well, as she begins to interpret as producer/creator on a whole new level what has been created from the reading. By mimicking the cinematic montage of a camera’s focus on a particular verse; by experiencing the visual aspects of a familiar painting in the context of the poet’s

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<sup>112</sup> Quotations are from Bruce Stiehm’s article, “Imagen multivalente y oración calidoscópica en la poesía de Eduardo Espina.”

description; by imagining the melodic tones and rhythms of a musical piece in a poet's lyrical style, the reader is given the agency to interpret the text in a multi-sensorial dimension. Stiehm explains that "Oración calidoscópica":

...comienza con procesos sintácticos aparentemente normales, llevando así el lector al intento de descifrar el texto por procedimientos convencionales. Sin embargo, la oración se alarga, una función anticipada se convierte en otra incongruente y la ilación de imágenes continúa, con solo un apoyo esporádico y equívoco del marco sintáctico. El efecto de pasar repentinamente de imagen en imagen, sin procesar un significado que las una.  
(121)

Stiehm describes Espina's poetics as the process in which a simulacrum of syntax uses sub-sentential structures to create sentences that give the impression of syntactic units yet extend illogically and inconsistently into the next sentence. Stiehm compares Espina's poems with drawings of Escher in which the same process occurs. Stiehm concludes, "[v]er el mundo a través de esta clase de oración es como mirar un calidoscopio, en donde el cambio es continuo pero impredecible, sin principio y sin fin" (121).

The term "difficult," as it relates to poetry, is the primary focus of George Steiner's essay "On Difficulty" as he examines why certain poems are so difficult to understand. Steiner breaks difficulty into four types: *contingent*, *modal*, *tactical*, and *ontological*. *Contingent* difficulty, Steiner explains, is referential, having mostly to do with obscure references, unknown words and lexical issues. For the reader, at some time, in some place, the difficulty can be resolved. *Modal* difficulties consist of a fundamental peculiarity or strangeness, impossible to understand even after having parsed the

elements of the phrase. In this form of difficulty, there still exists an opaqueness that prevents the understanding of the rationale of the poem's being.

With *tactical* difficulties (exemplified by Kozer, Kamenszain, and Espina), a poem can become obscure with the purpose “to charge with supreme intensity and genuineness of feeling a body of language, to 'make new' his text in the most durable sense of illuminative, penetrative insight” (34). The available language at the disposal of all poets originates in common usage, in which they, following Steiner, “create new words and syntactical modes, reanimate lexical and grammatical resources, create neologisms, work to undermine, through distortion, through hyperbolic argument, through elision and displacement, the banal and constricting determinations of ordinary, public syntax” (35).

Steiner classifies *ontological* difficulty differently from the other types of difficulty named, as it is based on the most essential of life's questions—the ones that cannot be referenced. Steiner names this category *ontological* due to the fact that this type of difficulty implicates the functions of language and of the poem as a communicative performance, placing into question the existential suppositions that lie behind poetry (41). Much like Eduardo Espina's *syntactic thought*, *ontological* difficulties confront the reader with incomprehensible questions about the nature of human speech, the status of significance, and the necessity and purpose of the construct as a poem (41). The *ontological* difficulty of Kozer's, Kamenszain's, and Espina's poems lies in the essential questions surrounding life and loss and is expressed through poems that question the boundaries of language.

As an author as well as reader of difficult poems, Charles Bernstein also has written on the subject of difficulty, offering to the reader a few suggestions for how to overcome this problem as such. In *Attack of the Difficult Poems: Essays and Inventions* (2011), Bernstein proposes that it is the presence of the following devices that make certain works difficult: “a high level of syntactic, grammatical, or intellectual activity; an elevated linguistic intensity; certain textual irregularities; initial withdrawal poem not immediately available; poor adaptability [a poem that is unsuitable for use in love letters, memorial commemoration, etc.]; and sensory overload or negative mood” (4). Bernstein’s ideas on the reading of difficult poetry and the resultant aesthetic pleasure experienced by the reader will be a reminder to the reader throughout this study, for it expresses the significance of poetry to take us beyond the ordinary, as well as “difficult,” experiences we face in life.

As the boundaries of the written text are extended through mimetic qualities, the recipient is drawn into a reading based on her appeal to a particular media presence, allowing for a choice of aesthetic interpretations. Stiehm’s designations of “imagen multivalente” and “oración calidoscópica” to describe the use of Neobaroque techniques such as internal rhyme, word-games and repetitions, distortions and transformation of sounds and morphemes, musicality, the unexpected combinations of words, the intertextuality and references to other works. In addition suggestions by George Steiner and Charles Bernstein for understanding difficulty, along with the extreme use metaphor and metonymy are all used by Kozler, Kamenzain, and Espina to extend language into



the realm of the visual, and in so doing, make the intellectual study of image and verse the focus instead of emotion.

### “El Más Allá”

The last key area in which anti-sentimentality works as a means to diffuse sentimental notions of grief is found within the questioning of an afterlife. In our postmodern times with the shock of social fragmentation, advances in technology, and political and financial upheaval around the world, many intellectuals, including poets, writers and artists of all mediums, are bound to feel a connection with an age which puts Donne’s phrase “new philosophy call[ed] all into doubt”<sup>113</sup> to good use. As Kozer, Kamenszain, and Espina face the loss of the Mother, their reaction is recorded within the words of their poems, leading each to examine what lies beyond, not only for the parent, but for the poet as well. Russell Shorto’s<sup>114</sup> eloquent quote sums up this proposition as it enlightens the reader on the dualism of the human condition:

We are all philosophers because our condition demands it. We live every moment in a universe of seemingly eternal thoughts and ideas, yet simultaneously in the constantly churning and decaying world of our bodies and their humble situations. We are graced with a godlike ability to transcend time and space in our minds but we are chained to death. The result is a nagging need to find meaning. This is where the esoteric “mind-body problem” of philosophy professors becomes meaningful to us all, where it translates into tears and laughter. (250–251)

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<sup>113</sup> *NPEP*: 37.

<sup>114</sup> *Descartes Bones: A Skeletal History of the Conflict Between Faith and Reason* (2008).

The parallel between the Baroque metaphysical poets of the sixteenth century and the twenty-first century poets Kozer, Kamenszain, and Espina is built on the belief that this triumvirate of poetic voices has established, as did their predecessors, the conviction that poetry is created through the use of a rational approach to emotion and death. It is this rationality that is reflected in the anti-sentimental poems on death found in this study.

Derived from the Greek *meta ta physika* (“after the things in nature”),<sup>115</sup> metaphysical refers to an idea, doctrine, or posited reality outside of human sense perception. In modern philosophical terminology, metaphysics refers to the studies of what cannot be reached through objective studies of material reality and uses broad concepts to help define reality outside of human sense perception. Metaphysical studies generally seek to explain inherent or universal elements of reality that are not easily explained in our everyday life. Therefore, metaphysical studies use logic based on the meaning of human terms, rather than a logic tied to human sense perception of the objective world.

*The PEPP*<sup>116</sup> defines metaphysical poetry as a term frequently applied to seventeenth-century English poets, including John Donne, George Herbert, Andrew Marvell, Richard Crashaw, Henry Vaughn, and Thomas Traherne, to name a few. Distinguished by its imaginative use of the metaphor and its stylistic obscurity (870), the study of spiritual subjects was done so through an intellectual and philosophical

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<sup>115</sup> For more on this topic, see metaphysical—<http://www.counterbalance.org/>.

<sup>116</sup> *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*. (2112).

approach. The metaphysical poets mentioned above used their prosaic talent to surprise the reader, offering a new perspective through the use of paradoxical images, subtle argument, inventive syntax, and imagery from art, philosophy, and religion as an extended metaphor known as a conceit. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, interest in metaphysical poetry weakened due to the opposition of ideas, which were seen to violate both nature and decorum. The Augustan poets John Dryden and Samuel Johnson reproved these poets for their "unnaturalness" (871). However, in the twentieth century, T.S. Eliot reexamines the metaphysical poets, writing that:

The possible interests of a poet are unlimited; the more intelligent he is the better; the more intelligent he is the more likely that he will have interests; our only condition is that he turn them into poetry, and not merely meditate on them poetically. A philosophical theory, which has entered into poetry, is established, for its truth or falsity in one sense ceases to matter, and its truth in another sense is proved. The poets in question have, like other poets, various faults. But they were at best, engaged in the task of trying to find the verbal equivalent for states of mind and feeling.<sup>117</sup>

While metaphysical poetry can be seen as an indistinct term, what has survived is the appreciation of the diversity, creativity, intricacy, and originality of the metaphysical mode. Important to this research subject is the lasting quality of the tradition, and as a result, the metaphysical tradition has continued to influence poets like Eliot in the twentieth century and Kozer, Kamenzain, and Espina into the twenty-first. Each of

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<sup>117</sup> Eliot's review of Grierson's anthology "The Metaphysical Poets" in the *Time Literary Supplement* (Oct. 20, 1921) praises metaphysical poetry, finding in its "conjunction of thought and feeling" and that it had not suffered the "disassociation of sensibility" that afflicted neoclassical, romantic, and Victorian poetry. *PEPP*: 871.

these poets demonstrates a questioning attitude in their poems toward what lies beyond for those they mourn.

Connecting the “metaphysical” with the Baroque, Elaine Hoover (1978)<sup>118</sup> attributes Frank J. Warnke<sup>119</sup> with clarifying this distinction. In his theory, Warnke asserts that as a designation of a period, “Baroque” refers not to a precisely definable style but a cluster of related styles (xv), of which the metaphysical is one. As Baroque and metaphysical poetry frequently take God as their subject, in comparing John Donne with Francisco Quevedo, we see strong Christian themes in the works by both poets. Hoover writes, “the contemplation of death not only saturates their love poetry, but is also a dominant theme in their religious poetry” (xiv).

Both Baroque and metaphysical poetry spiritualize all aspects of life, death, and love within the time frame of existence. Death’s omnipotence is perhaps the most common of themes and was articulated directly or indirectly through the conviction of life’s inherent value and the value of the final phase of that process. Quevedo’s poem 492, entitled “Laméntese, muerta Lisa, de la vida, que le impide el seguirla,” expresses the poet’s anguish at death’s power to destroy the best that life has to offer. In the first quatrain, Quevedo recognizes this inevitability and the impartiality it shares with the universe as he questions the moment of his own death:

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<sup>118</sup> *John Donne and Francisco de Quevedo: Poets of Love and Death*. Hoover makes the claim that Quevedo in Spain and Donne in England are perhaps respectively the most important poets on the subject of death.

<sup>119</sup> *European Metaphysical Poetry* (1961) and *Versions of Baroque* (1972)

¿Cuándo aquel fin a mí vendrá forzoso,  
pues por todas las vidas se pasea,  
que tanto el desdichado le desea  
y que tanto le teme el venturoso?

Quevedo's sonnet expresses no fear of death, only the need to seek beyond the realm of the living for that which has been lost, his much-loved Lisi. The capacity to maintain contradictory views as equally valid interpretations of reality reflects the Baroque manifestation of humanity as it casts into doubt the way people had always perceived the world. This preoccupation is reflected in Baroque and metaphysical poetics through the play with imagery and metaphorical conceit.

The condition of some form of spiritual foundation resided for each poet in conventional religion. As part of their religious formation, at a young age, Kozer and Kamenzain were raised in the doctrine of Judaism, whose discourse is based on the conviction that death is the end, as Kozer describes, "...it is done, kaput. It's nothing beyond that, when they say well you rest in peace, you don't rest, there's no peace in death, there is nothing, there's absolutely nothing, this is a conviction."<sup>120</sup> What Kozer means by nothing, takes on a different connotation in this thesis. Similar to Kozer, for Kamenzain death means, "[u]no se muere y listo, no? No tiene esta cosa como ilusoria, y yo no la tengo tampoco."<sup>121</sup> However, this statement does not prevent the poet from making an effort to communicate in the hereafter with her mother.

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<sup>120</sup> Appendix A.

<sup>121</sup> Appendix B.

As will be shown in this dissertation, Kozer's use of the term *nothingness*, takes on a different connotation as a result of the influence Zen Buddhism has had on his perspective of the afterlife. Similar to Kozer, Kamenzain grew up with the belief that with death, "[u]no se muere y listo, no? No tiene esta cosa como ilusoria, y yo no la tengo tampoco."<sup>122</sup> However, this statement does not prevent each poet from making an effort to comunicate with those lost to the hereafter. The contradiction between Kozer's and Kamenzain's traditional religious beliefs and their faith in poetry as purpose is expressed by both poets through the voices of their parents. Kozer's practice of Zen Buddhism and Kamenzain's use of *espiritismo* each surface in poems that use the voice of the father to represent Jewish beliefs, while the voice of the mother represents the poetic word as that which allows them to go beyond the strict discourse of their conventional beliefs.

Espina's faith, on the other hand, originates within Catholicism, and places great emphasis on language as a form of communication with the deceased. Espina explains further this proposal, supported by his statement that, "in the beginning was the word, in the end is the word, that is very Catholic."<sup>123</sup> The metaphysical aspects of mortality and the afterlife affect each poet's mourning poetry in unique ways that go beyond these brief descriptions, and will be thoroughly examined in the following chapters. Whether as a contradiction or extension of these statements, each poet deal's with existence or nonexistence of an authority beyond their own to make sense of death.

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<sup>122</sup> Appendix B.

<sup>123</sup> Appendix C.

Over the last two decades, there can be seen in contemporary North American literature a shift in and growth toward an Eastern influence in Zen Buddhist poetry. This interest in Zen thought and practice has not been seen since the Beat Generation, when poets such as Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Phillip Whalen, and Diane di Prima began using Buddhist ideas in their writings. This return is particularly noted among the post-language poets, who are combining the spirituality of Zen with the aesthetic of poetry, resulting in original modes of creative construction.

José Kozer has found an interest in Zen poetry and the philosophy of this experimental poetics by concentrating on the metaphysical links between Zen and writing. Important to Kozer is the idea of an amplified state of mind that requires very focused and concentrated practice in which the poet lets go of the ego, human intentions, and complications in order to simply allow the poem to come into its own art form through this mindful phenomenon. As a mode of spirituality, Zen Buddhism is highly reliant on the individual as it is primarily non-dogmatic. Enlightening states of mind can be experienced in a multitude of ways; each journey is unique and irreproducible (Lazer 54). In addition to the influences of Baroque and metaphysical poetry, the conventional forms of religious upbringing that include Judaism and Catholicism, and the Eastern voice of Zen Buddhism, the sublime plays a large part in Kozer, Kamenzain, and Espina's questioning attitudes regarding the function of life and death.

### *The Historical Sublime*

The Tate Britain's launch of the exhibit *The Sublime Object: Nature, Art and Language*<sup>124</sup> has done much to disseminate information on the often-evasive meaning of the sublime, pointing out that writings such as those of the classical author Dionysius Longinus and Edmund Burke, as well as other artists and writers on art, have discussed the issue of the sublime for over four hundred years. The sublime in art, as Nigel Llewellyn suggests, starts with Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry* (1757).<sup>125</sup> Before this, the sublime was considered a notion that applied only to rhetoric. However, Llewellyn points out that, the sublime in this period was very much concerned with the potential power of style and composition in the visual arts as much as in language, though it has yet been applied to nature.

Longinus claimed that while some works possess the quality of the sublime, others do not. Outlining these specific qualities in "On the Sublime," Longinus's sublimity is a quality that transcends generic boundaries, finding its source in drama or epic or lyric—or even rhetoric or history or theology. Longinus defines the Sublime as that quality within a discourse that produces "not persuasion but transport" [*ekstasis*] within the audience. Questioning whether there is such an art, he queries whether it is purely a matter of inspiration or whether there are basic principles at work.

Further along in his work, Longinus speaks as to what happens when those faults in literature that result from trying for the sublime miss their mark. These are faults, he

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<sup>124</sup> Nigel Llewellyn, "Project overview," August 2012, in Nigel Llewellyn and Christine Riding (eds.), *The Art of the Sublime*.

<sup>125</sup> Nigel Llewellyn in "Project overview," in *The Art of the Sublime*, January (2013).



concludes, of commission that result from trying too hard. In the remainder of his essay, he successively treats the five sources (beyond language itself) of the sublime; in order, they include high thoughts, second, strong passions (not included but promised in a separate treatise), both of which are innate within the artist; rhetorical figures; then noble diction; and finally, elevated composition, all of which are the product of art and must be learned.

The sublime is most often associated with all-powerful nature, something of the magnitude that evokes awe and terror that is beyond our grasp. The sublime is incongruous with the banality of everyday life, which eventually dwarfs reason. Ultimately, the sublime is that something that cannot be represented directly. While not influential in its own time, the value of “On the Sublime” dates only from the Renaissance, being published by Francesco Robortello in 1554 and translated by Nicolas Boileau in 1674. Poets like John Dryden drew upon its central themes.

During the eighteenth century, “On the Sublime” was considered to be of great significance in opposition to the beautiful (a dichotomy treated by Edmund Burke, Immanuel Kant, and others). Alexander Pope exalted Longinus’s talents as a critic in his “Essay on Criticism,” in which he writes: “[t]hee, bold Longinus! All the Nine inspire/and bless their critic with a poet’s fire.” However, since the nineteenth century, thinkers such as Matthew Arnold in the *Study of Poetry*, Walter Pater, and most recently Mikhail Bakhtin, have revived interest in Longinus for his qualitative criticism, while the subject of the sublime has found a contemporary audience as well.

## *The Contemporary Sublime*

Julian Bell<sup>126</sup> claims that the term *sublime* has been heavily employed in art writing over the past twenty years, perhaps, he points out, “too heavily, it may be.” In danger of losing a coherent meaning, references have been made from all angles. New ways of describing the sublime include “the techno-sublime,”<sup>127</sup> “the eco-sublime,”<sup>128</sup> “the Gothic sublime”<sup>129</sup> and “the suburban sublime,”<sup>130</sup> “anything from volcanoes and vitrines to still lives and soft toys may be sniffed at for sublimity.”<sup>131</sup> To date, there appears to be no cohesive theory as to what a “Neobaroque sublime” would entail, leaving this area open to continued research. Roberto Echavarren in the prologue to *Medusario* refers to Immanuel Kant’s ideas on the sublime as it exceeds the limits of the Baroque:

La contrafigura del devenir en el barroco no es el ser, sino un límite, y el intento sublime por sobrepasarlo. Es un límite de intensidad o resistencia más allá del cual el impacto agravia el sensorio, la atención se desconcentra, las impresiones se confunden. Si la fortuna de la metafísica se ve quebrantada por el descubrimiento de los escépticos griegos en el siglo XVI, la estética moderna está condicionada por el descubrimiento, a fines del mismo siglo, de un fragmento griego anónimo acerca de lo

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<sup>126</sup> Julian Bell, “Contemporary Art and the Sublime,” in Nigel Llewellyn and Christine Riding (eds.), *The Art of the Sublime*.

<sup>127</sup> Bell’s example is from the 2005 exhibition of that name at the University of Colorado.

<sup>128</sup> Bell’s example is the essay of that name by Vijay Mishra, in Simon Morley (ed.), *The Sublime: Documents of Contemporary Art*, London (2010).

<sup>129</sup> Bell’s example is Lee Rozelle’s, *Ecosublime: Environmental Awe from New World to Oddworld*, Tuscaloosa, Alabama (2006).

<sup>130</sup> Bell’s example is the photographer’s website <http://www.jeremyhogan.name/portfolio/11/military-industrial-shopping-complex>, accessed 18 September (2012).

<sup>131</sup> From Bell’s “Contemporary Art and the Sublime” (2013).

sublime. Kant lidia con ambos aspectos: la crítica del conocimiento del juicio estético o bello sublime. El juicio estético marca diferencias según un imperativo absoluto de espontaneidad.

Marcos Wasem in *Barroso y sublime: poética para Perlongher* (2008)

synthesizes various theories including those by Kant, Derrida, and others, which take the sublime beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, Wasem's description of sublime tendencies, including the absolute, the infinite, chaos, emptiness, and the abyss all resonate in the poems by Kozer, Kamenszain and Espina. Wassam adds that these labels have a special mode of presence as they generate and reject attraction and rejection as well as pain and pleasure at the same time (32).

One theory that falls under the bigger questions related to life, death, and the beyond is that of Gilles Deleuze, who, in *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (1993), uses the description of baroque "folds" to recall Gottfried Leibniz's description of the monadic logic of the universe. Following this logic, each monad or fold exists as a logical entity, while it also belongs to a grander whole. As one section of the galaxy opens up, it links serially into another section, and still another. In this way, everything connects seamlessly, creating a complex interconnectedness to the system as a whole.

As Leibniz proposes, human beings themselves will abandon their singularity to eventually become one with the universe "as the property of stardust (xi)."<sup>132</sup> The series of monadic folds eventually creates a complex unity made up of dualities of the individual/the cosmos, the fragment/the whole—but only after the witness has traveled the junctions of creases that fold and unfold like a labyrinth to reveal new possibilities at

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<sup>132</sup> Quoted from Angela Ndalianis's Foreword to *Baroque Tendencies in Contemporary Art*: (2007).

each turn.

The fold derives from Deleuze's advancement of a materialist metaphysics that potentially differs as the original and ongoing movement of the universe. This process, referred to as actualization, occurs when a single potential (singularity) is selected from the virtual and made concrete. Deleuze's concept of the cosmos as "an origami universe" follows a folding and unfolding whereby explosions of difference are followed by selection and accretion, only to expand again. So goes the movement of life, and the example of organisms, which internalize small aspects of their milieu until they no longer need those aspects of the milieu to survive.

In summary, the analysis of works by Kozer, Kamenzain, or Espina will be executed accordingly to Deleuze's concepts which are 1) open-ended and inexhaustive, with the potential to differ and grow despite an evident consistency of operation; 2) non-exclusive and unlimited (every application is creative, generative, and an ongoing process that allows alternate routes to be taken, as every actualization enables counter-actualizations); and 3) exist in exteriority to one another and are therefore infinite. Deleuze's form of criticism offers a vast framework for scholars establishing interdisciplinary connections between literature and visual arts. The use of the Baroque fold, along with metaphysics, Zen Buddhism, and the sublime will all be considered as a means of exploring life beyond death in the mourning poems of Kozer, Kamenzain, and Espina.

Kozer, Kamenzain, and Espina are three poets who have steadily situated a Baroque rationality as part of their poetics. Each poet writes contemporary poetry that

addresses the issues of our current times, without sentimental tactics to exaggerate the emotional aspects of their complexities. The questions and concerns surrounding death's omnipotence are for Kozer, Kamenzain, and Espina articulated directly or indirectly through poems that mark the conviction of life's inherent value and the value of the final phase of the living, dying progression. Their poems possess a sublime quality within a discourse that transports the reader beyond emotional concerns to a higher level of thinking and understanding that unfolds the labyrinth we call life.

The framework for anti-sentimentality to be used in the next chapters to analyze poems by Kozer, Kamenzain, and Espina has revealed four principal areas in which anti-sentimentality works as a means to diffuse the emotions surrounding grief, including ideas from the fields of language, memory, visual imagery, and the metaphysical. Each of these four areas contains sub-areas that highlight in detail the overall structure of this framework. As was noted, while some of the representative structures were found within Neobaroque poetics, others were found to be from other frames of reference.

Within the area of language technology, the presentation of the various linguistic and semantic tools utilized by Kozer, Kamenzain, and Espina to discharge the emotional subject matter of mourning were discussed, including the self-referential properties of poetry and the ways in which syntactic and semantic indeterminacy function. The use of humor to foil the effects of grief was explored by presenting a general overview of humor theory, followed by the examination of the Neobaroque devices of carnivalization, parody, and irony (and related forms of wit) as a means of

channeling sentiment away from the emotional and toward the real of the intellect. The relationship between *cursi*, *kitsch*, and sentimentality as a poetic device was established in order to examine how Kozer, Kamenszain, and Espina use the codes of “family language” to discuss these relationships and their resultant loss. And lastly, within the area of language technology, *ostranenie* or defamiliarization was presented as useful to change the reader’s habits of perception by interrupting the process of mourning.

The next section on memory and mourning included ideas based on the discipline of literature. In *The Future of Nostalgia*, Svetlana Boym’s search for an understanding of nostalgia’s role in modern civilization, its relevance to memory, and the literary and artistic landscapes it inhabits was examined. Evelyne Ender’s claim that remembrance is an act of imagination created by the introspection of past events was developed. Gaston Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space* elaborates on the meaning of spaces that poetry examines, emphasizing the interior of domestic spaces. Its elements showed the house to be the quintessential phenomenological object and the place where personal experience reaches its epitome. And lastly, Suzanne Nalbantian’s work showed clinical proof that life experience is relevant to the artist’s work and marks an undeniable link between author and text.

Visualizing the difficult established a two-pronged approach toward the advancement that poetic language is extended through a visual component. In so doing, Kozer, Kamenszain, and Espina move their poems toward an anti-sentimental approach to death by creating a space in which to re-imagine and re-configure mortality. The first

perspective is the use of Omar Calabrese's Neobaroque citation as an instrument for rewriting the past, shown as a useful means for understanding how the poet is able to renew it, not as a form of reproducing what has elapsed, but by working with forms and contents that restore ambiguity, density, and opaqueness, and relating its aspects and significations to the present. (179). The second perspective results from the use of language and images found in Neobaroque poems that create a visually colored world through language in motion. The terms "imagen multivalente" and "oración calidoscópica" were found to be a useful means to visually extend language, as the reader becomes active in the creation of new interpretations of the poems.

The final key area in which anti-sentimentality works as a means to diffuse the emotions of grief is found within the questioning of the philosophical purpose of life in opposition to the transitory nature of human existence. Here, parallels were drawn between the Baroque metaphysical poets of the sixteenth century and the twenty-first century poets Kozer, Kamenzain, and Espina, in the conviction that poetry is created through the use of a rational approach to emotion and death. It is this rationality that is reflected in their anti-sentimental poems on death. The interest in Zen poetry and philosophy, along with conventional forms of religion, including Judaism and Catholicism, were also examined as relevant to each poet. And finally, the sublime's historical and contemporary roots were investigated, including ideas like those of Gilles Deleuze in which he proposes that the complex unity of our galaxy is made up of dualities of the individual/the cosmos, the fragment/the whole that fold and unfold like a labyrinth to reveal new possibilities at each turn.

## CHAPTER IV

### JOSÉ KOZER: A POET'S IMAGINATIVE MEMORY

José Kozer, awarded the 2013 Pablo Neruda Ibero-American Prize for Poetry,<sup>133</sup> is the author of more than sixty books of poetry, many of which have been included in some of the most important anthologies in the world. In giving this award, the jury stated that Kozer's "vast and distinctive work stands out for its innovation, passion and devotion to the craft" and praised his "multilayered poems as an expression of the intricacies of memory, family history, multiculturalism, and the transforming experience of exile."<sup>134</sup> This praise for Kozer's technique and subject matter is indicative of the ideas analyzed in this chapter. Mourning begins for the poet with the death of his father in *Carece de causa* (1988) and is followed by poems mourning the death of his mother in *ACTA* (2010). Kozer's conviction in the significance he places on the relationship between life, death, and mourning is portrayed in these two books through his eloquent and impassioned poetic voice.

Kozer's first experience with death was life changing when at the age of sixteen he witnessed the death of his maternal grandfather from lung cancer. Close to his

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<sup>133</sup> This award was presented to Kozer by Chilean President Sebastián Piñera on Friday, July 12, 2013 which is the birthday of Nobel-prize winning poet Pablo Neruda, one of the world's most acclaimed poets. Established in 2004 for the centennial of Neruda, the award honors a lifetime contribution to poetry. It has been received by Nicanor Parra, Juan Gelman, and Ernesto Cardenal, among others. Posted by Iván Remeseria for NBCLatino @ <http://nbclatino.com/2013/07/12/revered-new-york-poet-wins-coveted-latin-american-prize/07/12/2013>.

<sup>134</sup> Posted in Poetry News by Harriet Staff of The Poetry Foundation <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet/2013/07/jose-kozer-wins-pablo-neruda-ibero-american-poetry-prize/07/12/2013>.



grandfather, Kozer observed from a distance the ritualistic practices of preparing his deceased body for the death journey. Watching the naked corpse, prone upon a large wooden table, as the female mourners wailed and beat their chests to alleviate their grief, affected the young Kozer in an emotional and primitive way. This experience was to leave an imprint on the poet/son's memory that over time would evoke emotions that he believes to have been the catalyst for his avocation as a poet.<sup>135</sup>

Years later, upon the death of his father, Kozer generated powerful and thought-provoking poetry to his memory in *Carece de causa*. One of Kozer's best-known books of poetry, and often argued as his best work, *Carece de causa* plants the seed of the description of his father's death that would be completed six years later in *ACTA* with the death of his mother. Noticeable within "La Dádiva" is the poet's reverence for religious ceremonies and traditions, while the point of departure in the poem is the theme of death. Features of Kozer's life, along with that of his father's, reside in exquisite verses in such a way as to leave open endless possibilities for understanding the multifarious subject of mourning:

Nací en la casa del moribundo su cadáver está  
extenuado: no lo sacudo más, se  
apaciguó. (109)

The focus of the poem on the phases of his father's life, from a strong and virtuous man to that of a wasting and decomposing corpse, becomes the subject of the death of his mother in *ACTA*. One theme to be considered in both books is the cycle of

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<sup>135</sup> Kozer expresses this idea in an interview conducted in January 2011. See Appendix A for complete interview. Designated hereafter as [Appendix A].

life and death and the construction and destruction of the body. Compelling verses from “La Dádiva” that exemplify this idea, “el óvalo de su cabeza rapada se ajó,” “Un batracio antiquísimo, el cadáver,” and “No está mermado: las moscas lo mordisquean,” are tendered as evidence to support the notion that what was begun in *Carece de causa* is expanded upon in *ACTA*.

Kozer’s obsession with death is a recognizable theme in his poetry and has been written on and discussed, not only by Kozer himself, but by scholars such as Aida Heredia and Jacobo Sefamí, among others.<sup>136</sup> The poet points out “there is hardly a poem I have written in which death is not mentioned one way or another,”<sup>137</sup> as he makes clear the fact that the fear of death runs in his family. [This phenomenon, Kozer notes, runs true for the male members, yet has never been a question of concern for the female members.] Kozer points out the imprint this “living contradiction” has left on his life: on the one hand, the deeply religious beliefs in God and the questioning of an afterlife, and on the other, the fear of death his elders have lived with day in and day out. However, as I will make clear, the poet’s fear of death is replaced by his faith in the poetic word, which then allows him to go beyond the strict discourse of his conventional belief.

These personal and cultural experiences, as well as this great contradiction of a highly religious yet fearful perspective toward death, trigger a range of emotions for the poet, igniting within him the stirrings of his calling as a means of answering these

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<sup>136</sup> For more on death in Kozer’s works, see Aída Heredia (1994).

<sup>137</sup> Appendix A.

questions. As mentioned, for the poet/son, the death of the Father as the central theme of *Carece de causa* has become more exacting in nature with the death of the Mother, the focus in *ACTA*. The two works, much as with Deleuze's folding, are independent but connected as they materialize poetic form into "expressive matter" (34).

Kozer's mourning poems are songs transmitted to the poet through the distant voices of his father and mother subsequent to their deaths. The emotional voice in his poems is that of his mother in *ACTA* "Voy a poner / la mesa. Con el pañuelo a cuadros de cabeza. Pantuflas. / El delantal floreado" while the philosophical voice of *Carece de causa* is that of his father, "El dedo de mi abuelo Isaac o Ismael o rey ahora sin / nombre o de nombre Katz o de / nombre Lev o corazón de Juda / (señala) la palabra donde se detuvo / la recta maraña de las palabras, rey extranjero." The poet's weaving of the defamiliarized voices and echoes of his parents allows the emotion of the intellect and the emotion of feeling to blend naturally in poems as a way for him to remember his parents and to keep them alive through his poetry.<sup>138</sup>

As a result of the analysis of the mourning poetry found in *ACTA*, the reader is led to understanding more thoroughly how Kozer expresses the consciousness of our world in a way that thoroughly touches the reader on an emotional as well as an intellectual level. Correspondingly, Kozer's poems present a vision of a more universal and precise way of dealing with death, the insight brilliant poetry confers to the reader when it possesses the ability to speak on a subject that affects us all.

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<sup>138</sup> Appendix A.

## Kozer's Aesthetics of Sensibility

Kozer validates complex language as a tool to be utilized in dealing with the complex and “unsentimental” issue of death: “It is an unsentimental issue, it happens to everyone, how can you become sentimental about this? So you need a complex and unsentimental language to deal with it.”<sup>139</sup> In *S/N: NewWorldPoetics*<sup>140</sup> Kozer explains his perspective on sentimentality and the Neobaroque, which exemplify my central argument that he prescribes to an anti-sentimental approach of expression through poetry:

...I would like to say that in our poetry we avoid sentimentality, that “hardly ever falls into the vaguely sentimental, the opportunistic sentimental, the nationalistic sentimental (patriotic gore) that pretends to enlighten and move to tears. Many linear Latin American poets fall into sentimentality, the rhetoric’s and verbosity of sentimentality, which placing open the right hand on the heart reeks to tears. On the other hand, the *Neobaroque* poet hardly ever falls for sentimentality, and when used, it’s for the purpose of debunking, which is achieved through irony and parody. (19)

Not allowing sentimentality to enter his verse begins by not allowing what the poet refers to as *la caída retórica*, the rhetorical “stuff,”<sup>141</sup> to overpower a poem. Thus, while all poets resort to rhetorical devices to manipulate language, for Kozer, it is important that overuse does not prevent effective transmission of the message to a reader. The cause of this “rhetorical fall” for Kozer is the poet’s failure to correctly

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<sup>139</sup> Appendix A.

<sup>140</sup> V.1,N.1. 2010.

<sup>141</sup> Appendix A.

construct a poem, and if often found at the end of the poem, he points out “where the poet is unable to solve the poem.” Kozer stresses the importance of saying something “in a different way, in a new way, in a more complex way, so that it means something forever.”<sup>142</sup> Seen as the dividing point between a good poem and a not so good or “lousy” poem, sentimentality for Kozer includes the poet’s inability to solve a poem geometrically, as Mallarmé strove to accomplish through the formal precision of the verse. The sentimentality in this case, according to Kozer, results when the poet lowers his standards by taking “the easy way out” instead of solving the poem.

Kozer’s ingenious approach to mourning, designated as his *aesthetics of sensibility*, results from two distinct but interconnected strategies<sup>143</sup> found within *ACTA*. The first approach predominantly focuses on language as it is used to describe the process of mourning and is referred to as the aesthetic of *hyper-rational art*. *Hyper-rational art* challenges the rhetorical features of Kozer’s work, previously shown through the linguistic aspects of his poetry as being difficult, fragmented, and ambiguous.

Rejecting the description of the Neobaroque’s use of linguistic and stylistic aesthetics as embellishment and ornamentation, Kozer prefers to “de-categorize” and to “de-catalogue” as a way of looking at reality, claiming that language does this when “... [It] is ready to take the chance of being what language is—heavy, difficult, complex.”

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<sup>142</sup> Appendix A.

<sup>143</sup> Aesthetic is defined here as a set of principles underlying and guiding the work of a particular artist or artistic movement.

Kozer explains further: “It is a way through language of dealing with reality and the reality of death.”<sup>144</sup>

In its place, the establishment of a theorem as an idea to be accepted or proposed as a demonstrable truth, Kozer’s *hyper-rationality* puts poetry on the level of a mathematical concept, seeing that both poetry and mathematics work as an actual language to record and express the process of thinking through creative ideas. The resolution to Kozer’s poetry is found within a precise and mathematical context, of which a sentimental reaction is not generally a part of the consideration in the solving of an equation.

The second approach is based on the expressive facet of Kozer’s poetry never before formalized in his poetry, which allows for the element of emotion, and is referred to as the aesthetic of *nothingness*. This constructive means of engaging with sentiment is demonstrated through the act or process of the intellectualization of emotion, or anti-sentimentality. Kozer’s strategy of *nothingness* is found in prosaic language that focuses on negativity, absence, emptiness, and lack. Conversely, for Kozer, this “emptiness” does not represent a nihilistic perspective of complete nothingness, but instead focuses on ideas that follow Zen Buddhism’s central teaching of “Emptiness,” seen instead as the idea that emptiness does not exist as we suppose it does. In this poet’s case, emptiness is seen as the true nature of things and events.

Thusly, the misunderstanding that emptiness is an absolute reality or independent truth is avoided in Kozer’s poetry. Instead, this philosophy promotes emptiness as

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<sup>144</sup> Appendix A.

having two aspects—one negative, which we normally associate with loss. However, *nothingness* has a positive nature as well, in which emptiness is endowed with the qualities of an awakened mind. Ultimately, reality is the union of both forms. Going back to Deleuze, everything is understood as a tentative expression of one seamless fold. Known as the teaching of “Dependent Origin” in Buddhism, this perspective embraces the positive aspect of *nothingness* since all phenomena are empty of inherent characteristics; they are neither born or destroyed, but instead are all interconnected, as everything affects everything else. Everything that is *is* because other things *are*. In this way, the positive aspect of *nothingness* is lived and acted upon by a poet of eminent contemplation and wisdom by virtue of his capacity to tackle philosophical questions that give them relevance and the ingenuity to both awaken and capture the reader’s imagination.

The poet makes clear he does not look for consolation in his poems, but instead looks for poetry itself, within language that allows him to produce a poem. Through Kozer’s *aesthetics of sensibility*, his mourning poems utilize, yet diverge from, the style of the Neobaroque. This new aesthetic is founded upon the wisdom that comes from learning to live and to survive in the contemporary world and how this poet has chosen to use this wisdom to his advantage in his approach to the subject of death. In this manner, the new understanding of poetry by an exceptional poet creates a new resonance in the reader’s mind as one of the many pleasures that poetry offers.

## Deleuze's Operative Function

*ACTA* is divided into two sections. The first section includes forty-seven poems, each of which carries the title “Acta” followed by a subtitle in parenthesis that refers to the first verse of each poem. The second section of the book is named “Exeunt,” a Latin term used as a stage direction to indicate when two or more performers leave the stage. What appears at first glance to be the case of dualities,<sup>145</sup> upon further examination, becomes better understood through Deleuze’s reading of Leibniz. With the inclusion of Deleuze’s fold [in which it becomes possible to escape the binary opposition between varieties of characteristics], we see that difference becomes the norm, as opposed to difference in general.<sup>146</sup> The “operative function” of the fold is relevant to Kozer’s poems as it explains the poet’s use of the transmission of the fragmented voices of his parents to convey meaning in his poems. Folding is thus one of the central theoretical

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<sup>145</sup> As proposed by René Descartes, who believed that real distinction between parts entails separability, or theories by Hélène Cixous and Jacques Derrida on binary oppositions in which two theoretical oppositions are set against one another.

<sup>146</sup> Ideas by Deleuze help to substantiate the analysis of anti-sentimentality in the poetics of José Kozer on several levels. In the analysis of the linguistic aspects of Kozer’s poems, as with Deleuze, we see a unique style employed to express the principal ideas throughout this study. While using simple sentence structures, the same cannot be said for transparency in meaning, as sentences are built less from the structures of grammar than through the path of logic found at the edge of each sentence. Attacking the linguistic distinction that grounds Cartesian logic and following Deleuze, we see in Kozer’s prolific writing the ways in which his poetry is an expression of baroque logic, much in the way a Baroque cathedral’s highly structured appearance eclipses its function.

We see the concept of the fold [Leibniz’s idea of the pleat] as curves and twisting surfaces that allow for the rethinking of phenomena, including the production of subjectivity, as it changes the supposition of a simple interiority and exteriority [appearance and essence, surface and depth] by revealing that the inside is nothing more than a fold of the outside. Deleuze’s *The Fold* (1993) refers to the Baroque, not as an essence, but as an operative function or “trait” that endlessly creates folds to infinity. As the title of this section suggests, folding is an “operative function” or “trait” (3) of the Leibnizian Baroque, in which it serves to determine and materialize form into “expressive matter.” Deleuze differentiates two varieties of folds from, the fold of our material selves, our bodies and the folding of time and memory.



concepts explored throughout this chapter within four sections that include the Occidental/Philosophical voice of the Father, the Eastern/Emotional voice of the Mother, the Construction and Destruction of the Mother's body, the folding of Absence and Presence in the Disconnection and Indivisibility of the family unit, the Interior and Exterior spaces, and the folding of textual strategies of *cursilería* and the Sublime.

### **Eastern and Western Voices**

Ezra Pound (1885–1972) is recognized as one of the central figures of Anglo/American modernism. In 1908, he left America for Europe, settling in London, where he established himself at the heart of the capital's artistic movement. Through a friendship with W. B. Yeats, Pound discovered Japanese literature and Chinese poetry through the work of Ernest Fenellosa, an American professor in Japan. Pound's work shifted rapidly from early formal poems influenced by Provençal lyrics to the purity of his Imagist work, culminating in the free verse lyrics based on Chinese originals of *Cathay* (1915).<sup>147</sup>

Pound's fifteen poems, later increased to seventeen, changed the face of American poetry. Most of these poems originated from T'ang Dynasty poet Li Po. With little knowledge of the Chinese language, Pound's translations introduced American poets to the master poets of Buddhist and Daoist China as well as the use of tones of voice and a directness of expression that addressed how people actually speak. Arthur

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<sup>147</sup> [http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/m\\_r/pound/bio.htm](http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/m_r/pound/bio.htm).

Whaley<sup>148</sup> points out that even experienced readers with a broad exposure to the different translators of different poets will speak of intense imagery, verbal concentration, and a mystical harmony with nature as opposed to rhyme and strict form as the most salient features of Chinese verse.

*Cathay* stands as a previous approach taken by a Western poet toward an Eastern poetic art form, and is added to by Kozer within his poetic discourse. In *Antología crítica de la poesía del lenguaje*, Enrique Mallén enumerates several characteristics of oriental art and the Japanese haiku that Pound found particularly important to his own minimalist aesthetics, which can be applied to Kozer's poems in *ACTA*. Pound's interest in concision pertains to poems with minimum length and maximum intensity and helps to define Kozer's poems. Maximum intensity, as will be shown, is accomplished through a shift in voices that then produces concise stanzas. The influence of oriental spirituality as generated from what Mallén refers to as "aesthetic asceticism" places Kozer, much like Pound, at the precipice of literary time and history.

Kozer's experience with Eastern literature at the age of twenty began with Kenneth Rexroth's books on poetry and translations of Japanese and Chinese poetry, expanding the poet's range beyond Cuba. At the age of forty-five he began the move toward Oriental literature and has been doing so ever since. Kozer sees Japanese poetry as being very aesthetic: "It's the aesthetics that I love. It's the elegance I love, it's that elegance that I respect so much among the Zen practitioners or the Zen Roshi, and the

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<sup>148</sup> Whaley is Pound's contemporary and closest rival as the main interpreter of Chinese poetry in the West.

wise men of Zen Buddhism.”<sup>149</sup> Kozer acknowledges a shift from the Occidental to the Oriental as “a cleavage from the Occidental Christian Jew” of his upbringing.

The variety found in Kozer’s creative use of language challenges tradition and expands the possibilities of his artistic production, while the philosophy of Zen fits both theoretically and aesthetically with his contemporary poetics and its continued trend toward experimentalism. As a *bricoleur*, Kozer’s poetry consists of his past experiences and the opportunities he takes to renew or enhance his work with the remains of previous compositions. His exceptional poetry derives from the fact that he does not confine himself to accomplishment and execution: He speaks not only of things, but also through the medium of things, giving an account of life by the choices he makes through the poetic arrangement of possibilities.

Hank Lazer<sup>150</sup> argues that the essence of Buddhist poetry is nontotalizable, meaning that it is unable to be bound by definition as it resists the constraints of exactitude and definitiveness (9). This is due, in part, Lazer points out, to the fact that Buddhist poetry coincides with the characterization of both Neobaroque and postlanguage poets. The refusal to fit singular and identifiable categories, often radically switching forms and influences is “a tendency which makes them hard to anthologize, generalize, or critique in more than individual cases or small groups” (10). This is due in part, Lazer points out, to the fact that Zen Buddhism, as a mode of spirituality, is non-dogmatic in its reliance on the enlightened states of mind of the individual, which can be

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<sup>149</sup> Appendix A.

<sup>150</sup> From “Reflections on the Wisdom Anthology of North American Buddhist Poetry.”

experienced in a variety of ways.

Kozer points to Oriental literature, not Jewish literature, as having helped him to deal with the death of his mother, whereas the Jewish, the Biblical, and Kabbalistic masters helped him to deal with his father's death. As he explains: "There is a masculine, biblical, Jewish, harsh and definite, almost arbitrary Judeo-Christian world that allows me to mourn Grandfather or Father."<sup>151</sup> In this way, Kozer suggests, it is the Bible that represents his masculine source for poetry, while the delicacy of Oriental myths and mythology has helped him to deal with his feminine source:

...there is an Oriental, haiku delicacy or softness, a vision that is miniscule, minute, that dwells with the flower and the ambience surrounding any issue, any material, any architectural form, and any geometry, making it easier for me to channel this into dealing with Mother, her death and myself mourning her absence.<sup>152</sup>

For Kozer, poetry fills the gap between his conventional roots of Judaism and the Torah and his journey toward Eastern beliefs and Zen Buddhism. The poet feels himself to be emotionally involved now with a more Oriental type of work in which the blending of the Occidental into the Oriental is a good thing. The spirituality of Zen theoretically and aesthetically fits with Kozer's poetics and its attraction for hybridity and experimentation with such approaches. This hybridity extends as evidenced in mourning poems that utilize the voices of his mother and father to speak of these two worlds.

Freud's two drives *Thanatos* and *Eros* are present in the two voices Kozer uses in his poems. The emotional being comes from his mother, and as he put it, "her tender

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<sup>151</sup> Appendix A.

<sup>152</sup> Appendix A.

ways of being,” while the philosophical being in his poems comes from his father. For the poet, the mourning or *duelo* that permeates the issue of the living and the deceased in his poems is a blend of the two, as he explains: “The intellect protects the heart, but the heart, which is feeble and more fragile and more vulnerable, depends on the intellect to express itself so that the two of them in a state of harmony can move a poet’s vision towards a more universal and precise, accurate way of dealing with mourning, of dealing with death.”<sup>153</sup>

Deleuze compares folding or “pleating” surfaces to the overlaying folds of fabric or paper, in which the endless function of folding represents the concept of the cosmos as “an origami universe” where bursts of difference are followed by selection and accretion, only to expand again (6). With Kozer, the selection and accretion of two cultural forms, one Eastern, the other Western, is produced in his poems through the transmission of the voices of his parents, as syntactic and semantic indeterminacy place the focus on language as opposed to a more sentimental attachment to death. “Aún no inminente”<sup>154</sup> introduces the use of Buddhist concepts into Kozer’s poems:

Aún  
no inminente, primeros atisbos, no sé si semejan o  
simulan acordes. Monocordes  
Tibetanos. Mudras, mantras.  
Budas inconexos, esferas  
quebradizas, desafina  
armonios. (16)

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<sup>153</sup> Appendix A

<sup>154</sup> All translations in this dissertation are provided by Peter Boyle with the exceptions of “Aún no inminente” and “La Euménide y yo.”

The epigrammatic configuration of the opening verses fits Mallén's description as found in Pound's poetry. Among the early forms of Buddhist spoken-word artifacts is the mantra, a string of sounds used by seekers to carry one to certain realms of experience. Like contemporary poetry, the mantra places the qualities of sound at least as high as the semantic content taken from them. The repetition of sounds alternates between assonance and alliteration, "Aún, inminente, primeros, atisbos, simulan, acordes, Mudras, mantras, inconexos, esferas, quebradizas, desafina armonios" to create a continuous harmony of sounds that produce a succinct opening to the poem.

The haiku-esque simplicity of the first stanza in which each verse decreases in length from nine words to three to two and ending with the last single word "armonios" conjures the ancient quality of Eastern images and sounds. The homonym "Monocordes," from the Greek meaning literally "one string," is defined as monotonous or monotonic and refers to the emission of sounds repeated in only one note, or without variation, replicating the chain of repeated sounds, adding to its "aesthetic ascetic" simplicity. Kozer's first lines are replete with a self-referential focus on the poetic structures of the poem. The poet's emphasis on language itself, his *syntactic thought* works to manipulate the structure of language, thereby dispelling sentimentality.

The second stanza begins a shift in reference and style that folds the severe tone of the "othered" voice of the father with the "othered" feminine voice of the mother that will progress as the poem continues. The poet's words illuminate the redness of the instrumental pick that transforms into the mother's black and hardened fingernail: "El plectro está uña endurecida y negra que me pinto rojo." Images of an interior feminine

world begin to unfold one after the other. The enjambed verses fold down the page, with no punctuation or break-in ideas, as they take on a life of their own in their proliferation beyond the referent:

El  
plectro está uña endurecida y negra que me pinto rojo  
chillón, mis carnes un  
disfraz de Dios, disfrazo  
mis carnes de hurí, de  
hetaira, empleando unos  
afeites que dejó mi madre  
sobre la coqueta con la  
luna doble del cuarto de  
dormir.... (16)

The pick as a dark and brittle fingernail is a synecdoche for the mother's corpse, as its powerful imagery appeals to the reader's senses. Referencing himself as a "huri or houri" and "hetaira" [the beautiful virgins of the Koranic paradise], the poet's acoustic word choice ("faldillas, zapatillas, planteadas, brazaletes de marfil percutidos") creates a rhythmic balance emphasized by the humorous anecdotal "estoy a sentarme a depilarme (perfilar) mis cejas (oscurecerlas)." Kozer's proclivity for descriptive nouns compels the reader's eye to linger on their content, as the deftly constructed feminine image completes its transformation to a "female god" ("Parezco hembra de dios"). Kozer bumps into a crossroads when the theme of "poésie de la entre-deux" becomes part of the subtext of the poem as the poet recognizes himself in the mournful imagery of death:

Parezco hembra  
de Dios con faldillas,  
zapatillas planteadas,  
brazaletes de marfil  
percutidos, estoy a  
punto de sentarme a

depilarme (perfilar)  
mis cejas (oscurecerlas):.... (16)

The following concise verses are of maximum intensity, found in the mathematical precision of his *hyper-real art*. Kozer's emphasis on word choice multiplies the meaning given to each word. Within the form of the poem, commas separate the ideas of the first three lines, "la cuerda rota vibra aún," "el plectro extraviado yace," "estoy seguro;" and then the poetic form unfolds, "entre pliegues últimos descarnándose mi madre." The enjambment in the poem separates the preceding idea by the use of a semicolon to designate the ensuing color change to his nails: "y tengo las uñas / más ennegrecidas que hace / unos momentos." Deleuze's "expressive matter" materializes slowly as Kozer's vivid imagery of the dermal surfaces of the body unfurl in the embryo, folding upon themselves at death (Deleuze, xi):

la cuerda rota vibra aún,  
el plectro extraviado yace,  
estoy seguro, entre pliegues  
últimos descarnándose mi  
madre; y tengo las uñas  
más ennegrecidas que hace  
unos momentos. (16)

The developing imagery of the mother in the mirror and the vibration of the broken string that allows the plectrum to break create a tension that resembles what Calabrese refers to as an eccentricity as the poet exerts pressure on the margins of order in his poem. Kozer is pulled back from the dark abyss by the recognition that his blackest of nails, "...y tengo las uñas / más ennegrecidas que hace / unos momentos," describe the close proximity of his own death. His recognition of the passing of time as



the issue of his own mortality becomes a presence. The consolidation of the mother's death along with that of his own make an effectual statement that leaves the reader in awe of Kozer's *hyper-real* acumen as a poet.

The logic of Kozer's poem is transcribed through the intangibility of his thoughts into words on paper, while the twists of his mind as it unfolds in the writing process are precise. Vermeer's use of the camera obscura to make the details in geometrical images larger may be compared to Kozer's extension. There is no sentimentality as death is placed on the spiritual level of the abstract. There are only folds, as with the infinite fold between the façade and the sealed room of Deleuze's baroque house.

Continuing with previous ideas on the influence of Buddhist poetry as well as those of the Neobaroque, "Me lleno los bolsillos" demonstrates the ways in which this exceptional poet addresses sentiment through his unique ability to grasp the essence of experience. Metaphorical poetry packed with recurring cultural references create the type of difficulty Steiner refers to as *contingent*, in which unknown words and lexical issues must be clarified in order to grasp the full meaning of the verses. In building the *contingent*, the poet is able to insinuate the more complex issues of the poem, what Steiner refers to as the *ontological*. Here, the ontological lies within Kozer's questioning of life's essential meaning as it implicates the use of language within the poem and the existential suppositions behind its experience.

As a Cuban poet, a Jew, a Zen Buddhist, and a Latin American living in the United States, Kozer has made incalculable contributions to today's Latin American poetry. Among these has been the introduction of themes that blend traditions in order to

synthesize ideas and entities that have occurred throughout the ages within the Spanish language. For Kozer, this synthesis of emotions and experiences results in his encyclopedic knowledge that he expresses within his poetry. “Me lleno los bolsillos” opens with a phrase in which the mustard seed is used. The significance of the mustard seed and its connection to death is noted in multiple cultures including Eastern, Jewish, and Christian:

Me lleno los bolsillos de un sentido último parecido  
al comino a la semilla de  
mostaza. (112)

The enjambment of the first three verses is comprised of at least one *ll* consonant and/or *o* vowel in most of the words. Kozer accomplishes a harmonious balance in these verses, “un sentido último parecido al comino a la semilla mostaza,” much as with the blending the cumin seed and the mustard seed to achieve new forms in culinary dishes. From India comes the story of a grieving mother (Kisa Gotami) who has lost her only son and is told to take his body to the Buddha to find a cure. The Buddha asks her to bring a handful of mustard seeds from a family that has never lost a child, husband, parent, or friend. When the mother is unable to find such a house in her village, she realizes that death is common to all, and she cannot be selfish in her grief.

Jewish texts use the mustard seed to compare the knowable universe to be that of the size of a mustard seed in order to demonstrate the world’s insignificance and to teach humility. The mustard seed in the Christian New Testament is used in Jesus’ parable as a model for the kingdom of God. His kingdom, as with the mustard seed, initially starts small and grows to be the biggest of all. In this way, and as we shall see throughout this

chapter, Kozer brilliantly overlaps spiritual ideas with poetic artistry to create innovational verse that scrutinizes the subject of life and death through imagery and fuguration associated with the emblematic mustard seed.

Kozer begins the next verses by announcing the death of his father and mother to the reader. The poet expresses *nothingness* through the inimical despondency he feels toward each, to the point of showing signs of relief at their passing: “No hay férulas el padre está muerto no hay ínfulas la / madre está muerta.” The use of the repetition of “No hay” and “está muerto/a” and minimal pairs “férulas” and “ínfulas” progressively unfurls the comparable disappointment with both parents, as the poet/son no longer has to live under a tyrant of a father and a mother who puts on airs:

Me siento en el suelo con el saco bíblico de yute o  
estameña ceñido a los costados  
nada de cenizas en esta historia... (112)

The consonance of the *s* sound in “Me siento en el suelo con el saco” and the *c* in “ceñido,” “costados,” and “cenizas” along with the repetition of multiple vowel sounds work to harmonically coalesce the subject matter to shift and to shift the tone of the lyrical “I” from its previous despair to a more sonorous state. The fundamental conception of the liturgical use of ashes symbolizes the Christian ritual borrowed from the practice of the Jews, a practice retained in certain details of synagogue ceremonial to this day. The Jewish custom itself refers to a number of passages in the Old Testament that connect ashes (*efer*) with mourning. However, Kozer announces that this is not to be a poem about mourning, “nada de cenizas,” but instead one in which the tenuous voice

of his autobiographical memory recalls the childhood games he and his sister Silvia once played as children.

Addressing autobiographical memory in his work, Kozer explains, "... the mother and the father figures are basically symbolical, they are not my real father, my real mother, you know, none of that, it is not that episodic, not that biographical or autobiographical."<sup>155</sup> The notion that poetry does not point to a true person, but to a voice that presents a script as performance for the reader, functions as a way to remove the first-person emotionality from the poem. In the following verses, Kozer refers to these memories of his sister Sylvia, and the experiences of their childhood:<sup>156</sup>

Me siento en el suelo con el saco bíblico de yute o  
estameña ceñido a los costados  
nada de cenizas en esta historia  
sino reír desternillarnos ayudo a  
mi hermana a hacerse moños en  
cada moño un perifollo (tricolor)  
yaquis damas chinas coleccionar  
postalitas no protejo a mi hermana  
lo suficiente en verdad no la protejo  
para nada me recrimino y descarto  
la recriminación no vale la pena  
soy en verdad (río) incorregible.

Mi sustancia es un vertido de aguas fijas de curso  
irremediable. (112)

In the enjambment of multiple lines, Kozer unfolds playful imagery and long-past memories of childhood, full of daily activities in which a brother teaches a younger sister to play adolescent games. "Jacks," "Chinese checkers," and the collection of

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<sup>155</sup> Appendix A.

<sup>156</sup> Sylvia is Kozer's younger sister. One of the poet's best-known poems is "Te acuerdas, Sylvia," in which he talks with his sister about his memories of his father.

“paper cards” (“...ayudo a / mi hermana a hacerse moños en / cada moño un perifollo (tricolor) / yaquis damas chinas coleccionar / postalitas”) (112), are all activities enjoyed by children during the decades of Kozer’s childhood. However, planted firmly within this austere world of the home lies the austere cultural practice in Judaism that as the primogenitor of the family, a son is responsible for the care of the younger sister: in this case, Sylvia.

Through the sensibility of ironic humor, “nada de cenizas en esta historia /sino reír desternillarnos,” Kozer reproaches himself for not upholding this tradition, and in so doing, “others” himself through dismissal and indictment that distances him from emotion: “...no la protejo / para nada me recrimino y descarto / la recriminación no vale la pena / soy en verdad (río) incorregible” (112). The poet artistically converts nearness to distance through the multi-voiced dissonance and operative self-transformation that remove him as the empirical self of the poem. The final line, “Mi sustancia es un vertido de aguas fijas de curso / irremediable,” resonates with a delicacy that combines the spirituality of Zen with the mystic “aesthetic asceticism” for which he is known. With sagacity the poet lets go of human intentions and complications, and, in this single line, he recognizes the course of his own life. Maximum intensity resides in these verses first through the expression of intense sentiment followed by tempered recrimination, “soy en verdad (río) incorregible,” to describe the true relationship with members of his family.

Peter Sacks in *The English Elegy* writes that the separation of voices reflects and carries forward the necessarily dialectical movement of the work of mourning, not merely in the process of recognition but for the entire project of withdrawal and

reattachment of affections (34). Additionally, the author proposes that if the mourner must break off and replace his attachments, the self that survives has begun, in a way, to put the past behind him (36). Kozer's poetic application of Eastern/Feminine and Western/Masculine voices in "Aún no inminente" and "Me lleno los bolsillos" reflects his sentiments and his ideas regarding life, death, and the mourning process as he conceives it. Through his ingenious folding of two voices, he surpasses his objective in brilliantly expressed and contemplatively explored poems that unfold the memory and time of one family's historical moment. Kozer's exacting focus on the syntactical meaning of language while attending to the emotional component of death results in the negation of silence through an abundance of language that proves his poetic creation to be located entirely in the hands of its masterful creator.

### **Corporeal Constructors, not Destructors**

Kozer's *hyper-rational art* explains death not as a rhetorical device to embellish it but as a way to understand it. In *ACTA*, poems written about death through the construction and destruction of the mother's body, on the one hand, may be construed as melancholic, but on the other, as Kozer explains, "they are not written in the sense of morbidity, but as a simple fact of "facing reality, looking at reality, which is the healthiest thing a human being can do for him or herself."<sup>157</sup> And while Kozer's poetry engages with the sentiment associated with death and mourning, it is this rational

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<sup>157</sup> Appendix A.

approach to life that continues to penetrate his poetry. Kozer explains this representation of life and death in his poems:

The poetry is not afraid of the decomposition of the body. How the elements of the body are perforated, are filled with matter that does not pertain to the body, be it ants or larvae or worms, but beyond that, beyond that perforation, it brings forth matter that allows for a flower to appear, for a bird to spring from the dead body, so that there is always life being produced.<sup>158</sup>

Kozer's choice of representing death as destruction and then re-construction opens the possibility for the reader to see a different interpretation of death as a progression that produces life. Death is difficult and the process of mourning is arduous, but by writing about death as life in his poems, Kozer's approach to *nothingness* offers us a more dignified understanding of life's cycle, one that makes it more demonstrative to us all. Overcoming the lost object in this way, the poet transforms his poetry into a "sublime object of intellectual and aesthetic production" (Kristeva 28). Kozer processes his grief by reinvigorating loss through art that excels in expanding the limits of representation.

In place of an emphasis on sentiment, Kozer begins the writing process by looking instead for the material he needs to write a great poem: "I am not looking for consolation in the poem, I am looking for poems, I am looking for poetry, I am looking for language that allows me to produce a poem." Kozer's emphatic attention to the use of language through various linguistic and semantic tools helps to discharge the effects of mourning and highlights his poetic strategies [*syntactic thought*] that speak to poetry

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<sup>158</sup> Appendix A.

about poetry. This process creates a sense of *ostranenie* that places the reader's focus on the function and form of the poem itself in place of the sentimental aspects of mourning. Kozer's position supports his notion that "poetry is the center where I can synthesize all sorts of emotions and experiences, where I can exalt, not diminish," and claims that his is not poetry of destruction but of construction. He explains:

Pound has a beautiful line on this; that we are constructors, we are not destructors, and he says something of this sort in one of his last poems and it moves me tremendously that he says that because this is how I feel. The death of my parents is a form of destruction, but my poems have reconstructed them, reinvented them and re-brought them back to life, they are alive because of the poems.<sup>159</sup>

Thinking in terms of Deleuze's idea of the fold, decomposition, while disconcerting, also represents construction or renewal. Deleuze points out that among things folded are draperies, tresses, fabrics, costumes, and "dermal surfaces of the body that unfold in the embryo and crease themselves at death" (xi). In "La Euménide y yo" Kozer recycles Greek mythology to evoke the three avenging deities of the Erinyes to help sew his mother's death shroud. Kozer uses "Euménide" in the singular form instead of the plural "Euménides," perhaps to designate the three forms (Alecto, Tsiphone, and Megaera) of this Greek deity as they work together as one with him to sew his mother's shroud:

La Euménide y yo, araña contra oruga tejiendo el  
sudario de mi madre,  
puntadas a contrarreloj,

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<sup>159</sup> Appendix A.



boj contra maderas blandas,  
carcaj vaciado: la Euménide  
y yo conminados a perder  
distancia, reducir magnitud,  
un dios a medias empujando  
el hilo de la trama, yo pongo  
las orlas, la Euménide se  
hace cargo, dado su  
desparpajo, de destejer  
su propio trabajo. (9)

*Nothingness* and emptiness, both apropos to Kozer's poetry, take on a sense of urgency as these entities work in a concerted effort, yet one against the other as well. The spider constructs the mother's death shroud from the thread of the silkworm, "araña contra oruga," "puntadas a contrarreloj," "boj contra maderas blandas," followed by words related to emptiness and reduction: "carcaj vaciado," "perder distancia," "reducir magnitud," "destejer su propio trabajo" (9). For Kozer, the use of materials, whether cloth, food, objects of daily use, or from the world outside, including plant and animal life, are pronounced in his poetry as a way to express the materiality of life and death.

The use of weaving, "La Euménide y yo, araña contra oruga tejiendo el sudario de mi madre," has been employed as a convention in the elegy as a means of creating fabric in the place of a void (Sacks 19). To speak of weaving as consolation recalls the actual weaving of burial clothes and shroud. Kozer elegantly emphasizes this idea in these lines in which mourning becomes an action and a process of work. These ideas are extended through enjambment of the verses that increase the sense of urgency or time against the clock as the lyrical "I" and the Euménide weave the burial shroud of his mother.

Aurel Kolnai in *On Disgust* (2004) offers a phenomenological explanation of disgust that alludes explicitly to the issue of mortality. Kolnai interprets substances that evoke disgust as embodying the idea of putrefaction, dissolution, decay, and rottenness as being intrinsically related to the idea of transformation from living into dead matter (10). Appropriately, if what is inherent in the nature of disgust is the idea of life and vitality; an object must first exist and live in order to be decomposed into death. In this way, and following Kolnai, only an object that evokes an idea of life can elicit disgust, a life that is vanishing and decaying (11). In the following verses, Kolnai's ideas on the vanishing of life and the ensuing decay are expanded as the poet/son expresses this form of decomposition in his clothing, "impregnada de olor a muerte de mi madre..."

Toda la tarde y días subsiguientes llevo la ropa  
 impregnada de olor a  
 muerte de mi madre,  
 respunteada por Alecto,  
 Tisífone la estampa, toda  
 esta noche veo su piel  
 labrada, a flor de piel las  
 tallas de las ascuas, lo  
 ígneo reduce lo ígneo  
 debajo, y restalla: camino  
 abierto a todo lo ancho  
 para Mégera: yegua bruta  
 muerte, yegua bruta tapujada  
 muerte, arado, campana  
 desdoblada, qué bruta eres. (9)

The enjambment in the above verses moves the poem in a vertical manner, down through the igneous rock mantel of the Earth's crust toward Hades, "...a flor de piel / las tallas de las ascuas, lo / ígneo reduce lo ígneo / debajo, y restalla." The destruction of the mother's body is completed through the actions of the "Euménide," as each has their

own job to accomplish, “pespunteada por Alecto” [Greek for “implacable or unceasing anger”] while [the avenging death] “Tisífone, la estampa...” And then the Earth cracks open and the third sister, Megeara, [“the jealous one”] breaks through, “...camino / abierto a todo lo ancho / para Mégera.” The repetition of the words “muerte” and “bruta” emphasizes the control with which the poet speaks: “...yegua bruta / muerte, yegua bruta tapujada / muerte, arado, campana / desdoblada, qué bruta eres.” The hooded odious death mare has arrived to take the mother away and in the process of doing so, the reader recognizes the poet’s engagement with sentiment, “yegua bruta / muerte, yegua bruta tapujada / muerte, arado, campana / desdoblada, qué bruta eres” as he faces his mother’s death. Kozer’s *hyper-rational art* allows the poet to successfully solve the end of his poem, as sentiment is balanced within the juxtaposed complexity of emotion and rationality.

In this description of the physicality of death through decomposition and corporeal decay, we are reminded of Calabrese’s categorization of “excess-in-content” within the “aesthetic of the ugly,” for in the depth of Kozer’s description “there is an ugliness here that is not in a polemic relationship with the ‘beautiful,’ but instead becomes an ‘ugliness that is beautiful.’”(61). Kozer adheres to the magnitude of nature that evokes awe and terror that is beyond our grasp. His poem reaches the realm of the sublime to express that which cannot be represented directly. In Zen Buddhism, this mindfulness and intensified state of awareness is similar to John Keats’ theory of negative capability: “when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts,

without any irritable reaching after fact and reason”...“the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration.”<sup>160</sup>

The metaphorical image of the death mare and the olfactory response to the stench penetrating the day's worn clothing exemplifies the poet's imperative and exquisite repulsion and attraction to death, one that transforms his poem from a representation of excess into an excess of representation, or what Mallén referred to as maximum intensity. This intensity and focus on the extreme nature of death transforms emotion into one associated with the awe of the sublime in which the poet's perspective brings new life to the decaying form.

Kozer's *hyper-rational* approach to poetry equates in terms of life and death as that which is, nothing more, nothing less. And, as with the circumstances of our existence, this idea extends to his poetry, not only in its form, but in its discursive structure as well. In surviving the death of the mother, the poet turns to the poetic word and his Buddhist belief, in which death is the arising of the new state in place of the preceding one. “La Euménide y yo” is Kozer's impassioned and poetic invocation to the acceptance of the fact that death is at the heart of the human condition and is written with the understanding of this meaning through exquisite verse based on an unsentimental yet eloquent and enlightened approach.

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<sup>160</sup> Keats' “Negative Capability.” 18 January 2014. <http://www.mrbauld.com/negcap.html>

## Absence and Presence

Kozer's father died in Florida in 1988 around the age of eighty-one or two.<sup>161</sup> Fearful of his father as a young boy, the poet/son saw his father's presence as an interruption to his home life, or what he referred to as "paradise." Surrounded by women, including his mother, sister, aunts, and maids, Kozer remembers himself as the *gallito de pelea*, the "rooster in the coop" or "the cock of the walk." This privileged position, however, was interrupted when his father was present. Kozer remembers his father as a grump ("*refunfuñón*"), always complaining, ("*refunfuñando para siempre*"), and wrecking his idyllic situation. With death, the father became a form of absence for the poet/son and a presence whose memory he claims, he has since forgotten, except as a presence in his poetry.<sup>162</sup>

Ana Katz Kozer died at the age of ninety on February 1, 2005. She lived the last several years of her life close to Kozer and his wife Guadalupe in Florida. While alive, Kozer felt he and his mother had very little in common. She was a presence to be avoided, and so he turned her presence into an absence. Upon departure from the cemetery and the burial service, Kozer remembered feeling at a very specific moment his mother's presence, and at that moment he began to miss her and pointed out that he continues to miss her presence to this day.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Appendix A.

<sup>162</sup> Appendix A.

<sup>163</sup> Appendix A.

The occurrence of the folding of Absence and Presence is explored in *ACTA* on three levels. The first recognizes the Disconnection and Indivisibility of the family as an entity. Next, the Interior space of the family home, and the Exterior space Kozer writes about due to exile are explored. And lastly, I investigate Kozer's uses, *cursilería* and the sublime as textual strategies to illuminate the reader on the importance to the poet of the Absence and Presence of his mother's physicality. Each of these strategies help the reader to better understand the importance of *ACTA* as the means by which the poet deals with the after effects of the loss of his mother in particular. What is shown through this discussion is how the poetic strategies used by Kozer deviate from previously held beliefs regarding his status as a poet who adheres to the Neobaroque style of writing poetry, in which the use of emotion to express ideas and emotions is disacknowledged.

### ***Disconnected but Indivisible***

For Kozer, the disconnect created as a result of this fear of his father and his inability to be near him and the lack of commonality with his mother whose presence he avoided create an acute sense of absence and presence that for Kozer is very profound. Kozer's poem "Visible" thematically explores the interstices of memory to construct the resemblance<sup>164</sup> of family in which the dynamics of this relationship place the son as the

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<sup>164</sup> While Deleuze does not use the terms *absence* and *presence*, his use of resemblance is similar to the notion of presence.

Resemblance refers to an image's ability to embody or look like an absolute truth. Therefore, when using the terms *copy* and *simulacrum*, Deleuze questions their connection to *presence* and *absence*, demonstrating that the simulacrum, because of its absence of resemblance, becomes an entity possessing a different kind of presence. It is, then an absent presence and the terms *absence* and *presence* lose their binary distinction. Instead, absence can be thought of as a kind of presence, and presence as a kind of

linchpin that joins while at the same time separates the family unit. With the first line, there is a constraining tone emanating from the poetic voice due to the limiting use of “Sólo en cuanto.” Kozer takes a calculated approach toward *nothingness* in which we must rethink the title of the poem as something “Visible,” since what is visible is not so, and that which is thought to be “visible” is so, “only insofar as” the light is effective “Sólo en cuanto filamento (incandescente)”:

Visible

Sólo en cuanto filamento (incandescente): en cada pliegue  
antepenúltimo una semilla; en  
cada repliegue penúltimo, prende:  
flores será en unos días, su ajuar. (46)

The caesura in the second line shifts the poem’s focus from the subject matter of the incandescent light to the seeds that become the flowers held within the folds and creases of his mother’s death trousseau. The next caesura in the third line utilizes a semicolon between two elements of the anaphora “en cada,” before “pliegue” and “repliegue” offering a rhythmic pause in which to consider each idea. The repetition, however, changes as each recurring act of folding and unfolding provides the surface and depth necessary for the poet’s purpose of announcing his final consideration—the growth of flowers that will adorn this metaphorical trousseau. The division of ideas and structure is redolent with the son’s separation from his parents to come in the following lines of the poem:

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absence. The displacement of absolutes from the center and its replacement with forms of mediation like language, representations and images point our attention to the way in which absence and presence have a direct connection to forms of reality, presence and/or truth.

Nada los une salvo el hijo que los  
 separa y que los une por separado.  
 A la hora de fallecer se desentienden  
 todavía más (a fondo). El padre es  
 enrevesado, la madre un bostezo.  
 El padre filtra, la madre distribuye.  
 El padre oculta mientras la madre  
 ausculta. La de afeites y el que se  
 afeita cantando la Internacional en  
 idioma polaco, barridos. El hijo,  
 detestaba. Al que cantaba. A la que  
 se sentaba delante del tocador. El  
 hijo todo lo ha exagerado. (46-7)

Kozer's edifice built on his approach of *nothingness* (Nada) unites the father and mother, except that the son whose presence expands the separation between them, which then rejoins the pair against their isolation. The following enjambment highlights the antithesis that separates the mother and father through the use of verbs that descend down the page, symbolizing this antagonist relationship: "filtra" / "distribuye," "oculta" / "ausculta," "La de afeites" / "el que se afeitas," "Al que cantaba" / A la que se sentaba," "El Santo de santos no le incumbe al padre" / "La madre garantiza que Dios no existe." In the son's inability to tolerate the situation, "El hijo, detestaba," *nothingness* absent his parents from his world, while the future poet exaggerates his frustrated emotion, "El hijo todo lo ha exagerado." The juxtaposing of contrasting words and phrases rhetorically produces the effect of balance, yet the circumstance proves to be one of the imbalance of the Ideal of family, as shown in the words "la muerte remate total."

The "Ideal" of family and the activities shared by brother and sister are blurred by Kozer's use of estrangement to affect memory as time hinders and alters the details of these memories. The presence of absence and vice versa works to make the familiar



peculiar and alienation to appear more recognizable. The poet's careful selection of the words, "El hijo, y la hermana" as opposed to "el hermano y la hermana" or "El hermano y la hermana," leave the imprint of the tradition of primogeniture, or being "first born," left on the poet's psyche:

la muerte remate total: sin delantal,  
sopera, cubiertos bruñidos de plata,  
el perentorio coman. O la próxima  
vez voy a servirles piedras. El hijo  
y la hermana se relamen, golpean  
con los puños la mesa, queremos  
comer piedras, queremos se nos  
sirvan piedras en lo adelante. Y  
la madre estalla (riendo) sonrió  
el padre, ira y disolución nos  
reúnen a bailar frente a Dios  
un sábado con los patriarcas

avenidos. (47)

The enjambment creates a cacophony of sounds that convey the disorder within the order of the family routine: "...El hijo / y la hermana se relamen, golpean / con los puños la mesa, queremos / comer piedras, queremos se nos / sirvan piedras en lo adelante. Y / la madre estalla..." The device of naming everyday household items serves as a way to remember the past that continues forward in the mind of the poet: "sin delantal, sobera, cubiertos bruñidos de plata," all used in the kitchen, aiding in the stimulation of the olfactory senses and memory of these smells. The familiar threat to eat or else, "el perentorio coman. O la próxima / vez voy a servirles piedras..." is a part of the jokes and games played, while the mother laughs, the father smiles through his anger, and another Sabbath passes.

The absence and presence of the father and the mother linger in Kozer's memory through his use of humor to offset overt emotion (“...O la próxima / vez voy a servirles piedras. El hijo / y la hermana se relamen, golpean / con los puños la mesa, queremos / comer piedras...”) and to bring the family back together in the reconciliation of their differences. The family is present and alive through the poet's memory of an entity that is now lost, becoming an absent presence—that is, a trace<sup>165</sup>—that is unseen, yet nevertheless felt as a result of death. The presence of the “real” family has now become a simulacrum as a result of the absence of the “Ideal” of family, as Kozer describes in the final lines of the poem: “...Y / “la madre estalla (riendo) sonrió” / “el padre, ira y disolución nos” / “reúnen a bailar frente a Dios” / “un sábado con los patriarcas” / “avenidos.”

Kozer's poem eulogizes the absent family, which is a simulacrum that possesses an absent presence of the poet's image of family created in the words of his poem. Kozer's desire is to separate some form of the “Ideal of Truth” found in the essence, the intelligible, the Idea, the original, and the model of “Family” from the reality as the embodiment of the appearance, the sensible, the image, the copy, and the simulacrum. Kozer's introspective look at past memories in which representational absence has become a form of presence allows for the only way in which he can actively bring back to life these moments. The creativity and use of his genius for “imaginative memory” is

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<sup>165</sup> In poststructuralist theory, this concept is most closely associated with Derrida. Trace can be seen as a contingent term for a “mark of the absence of a presence, an always-already absent present.”

a way of thinking in which “this is the way I remember it” takes the place of memory as the way things were.

### *Interior Presence Absence in the Space of Home*

Concrete images highlight aspects of memory in which poetry acts as a means of replicating those memories. Baudelaire opened up the way for this poeticization of the memory process as he linked his concrete imagination to it.<sup>166</sup> We see a similar concept in Kozer’s interview “Signos del destierro”<sup>167</sup> when asked: “What does the word *HOME* mean to you?” (95). Kozer answered, “Cuando digo casa mi inconsciente y mi semiconciencia reaccionan con una dirección, enclavada en unas fechas, Estrada Palma 515 between Goicuría and Juan Delgado, (1945–1955).” For the poet, memory holds in mind specific dates and a specific address that represents the significance of this word, as Kozer clarifies:

Ésa es la casa, cierro los ojos y veo, desde la memoria,  
todo el universo: el de la infancia y mejor estado para la  
omprensión, el verdadero estado religioso. Luego esa  
casa se hizo la casa de Forest Hills, nuestra casa, la casa  
matrimonial y, por ende, sacramental... Éste es el sitio donde  
mayormente hago mis poemas, éste el lugar donde soy libre,  
rey y reyezuelo, autodidáctica, y sereno, solitario y aventurero.  
(95)

Found within this quote are the three essential requirements of Kozer’s life comprised of the family, spiritual well being, and poetry, all created in this original

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<sup>166</sup> For more on “concrete images see Nalbantian: (44).

<sup>167</sup> “Signos del destierro” is published in Jacobo Sefamí’s *La voracidad grafómana: José Kozer: crítica, entrevistas y documentos*. (91–101).

universe of the home. Gaston Bachelard reassures us of the importance of the habitation of these spaces, as to deny them is to deny our essential selves. (5) The house is the place in which the personal experience reaches its fundamental nature, as Bachelard claims: “all really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home.” (5) Kozer also thinks of the house in similar terms: “That is the house I close my eyes and see, from memory, the entire universe.”<sup>168</sup> Kozer describes his own meaning of home through the remembrance of his grandmother’s kitchen in Havana:

My grandmother’s was the first kitchen in all Havana that I smelled, and touched and loved. I always wanted to be in the kitchen with her. I always wanted to be in the kitchen smelling and watching her hands do things —making bread, or making puddings or making *compotas* or making pastry. She was the kitchen. She smelled like kitchen things, she smelt like sugar, like cinnamon, like boiling oil. She was the kitchen. (Appendix A)

Halbwachs reminds us that “the greatest number of our memories come back to us when our parents, our friends, or other persons recall them to us.”(85) However, home for the poet/son as a place alive within the memory of smells and sensations has, as the result of his mother’s death, become a simulacrum, as the home of his memory no longer exists. Through the use of descriptive language alive with vivid representations and images, Kozer points our attention to the way in which absence and presence have a direct connection to forms of reality, presence, or truth.<sup>169</sup> In “No variaba nada” the poet

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<sup>168</sup> Appendix A.

<sup>169</sup> For purposes here, *absolute* truth can be thought of as that which is always valid, regardless of parameters or context. The *absolute* in the term connotes one or more of a quality of truth that cannot be exceeded; complete truth; unvarying and permanent truth. It can be contrasted to *relative truth* or truth in a more ordinary sense in which degree of relativity is implied. For more on this discussion see The Chicago

enumerates all the things present that made the house a home, a place now where nothing changes. Kozer's *nothingness* becomes evident in the use of words that focus on negation, "No variaba nada" and "inexistentes":

No variaba nada. Los vasos en su sitio, en su sitio la  
pecera y las plantas de  
interior, inexistentes. (68)

The poem begins with the chiasmus, "Los vasos en su sitio, en su sitio la pecera..." that extends the words "no," "nada," and "inexistentes" to "absence" due to the lack of change since his mother's death. However, for the poet, this *nothingness* begins a shift that is not necessarily a nihilistic perspective representing complete nothingness. Instead, Kozer uses absence in a rational framework to mean that things do not exist as they did before the death of his mother, existing instead in their true nature as they are. Approaching the poem in this way, absence or emptiness is not an absolute reality or truth:

Todo atenuado. Una situación desahogada, sin destino  
La fuente del fricasé de  
pollo, puré de papas,  
lechuga insípida, de que  
huertos indescifrables el  
*insulso* tomate: el padre  
(originando en el mutismo)  
acomodado: la madre,  
ingente insustancialidad. (68)

Kozer's copious use of prefixes beginning with "-in" signifying "not or without," adjust or qualify the usage or meaning in each base word found in the previous

segment, “desahogada,”<sup>170</sup> “insípida,” “insulso,” “indescifrables,” “ingente insustancialidad,” “inmovilidad,” “introversión,” “infringe,” “infracción.” In addition, Kozer uses words that denote *nothingness*: “la ausencia,” “nunca,” “sin,” “mutismo.” At the center of Kozer’s experience lies the significant threat of the void from being cut off from relations with other people as a result of concrete life experiences. It is this continual driving force into *nothingness* that Kozer searches for and continues to work through in his life’s work:

Llámalos, de la inmovilidad. Convócalos, de la separación.  
Hay que agradecerles la  
hoscía introversión de los  
horarios, la ausencia de  
prodigios, nunca chica,  
siempre limonada. La  
del padre a pelo, sin  
azúcar. A la madre,  
con quien todo era  
infracción, los  
aguachirles  
empalagosos. (68–9)

In the form of a command “Llámalos, de la inmovilidad. Convócalos, de la separación.” Kozer urges an unknown other to rouse the parents from their immobility and separation. The vivid imagery associated with taste and smell described through Kozer’s memory envelops the reader as he writes “siempre limonada La / del padre a pelo, sin / azúcar. / A la madre, / con quien todo era / infracción, los / aguachirles empalagosos.” The poet’s tone reveals urgency in the bitterness toward his father, and reprehensive distaste of the sticky sweetness of his mother. We are at once reminded of

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<sup>170</sup> My translation: “A comfortable situation with no future.”

Proust's *Recherche* and the importance of remembrance in constructing the past. As Bachelard writes, "Poetry" gives us not so much nostalgia for youth.... as nostalgia for the expressions of youth. It offers us images, as we should have imagined them during the "original impulse of youth ..." (33). In recollection, Kozer's poem reconstructs a past in which his words refer us to things that have existed before, evoking an absence of what is no longer present.

Kozer verbalizes images of the past house and home life that return in order to allow him to create new images in which, as Bachelard points out, his certainty of being is concentrated (33). These images begin with the offer of a youthful impulse and certainty, "De pláceme. Y festejar," followed by the questioning of order and then moves to the mention of places of secrecy and silence within the microcosm of the house. "El orden? ¿Las paredes? ¿Detrás, los nichos?" expresses the poet's need for order and privacy through the questioning of the inside and outside of the home and its spaces. Writing about the events taking place he finds a "niche" to store his memories within a private space to keep them safe:

De pláceme. Y festejar. ¿El orden? ¿Las paredes? ¿Detrás,  
los nichos? ¿Superaciones,  
del silencio? Aprovechemos  
la ocasión (ya nada es factible  
en esta casa) tras la (calva)  
Muerte (ya) de la generación  
de mis mayores... (69)

Kozer also questions what is left ("...¿Superaciones, / del silencio?...") after the parents' death and absence as "ya nada es factible en esta casa tras la (calva) Muerte (ya) de la generación de mis mayores." These images are for the poet, as Bachelard writes,

“primal images, simple engravings” that act as invitations for the poet/son to start imagining again in order to start a new life, “a life that would be our [his] own, that belong to us [him] in our [his] very depths.” (33) The final verses demonstrate this line of thinking as he proclaims: “Aprovechemos / la ocasión...” on the creation of new images from those of the past as he searches new ways to begin again after the distress of death.

In the following verses, clusters of sounds are juxtaposed with the precision and texture of word choice to produce the musical rhythm of the Cuban Popular Music of the Son and the Danzón. This acoustic mixture composed of exacting word choice creates euphony, “matracas, pirata y guacamayo,” “totí, totí, babuino y tití,” that is rhythmic and mixed with colloquialisms, “chica qué te parece tú de caguama yo de ornitorrinco.” Kozer’s syntactic aplomb and semantic accumulation puts the reader in touch with the abundant experience of the rhythms and sounds of his native Cuba. The *proliferation* of the signifier is replaced by a syntactical chain that progresses metonymically to represent an image of “home”:

...traigamos  
múltiplos y submúltiplos  
de aire (aire) confeti,  
matracas, pirata y guacamayo,  
tres árboles frutales en  
medio de la sala, totí, totí,  
babuino y tití, madre de  
odalisca, padre de tahúr,  
mi hermana y yo (también  
hermoseados por la Muerte)  
de (chica qué te parece tú de  
caguama yo de ornitorrinco). (69)



The structure of the poem with its syntactical configuration is done with Kozer's mathematical precision demonstrated by his word choice, "totí, totí, babuino y tití," in which a measured and calculated rhythm folds one word into the next, drawing out semantic relationships normally nonexistent in non-poetic discourse. Kozer's strategy focuses on the formal features of poetry that in the final verses take the emphasis off emotion and focus the reader's attention on language itself. We see naming and exalting as a way for Kozer to safeguard memory as he remembers people, places, and things that allow him also to get to the core of his mental and personal experiences.

Exile is a way of life in which constant awareness makes certain that one is not at home. Oriented to a distant place, this experience can be characterized as a sense of presence and absence from one's native land. Presence is the sense that allows the émigré to take with him the familiarity of home, and absence is the loss of the familiarity he works to remember. The emptiness that results from not being a part of either place is useful in explaining the sense of absence that manifests itself in Kozer's poetics.

"Presence" and "Absence" in Kozer's aesthetics of *nothingness* are found within prosaic language that addresses emptiness, absence, and loss. While describing the absence of his parents, Kozer prevents what he calls *la caída retórica*, the avoidance of any rhetorical device or excessive emotion that might overpower the poem. Essential in Kozer's work is the idea that emptiness is not an absolute reality or an independent truth. Instead, as he demonstrates in "No variaba nada" with his use of the imperfect tense in the title, the present has an ongoing relationship with the past in which absence exists as a part of the true nature of actions and events.

### *Exterior Absence/Presence in Exile*

Svetlana Boym makes the claim that “the main feature of exile is a double conscience, a double exposure of different times and spaces, of constant bifurcations” (256). The bifurcation in Kozer’s poetry of exile is one of absence and presence, what is and what was, the vacant and the inhabited. Yet for Kozer, exile means that he is always present and absent and therefore not static, which is reflected in his challenge to the conceptions of art itself and to his own creativity as the source of his poetics. As Boym surmises: “The experience of actual exile offers an ultimate test to the writer’s metaphors; instead of the poetics of exile, one should speak of the art of survival” (256). Kozer’s art has met and surpassed the “art of survival” as is shown in the following pages.

Exiled from Cuba during the 1960s for political reasons, Kozer has spent the last fifty years in the United States. His exile has been a life-long experience on multiple levels: growing up as a Jew in Cuba, as a Cuban Jew in the United States, and as a private and solitary poet, exiled in his isolation. Adding to this sense of separation, the poet is now exiled from his mother and father as well, since exile, like mourning, is a conflict between internal and external realities. In both cases, the connection between the feeling of impotence and the irreversible loss that accompany the symptoms of long-term illness, old age, and death are part of what it is also like to go on without the presence of loved ones, whether from exile or bereavement.

In addition, the loss of the mother in particular serves as the final confirmation of an irretrievable loss that began with the motherland. Again referring to the

foreshadowing of the subject's own death, and his "poésie de la entre-deux" as the probability of its happening in exile, his poetry thus embodies the fear of finality and the irreparability of the whole experience. As Edward Said wrote: "Lateness is a form of exile, but even exiles live somewhere..." (xiv)<sup>171</sup>

Exile as subject matter, whether obvious or concealed, makes its presence in Kozer's choice of syntax, as it speaks of absence, emptiness, and loss. Kozer explains his approach to *nothingness* in his poems: "en mi caso me confronta con un sentimiento de vacío, de irrealidad...Entonces, el intento inmediato es llenar esa sensación de vacío. ¿Cómo lo lleno? ¿Qué me queda? ... quizá como una especie de exorcismo a través de la poesía" (29–30). The poet seeks to break the silence and to fill the emptiness through poetry. The *horror vacui* that exists as a result of exile manifests itself in Kozer's concept of *nothingness* through his *hyper-rational* approach to experience as the true nature of his reality.

The white pages that Kozer fills with words continuously circle around the exile he experiences as the lost source of his vision and desire he searches to reclaim. Because the past can never be recuperated in its full capacity and because words can never be substituted for experience, language itself remains in a state of irreversible exile. Mexican poet, novelist, and essayist Angelina Muñiz-Huberman, professor of comparative literature at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, writes in "La poética del exilio en José Kozer" about the poet's linguistic choices as a result of his experience as a poet in exile:

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<sup>171</sup> From *On Late Style*.

Entre sus temas queridos, que podrían ser muchos, hay uno recurrente y, a veces, disfrazado, que es el del exilio. Exilio como reflejo del modo existencial y del modo metafórico. Y, claro, del modo lingüístico. La poesía de José Kozer es de pérdidas y de recuperación armónica matizada por una dolorosa recreación de la memoria. Poesía entre lo cruel cotidiano, el cinismo hiriente y una sacralización de la realidad. (244)

Kozer's loss and recuperation, as Muñiz-Huberman points out, is found within poems that recreate memories of home and family. The void of exilic existence is deeply buried in poetic language expressed in "Me lleno los bolsillos" through the themes of emptiness, absence, and loss the poet experiences upon leaving Cuba. What was once familiar is now distant, and recuperation depends on the language used, for it is the words he writes that become his only certainty. Enjambment with a minimum number of caesuras and few end-stops mimics the unremitting connection of the exile's egress from the homeland. For Kozer, nothingness becomes a means of survival:

Me voy de Cuba tengo el peso bruto de las antesalas,  
los cuadrúpedos a la espera,  
carezco de peso neto (entrar,  
aligerado) me constituye un  
insecto incrustado al cristal  
de roca inadvertido por un color  
ya muy deteriorado por el paso  
del tiempo por mi temperamento  
mi falta de carácter bien pude  
ser una canalla un pordiosero o  
malabarista por los pueblos en  
su lugar fui este estado de cosas  
el hueco el agujero imposible  
llenar los bolsillos con el  
agujero por lo que veo este  
sentido último no tiene  
mollera no llena (nada). (112-13)

From the first line, “Me voy de Cuba,” we sense the burden of the poet’s journey, “...el peso bruto de las antesalas,” and the hope or the wait for a possible return, “los cuadrúpedos a la espera.” Kozer finds absence or emptiness, and a hole that cannot be filled within himself, as manifested in specific personal characteristics, “...por mi temperamento / mi falta de carácter...” “...fui este estado de cosas / el hueco el agujero imposible / llenar los bolsillos con el / agujero por lo que veo este / sentido último no tiene / mollera no llena (nada).” Again, we see that for Kozer, at his core, he is cut off from all roots or grounds, faced with alienation from his surroundings. The Jew, the Cuban, the poet, the exile, wanders in search of words to fill the silence through the language of *nothingness*.

Kozer continues with the same formal structure as the previous lines. With a shift in tone that blends previous and present cultural and intellectual ideas, we see another aspect of his *nothingness*, which comes from Buddhist thought. This philosophy promotes emptiness as having two aspects—one negative, with which we normally associate. However, “nothingness” or “emptiness” has a positive nature as well, in which emptiness is endowed with the qualities of an awakened mind. Ultimately, reality is the union of both forms. The ancient mustard seed, “Del comino un olor de la mostaza un color llenar la panza,” expresses his interest in Oriental culture and literature, allowing him to transcend the negative aspect of “emptiness.” His practice of Zen Buddhism and yoga, “añádase su poco de zen su / pizca de yoga en el escaparate” awakens his mind to the wisdom and peace that there is quite enough, “hay bastante lo suficiente.”

Kozer's colloquial expression "to stick our noses where they don't belong" ("meter las narices donde no nos llaman") shows the poet's curiosity with the world and the desire to know more about the universe with which he is connected, "...aprender el nombre / de las constelaciones un poco / de aritmética para salir de apuros." Kozer's reference to arithmetic and the constellations underscores the poet's ideas of reason and rationale in which the language of logic, a focus on transcendental concepts, and his great interest in the intellectual aspects of the world prevent this exceptional poet from allowing sentimentality to intrude on his poetry.

Del comino un olor de la mostaza un color llenar la panza  
sobras vaciar a la mañana  
añádase su poco de zen su  
pizca de yoga en el escaparate  
en la alacena si no hay de todo  
hay bastante lo suficiente  
para enredarse (entretenerse)  
meter las narices donde no  
nos llaman aprender el nombre  
de las constelaciones un poco de  
aritmética para salir de apuros...(113)

The phrase, "por supuesto me refiero a los cotidianos" becomes a list of everyday affairs in which Kozer's turn to *cursilería* to describe his sister's coiffed hair and the junk jewelry, "cotidianos así la hermana / (emperejilada) moños y / perifollos..." with which she adorns herself. Kozer beautifully contrasts this imagery with his his lofty ambition to leave Cuba for the US to become an intellectual poet, as found within the following words: "la gente en casa seamos aedas / vámonos de Cuba." Humor distances Kozer from the adversity he knows he will face in exile, yet we see him going beyond his circumstances. The poet hears the call of his aspirations beyond the shores of Cuba,

to leave behind the “mal gusto tiene a la gente en casa” in order to become a poet, a bard, “seamos aedas:”

por supuesto me refiero a los  
cotidianos así la hermana  
(emperejilada) moños y  
perifollos qué mal gusto tiene  
la gente en casa seamos aedas  
vámonos de Cuba. (113)

The Spanish “aedas” *aidos* refers to the ancient Greek personification of modesty, excellence, and respect. These characteristics form the source from which Kozer develops his compelling philosophical beliefs, and eventually take him beyond and away from the colloquial life he assumed in Cuba. With regard to the formal aspects, the reader must go deeper than what appears on the surface level of the poem to get to the heart of his poetry. “Me lleno los bolsillos” engages with emotion yet surrounds itself with absence. Feeling comes, but later and in a different way, as Kozer transitions from a negative space of nothingness to a more positive one as a poet and enlightened being with an awakened mind that expresses reality with wisdom, compassion, and clarity.

Returning to “Aún no inminente,” we see Kozer’s understanding of Zen Buddhism in which he recognizes the totality of the universe. The repetition of “however much” (“por mucho que”) and the reflexive verbs in which the lyrical “I” is both subject and object, “me disfrace”, “me ronde”, “me desvíe”, and “me autosugestione” emphasize the unfolding of his developing perspective of the world from the perspective of an exile in motion in which all becomes interconnected, and everything is affected by everything

else. Everything that is *is* because other things *are*. In this way, *Nothingness* illuminates the *absolute* found in the awe of the sublime:

Por  
mucho que me disfrace y me ronde, por mucho que me  
soslaye y me desvíe, y por  
mucho que me autosugestione,  
esto (Ésta) viene: no eminencia  
del terreno sino tierra llana. La  
tierra es plana a su alrededor;  
redonda es la Muerte. Nada que  
pugnar. Esto no es contienda.  
Ni considerable. Y menos (aún)  
magnitud. Reducción del  
quebradizo denominador  
(común) del quebrado... (17–8)

As much as the poet disguises and circles around himself, circumvents and diverts the issues, he wills to admit, “Por / Mucho que me disfrace y me ronde, por mucho que me / soslaye y me desvíe, y por / mucho que me autosugestione / esto (Ésta) viene....” In this admission he comes to know that the common denominator is that with death, there is no contest. There is no inside or outside. For this great poet, the world is a very logical place in which there is nothing to fight: “Nada que pugnar. Esto no es contienda. Ni considerable. Y menos (aún) magnitud. Reducción del quebradizo denominador (común) del quebrado”.

A afuera. La diseminación.  
Podrida. Ésa, ésa que reconoce  
a ciencia cierta al molusco, la  
estrella, a Dios

desinventar. (18)



As a presence in US and Latin American poetry, Kozer continues to write a poem a day, as he has done since leaving Cuba over forty years ago. His displacement due to exile and death are replaced with creative forms of meditation in which his poetic representations direct our attention to the way in which absence and presence have a direct connection to forms of reality, existence, and truth. For Kozer's parents, death has ended their exile, and their pain is relieved. However, for the poet and son, exile and mourning continue. Broad questions such as how long mourning lasts and when or if it will end is different for each of us depending on our own circumstances. But helping us in this process are the brilliant works by passionate poets like José Kozer, who are willing to put these quandaries into expressive artistic forms that help each of us to better understand our own individual and collective condition, with the promise of finding our own answers to these significant questions.

### **The Banality of *Cursilería* and the Awe of the Sublime**

The language of *cursilería* [*cursi*] is intrinsically social but it is also based on a private and intimate choice. For readers outside the culture in question, the understanding of this practice poses serious difficulties in grasping its nature and meanings. Through Kozer's unparalleled voice, *cursi* becomes a dynamically orchestrated poetic device by which he articulates the significance of death in an ingenious way. This poetic versification requires an energetic contribution from the reader in order to decode the nuance of *cursi* found in the poet's treatment of clichés, colloquialisms, and references taken from former traditions. Structurally, *cursilería* is noted for the rhetorical and

etymological purpose it serves in Kozer's unique poetic expression in order to attend to the compositional as well as the interpretative nature of his poems.

*Cursilería*'s correlation to mourning is located within its existent link to the Neobaroque in which poetry itself emerges as the core of Kozer's auto-conscious concern with language. The poet utilizes *cursilería* as a means of affecting perception by creating humor and distance in order to digress from the painful response to death and the uncertainty of contemporary experience of which death and mourning are a part. The use of estrangement as a means of inclusion or exclusion in a particular situation utilizes *cursilería* and has a renewed meaning when acting as a device for distancing feeling in his poems. In "SUEÑO DE UNA NOCHE DE VERANO,"<sup>172</sup> the poet describes the woman who was his mother, "...devota / (de la casa) costumbres / rancias, dama seria," (revealing another side to a woman otherwise known for her prudence.

Humor is found in the irony of the orphaned son's expectations and perceived notions of the mother as prudish yet able to tell the least biblical of dirty jokes, "...el chiste del vejete y la doncella, / el más escabroso, el menos / bíblico de los chistes verdes

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<sup>172</sup> Y hela aquí contándome el chiste del vejete y la doncella  
el más escabroso, el menos  
bíblica de los chistes verdes  
de la tribu, me lo ha contado  
tres veces (digo siempre fue  
obsesiva mi madre) (de tal  
palo tal astilla): en yidish,  
en inglés, y oiga Ud.,  
cubaneando. Había que  
oírla, mi madre cubaneando  
a tal punto que, lo juro y lo  
perjuro, ni un Beny Moré,  
ni Cecilia Valdés o Celia  
Cruz, le llegaban al tobillo: (126-127)

/ de la tribu...” her awareness of specific clichés, “(de tal palo tal astil):” (126–27) and Cuban colloquialisms, “y oiga Ud. / cubaneando,” are references taken from former traditions, as Kozer holds on nostalgically and even ironically in remembering his mother. Kozer uses affectation, imitation, and triteness in language of nonliterary texts as a “wink and a nod” gesture between those within a culture who laugh and those outside who do not.

The tendency toward the presence of his mother’s spirit in the useful objects of the house becomes a fetish for Kozer as he longs for and desires his mother’s reincarnation. In “Diez días lleva mi madre” the living room sofa bed in his mother’s house becomes the center of Kozer’s meditation as he recognizes that he must now learn to adjust to her absence. Behind this subject matter lies a set of issues involving memory found in questions regarding the limits of nostalgia, the fetishistic attachment to certain objects that carry our memories, the effect of objects that evoke past emotions, and the limits of imagination in the response to these memories:

...Mi madre, desconfiada,  
tantea: quizás alguien quiera  
comprar por unos pesos el  
sofá cama, no está tan  
destartalado, en su época  
costó lo suyo: en todo caso,  
venga alguien a llevárselo.  
Un Quienquiera, Cancerbero,  
o reflejo de la Divinidad. (30)

The poet as narrator draws the reader’s attention into this stunning poem with the single word “Diez” as the shortest verse of the poem followed by the enjambment with the second verse as the longest, in which *nothingness* (“la Nada”) again becomes a

major premise as demonstrated in words associated with this idea, “...Sin ajuste” / “Sin reajustes” / “Nadie se quiere” / “llevar el sofa desvencijado de” / “...Mi madre, desconfiada,/ tantea...” Translated into English, the verb “to adjust” (“ajustarse”) in the first usage appears in its reflexive form as “my mother has been adapting” (“mi madre ajustándose”). Repeated a second time, it appears as “With no adaptations” (“sin ajuste”) and lastly as “No readjustments” (“Sin reajustes”). Each repetition of the verb accentuates the poet’s inability to be at ease with death’s presence.

Following the caesura in the sixth verse, the narrator makes a shift and the poet’s “othered” voice takes on characteristics of his mother’s *costumbrismo* that emphasizes and depicts the everyday manners and customs of the family’s Cuban social or provincial milieu: “...quizás alguien quiera / comprar por unos pesos el / sofá cama, no está tan / destartalado, en su época / costó lo suyo.” The mixing of clichéd phrases found in his mother’s expressions humorously echo the voice of an older generation, years before when the sofa was first bought. A sofa that was once expensive, “en su momento costó lo suyo,” could now be bought “por unos pesos.” The colloquial expression “lo suyo” emphasizes the cost the sofa. The stressed use of “tan” highlights the mother’s nostalgic appreciation for the old sofa bed, “no está tan destartalada” as being not *that* decrepit.

After the caesura in the eleventh line, the poetic voice shifts back to the poet/son in which he makes an urgent appeal for someone to take the sofa bed away, “...en todo caso / venga alguien a llevárselo,” beseeching “Un Quienquiera” “Cancerbero,” the guard dog of the underworld who preserves the boundary between life and death, or

“reflejo de la Divinidad.” In Kozer’s nimble shift of narrator, the  *cursilería*  found in the mother’s private and intimate language characterizes her life and the everyday objects that were a part of it, while the poetic voice of the poet/son characterizes the sublime element as the he reaches for the limits of intensity and calls out to the abstraction of the divine.

Kozer’s fetishizing the sofa bed as the incarnation of his mother creates a complex emotion in which the poet calls “venga alguien a llevárselo.” In the use of the direct object pronoun “lo”, the poet refers to the sofa bed, yet the reader is left to speculate if it is this object or the memory of his mother he wishes to exorcise from the house. In the following verses, vivid images come to the reader through vivacious details Kozer uses in describing the pattern of the threadbare fabric on the sofa bed, stamped with a pattern of birds: web-footed ducks, goldfinches, kingfishers, and woodpeckers. Our suspicion is confirmed when the poet’s increasing fetishism is expressed in the elemental details of chosen words and their arrangement on the page that capture his strong conviction made clear in the incompatible nature of the comparison between the condition of the sofa bed and that of his mother:

...El  
sofá estampado con animales  
de locución nula. Eran aves. En  
lo raído asoma algún ala, pata  
palmípeda, un colorín intacto.  
Ved: un martín pescador intacto:  
en una rama quebrada o a punto  
de quebrarse en la raída tela  
descolorido apareció un  
picamaderos: la ausencia del  
fundamento locomotriz (volátil)

No lo exime, ni siquiera en la tela,  
de su condición. (30)

The sofa with its pattern of animals with zero expression (“El / sofá estampado con animales / de locución nula”) also describes his mother’s unexpressive features in death. The use of assonance in the vowel A “sofá estampado con animales...” “Eran aves” “asoma algún ala, pata palmípeda...” along with the consonance in *P* “pata palmípeda” exemplify Kozer’s surgical skill in the use of poetic devices to illuminate the rhythmic pattern of the Spanish language. The poet’s passion comes from within to express his increased preoccupation: “No lo exime, ni siquiera en la tela, de su condición.” The complexity of the mother’s condition is replicated in the image of the woodpecker on the faded print fabric of the worn-out sofa as both immobile and unable to escape their fate due to a lack of will “la ausencia del fundamento locomotriz (volátil).”

Desire is reinforced with the possibility of continued hope: “Es posible que. Mi madre, En su / actual situación. Tal vez condición. / Permanezca (yo tanteo y tanteo) / intacta. Decrépita.” Kozer the poet/son in his fetishistic attachment to the sofa [an object that carries the nostalgic memories of his mother and home] is not yet ready to let go, as evidenced by word choice leading to his evocation of powerful emotions. Endowed as a result of these feelings, the poet’s creative use of language pushes the limits of imagination in response to these memories. Kozer’s poem is intrinsically tied to a social and historical period of time in his life when he was connected to the mother through

“imaginative memories” in which the sofa is a part of the familiar surroundings of the home space and the private and intimate feelings of a grieving son.

The poet/son continues his questioning tone using taxonomy associated with nature and the sublime to describe his mother’s current state and speculates as to what form she may take if there is life after this one. Within the encyclopedic use of words, [as with the Baroque] Kozler delves into language both rhetorically and structurally to enrich poetry itself. The poet attempts to make sense of the world through a strong voice that ranges between the absolute and the indefinite, chaos and emptiness, attraction and rejection, desire and disgust. While originally commenting on his belief in the nonexistence of an afterlife, the poet’s perplexity in this poem creates a contradiction, which speaks to his uncertainty. Within the words associated with nature, the poet looks to find the remains of his mother’s earthly existence; “Pupils like buckthorn berries,” its larvae, “a mit,” “a sedentary mayfly,” “A motionless ladybug.” It is with the decomposition of the mother’s body and the composition of the natural order of things that he again finds her, “Se está:”

...Baya de arraclán  
sus pupilas. ¿En su cresa? Ácaro,  
¿adónde? Cachipolla, sedentaria.  
Catarina, inmóvil. Se está. (30–1)

The anacoluthon “Baya de arraclán/ sus pupilas” prepares the reader for a series of irregular statements and questions in which the poet’s individual perspective leads to the speculation of the shape and form of his mother’s current state: “¿En su cresa? Ácaro,/ ¿adónde? Cachipolla, sedentaria./ Catarina, inmóvil. Se está.” Sarduy’s

suggestion that “eroticism presents itself as the total rupture of the denotative, natural, direct level of language that every perversion of metaphor and figure implies” (288) is a means of interpreting the poet’s use of the sublime in the form of nature to distort the son’s fetishism and desire for the presence of his mother in an effort to suppress or distance himself from this desire and longing for that which no longer exists.

The present progressive form of the Spanish verb “recomponerse” suggests certainty and immediacy of action in progress: “Gathering herself together. For sure.” (“Se está recomponiendo. Es lo cierto”) Citations to historical figures are given new meaning as his mother’s virtues and “instantaneous remaking” (“se rehacía instantánea”) are compared to those of Gonzalo de Berceo’s<sup>173</sup> Virgin Mary in *Los Milagros de Nuestra Señora*, and to the biblical King Solomon’s wisdom and perfection, “Salomónica. Apenas ya / “más perfectible:”

Se está recomponiendo. Es lo cierto.  
Creíamos que al morir se rehacía  
instantánea. Con edad, como dijera  
Berceo, treinta y cinco. Hecha y  
derecha. Salomónica. Apenas ya  
más perfectible. Lo cierto es que  
resucita gradual. Músicas inciertas.  
Aves a medias. Dios mismo en mi  
madre complementándose. (31)

The poet/son puts his mother on the level of the divine by claiming that God makes himself complete in his mother, “...Dios mismo en mi / madre complementándose...” Placing his mother at this sublime level is the basis of Kozer’s internal logic in the poem. His universe is consistent, even though it violates all of the

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<sup>173</sup> Berceo, Gonzalo, and Brian Dutton. *Los Milagros De Nuestra Señora*. London: Tamesis, 1971. Print.



fundamental laws we experience in the real one. Within the mind of the poet, while the circumstances of his mother's death do not make sense, the ethos he creates does. The sublime's association with all-powerful nature, something of the magnitude that evokes awe and terror that is beyond our grasp [as Kozer exemplifies], is in stark contrast to *cursilería*'s banality of everyday life.

By combining incomparability and banality in a way that depicts a surprising accord between *cursilería* and the discourse of the sublime, the difference between the two seems obsolete. The ultimate effects of both depend on reconciliation, and, in this case, shielding the subject from desire and loss. Through the folding of the representation in both, we better understand the "imaginative memory" of Kozer's internal logic in his poetics.

Continuing this line of thought, the following verses beginning with the command "...Va y / le pide ayuda..." (to go and ask for help), "...venga alguien a comprar o llevarse el sofá cama /de la sala..." (to buy or take the sofa away). The poet then begins to modulate his tone as he reminds himself, "...Tiempo al tiempo..." (in due course), "...Esto / va más lento de lo figurado. Hasta /volverse familiar, augotes y reajustes, / llevará lo suyo..." (things will become familiar, and again, reminds himself life is about adjustments and readjustments). After the caesura in the second verse, Kozer returns to the imagery of nature using the metaphor of the cycles of life and death of an insect to describe his mother's metamorphosis:

...Va y  
pide ayuda venga alguien a  
comprar o llevarse el sofá cama

de la sala. Tiempo al tiempo. Esto  
va más lento de lo figurado. Hasta  
volverse familiar, ajustes y reajustes  
llevará lo suyo. (31)

From the first stage of life as a changing larva, “larva, mudar;” to the next as a chrysalis still in an indecisive state, “crisálida manifestar su indecision” the poet’s desire for the full return of his mother is expressed in comparing her to a queen bee, which like his mother, is able to give life: “Una abeja machiega o polilla del cereal la restituirá.” Kozer’s words are representative of Deleuze’s concept of “an origami universe” with its folding and unfolding of the movement of life, in which “life in not only everywhere, but souls are everywhere in matter” (11), illustrating the poet’s understanding of this process. Deleuze continues: “Thus, when an organism is called to unfold its own parts, its animal or sensitive soul is opened onto an entire theater in which it perceives or feels according to its unity, independently of its organism, yet inseparable from it” (11). We see how when provoked by the emotions of loss and desire, the poet’s intellectual, philosophical, and spiritual rationality prevails: “Hasta volverse familiar, ajustes y reajustes.”

Returning to humor to alleviate tension in the poem, Kozer takes a psychological approach (“Es para echarse a reír”), through the venting of excess emotion stored up as a result of the incongruity of the absurdity of death, and the fact that now that the mother is dead, she has nothing but time: “Tal vez. Y se verá. precipitarse. Si algo hay / ahora es tiempo.” Kozer’s use of irony shocks the reader as the affect of *ostranenie* offsets emotion through his penetration of the metaphysical features of life, death, and the

brevity of time. Knowing that his mother will not recover, “Diez días lleva mi madre” focuses on the acoustic dimension of language, “Escuálida, sin extensión, mas con tiempo,” to create a lasting image in the reader’s mind of deathly pallor as flesh or a shroud: “En su mayor flacura no flaquea. La lividez puede ser carne o sudario”:

...Es para echarse a  
reír: larva, mudar; crisálida manifestar  
su indecisión. Una abeja machiega  
o polilla del cereal la restituirá.  
Tal vez. Y se verá. No hay que  
precipitarse. Si algo hay ahora  
es tiempo. Escuálida, sin  
extensión, mas con tiempo. En  
su mayor flacura no flaquea. La  
lividez puede ser carne o sudario. (31)

The poet/son’s fetish re-manifests in exact images of his mother’s personal remains, from a shoe, to the run in her silk stockings, and underwear (“...Un / zapato. El corrido en la media / de seda. Vestigios de tela (ropa / interior”). Kozer grapples with the matters of life and death in the unreachable alter he creates on the sofa bed where his mother once sat (“Altar. Donde estuvo en la sala / el sofá, ara inasible...”). In seeking resolution to grief, Julia Kristeva writes in *Black Sun* that literary representation as a therapeutic device has been used in all societies throughout the ages and points out that the loss of the mother is a biological and psychic necessity as the first step in becoming autonomous (63). Kozer’s plight toward resolution draws the reader into the emotional and intellectual aspects of his dilemma through thought provoking and compelling representation:

En sí o externa. Se sabrá. Un

zapato. El corrido en la media  
de seda. Vestigios de tela (ropa  
interior). Telares, lejos: motas.  
Altar. Donde estuvo en la sala  
el sofá, ara inasible: votivo (le)  
coloco en la hornacina un plato  
(hondo) de alforfón, un platillo  
(peltre) de nueces y  
avellanas. (31)

By naming the suffering, exalting it, and dissecting it as Kozer does in the preceding lines, his poem exemplifies what Kristeva describes as the need to break things into its smallest components as a way to curb mourning. Throughout “*Diez días lleva mi madre*” Kozer names, exalts, and dissects the components of his memory that touch on the subject of the limits of nostalgia as spoken in the *cursilería* of his mother’s voice. Kozer’s fetishistic attachment to the sofa bed is an object that for the poet/son carries the memories of his mother. Through his poem we were able to see the effect this object has had in evoking his emotional attachment to his mother. And lastly, through poetry, we see that Kozer’s imagination has no limits in the response to these memories.

The use of *cursilería* works to distract as it helps to explain the world as it is. As Kozer’s poem speaks of his mother’s sofa bed as passive and non-threatening, he is able to shift his attention from the painful acceptance of loss and separation. In the process he finds comfort as well as autonomy in the sublime poetization of the object, as he places in the empty space where it once sat an ungraspable altar to his mother’s memory, in which he is able to curb mourning by making an offering to his mother on this “vaulted niche.”

### **The *Hyper-Rational Art* of a Poetic Son**

In *ACTA*, Kozer's absorbing mourning poems are unequivocally transcendent in their poetic vision, and are aimed at a more universal and precise way of thinking about human consciousness, of which death is a part. The innovative poetry in this book has also set forth a process of revitalization in Kozer's poetic practice based on two strategies, which together create a transformation within the spirit of the Neobaroque [the most original literary movement in Latin America in the last thirty years]. Both of these innovations are developed in this investigation as Kozer's *aesthetic of sensibility*, *Sensibility* was selected as the appropriate title for this aesthetic due to its dual meaning, first as it refers to the poet's common sense approach to death, and additionally as it pertains to Kozer's challenge to the Neobaroque as poetry that now expresses a conspicuous engagement with emotion.

The strategy referred to as *hyper-rational art* challenged the former claim that the Neobaroque is comprised of fragmentation, accumulation, ambiguity, and difficulty. In contrast to this erroneous and exhausted claim, I have shown that Kozer, through his mourning poems in *ACTA*, possesses a calculated rationality based on logic and precision in which feeling has a place but never obstructs the desired results of poetry as an intellectual art. Kozer, a poet with great control of the formal medium of poetry, is shown to write with a surgical precision, and *ACTA*, his forensic investigation into mourning. Instead of embellishment and ornamentation as key devices, Kozer's mathematical precision is shown to take the reader to a deeper level, going past these previous claims to see a new form unfolding within his poetry.

Kozer's strategy of *nothingness* showed that through the emotions revealed during mourning, as anti-sentimental poetry, Kozer clearly engaged with sentiment. Through *nothingness* feeling comes, but in a delayed sense, much as with the idea that consciousness of life's meaning only becomes clear upon death. The positive aspect of Kozer's *nothingness* was shown to represent the qualities of an awakened mind, in the belief that all phenomena are interconnected. This quality of *nothingness* in Kozer's mourning poetry is shown to tackle philosophical questions while capturing the reader imagination on an emotional level at the same time.

The mourning poems in *ACTA* are interpreted through the poet's representation of oppositions that exist in relation to one another, much like those found in the concept of *yin-yang* in Chinese philosophy. But with *yin-yang* as with life and death, Kozer's hybrid duality was used to describe how seemingly opposing forces are interconnected and interdependent in the natural world. The idea that instead of a binary system for examining oppositional voices, Deleuze's operational function of the fold supported the revelation that difference within the same works as the new norm versus difference as the rule.

José Kozer's poetry is imaginative and passionate yet, it has a realistic and critical intent. Through the folding and unfolding of the minutiae of everyday life and the intellectual concerns of art, philosophy, and spirituality, after *ACTA* we are more familiar with a poet who has spent a lifetime in the pursuit of the awareness of the world around him. Kozer's memoir of the life and death of his mother, reveals the voice of this

versifier who speaks of emotion, rage, sadness, and loss through poetic language that leaves the reader better prepared to face her own life circumstances.

Through the masterly linguistic mechanisms and resonant poetic imagery, emotional verses on the death of loved ones touch the soul of the reader. Yet the poet never gives in to the unrealistic expectation that sentimentality makes mourning easier. Instead, Kozer's expressed sentiment is filtered through his intense rationality to reach the reader's understanding of life's true nature, while the sublime beauty of his words awakens a sense of poetic creativity in the experience. We may never fully understand the process of mourning in view of the fact that each of us grieves differently, in our own time and in our own way. Still, there is much to be gained from the poetic teachings of a true poetic genius that inscribes for us the ambiguity of our contemporary experience of which of death and mourning play a fundamental role.

## CHAPTER V

### TAMARA KAMENSZAIN: POETIC DESIRE OF MEMORY

Memory loss is an unforgiving foe; an unwanted adversary as it lurks within the far reaches of the mind. Those who have experienced the dismantling effects of a loved one forever lost due to the insidious effects of Alzheimer's disease, know that it to be a disconsolate experience on myriad levels. For Dublin-born novelist Dame Iris Murdoch,<sup>174</sup> a vocabulary analysis of *Jackson's Dilemma* (1995) now confirms suspicion that the degenerative disease had damaged her literary skills long before it became obvious to those around her. Unable to remember the accomplishments of a literary career that spanned decades and included twenty-six novels, Murdoch says that in writing this last novel, she felt an intense and unfamiliar feeling of writer's block which she likened to being in "a hard, dark place" from which she was trying to escape.

Murdoch's struggle portrays a less than expected standard for the writer as it provides an image of a mind in distress. As with Murdoch, in *El Eco de mi madre* (ECO)<sup>175</sup> there is no escape for Tamara Kamenszain's mother, as the poet explores the

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<sup>174</sup> From article by Roger Highfield in The Telegraph. 12:01AM GMT 01 Dec 2004.  
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1477906/Decline-of-Iris-Murdoch...-in-her-own-words.html>

<sup>175</sup> Kamenszain's most recent work, *La novela de la poesía* (2012) [*La novela*], was selected by the Premio de la Crítica (Critic's Award) by The Book Foundation of Argentina as the best book of literary works published in 2012. *La novela* includes all of Kamenszain's books of poetry, *De este lado del Mediterráneo* (1973), *Los no* (1977), *La casa grande* (1986), *Vida de living* (1991), *Tango bar* (1998), *El Ghetto* (2003), *Solos y solas* (2005), y *El eco de mi madre* (2010), along with several unpublished works. Summarizing this volume, critic Enrique Foffani describes in the prologue to *La novela* this compilation as one that "begins with the poet's ancestors and moves to the present, as it also captures the family moments that touch us all."



mother-daughter bond while confronting the bewildering effects of Alzheimer's disease<sup>176</sup> that leads to her originator's memory loss and eventual death.

Kamenszain sees her mother's death in 2009 as "una enfermedad de la desmemoria."<sup>177</sup> The poet designates her mother's illness in this way to steer clear of the habit of readers to assign a particular marker to a particular illness. Described by sufferers as losing oneself in the disease, it may be more accurate to say that it is a disease that takes one from oneself. David Shenk in *The Forgetting* (2001), writes that throughout history, human beings have celebrated the powers of memory and lamented its frailties. He also shares the words of the Roman poet Juvenal, who in the first century A.D. proclaimed, "Worse than any loss in body, is the failing mind which forgets the names of slaves, and cannot recognize the face of the old friend who dined with him last night, nor those of the children whom he has begotten and brought up" (44-45).

Memory and memory loss in this investigation are considered from a wide field of studies including literary theory, the social sciences, psychology, philosophy, and the neurosciences. The poet's memories, found in the poems of ECO, are expressed in an open and direct manner as the advancement of traumatic disease and death simultaneously describe the synchronic experience of the poem's present moments while also attending to the awakening memories of the diachronic past. Kamenszain conveys

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<sup>176</sup> Kamenszain's reluctance to employ the designation of Alzheimer's is shared by writer Jonathan Franzen, who in the case of his own father writes that the use of the term memory loss is "a way of protecting the specificity of Earl Franzen from the generality of a nameable condition." From "My Father's Brain" in *New Yorker Magazine*. September 10, 2001. A feeling also expressed by Kamenszain, memory loss seems a better choice and more appropriate term in this study as well.

<sup>177</sup> Quote is from a personal interview conducted with the poet at Middlebury College in Vermont on August 8, 2012, found in Appendix B of this dissertation. Hereafter quotes from this interview will be footnoted as Appendix B.

the sequence of events of two sisters as they work through the loss of their mother, as well as their mother's gradual memory loss of her two daughters. The poet dedicates this volume to her sister [Rut], for whom she writes "la perplejidad de ser hijas resultó siempre una aventura compartida." For Kamenszain, the challenge in this work is to listen to the "other" [in this case her mother] as she increasingly becomes more so.

For Kamenszain, the death of her father, depicted in *El ghetto* (2003), was an anticipated occurrence due to his advanced age. *El ghetto* is dedicated to her father and begins with the following inscription "In memoriam Tobias Kamenszain /En tu apellido instalo mi ghetto" (7). The book consists of three sections, each with an epigraph from Paul Celan. Denise Leon points out, "por eso es en su apellido donde la escritura instala su identidad".<sup>178</sup> As such, *El ghetto* represents Kamenszain's relationship with her father and her strong attachment to Jewish traditions.

In the second part of *Ghetto*, Paul Celan's epigraph "mi duelo, lo que estoy viendo pasa a tu campo" reflects the poet's sentiments regarding the father's death. In addition, the lines, "Qué es un padre? / Con la primera estrella llega / el *shabbat* / y todavía no tengo respuesta" and further in the poem, "Un portafolios vacío / sobre la mesa vela los restos" ending with, "Mi duelo, lo que estoy viendo / es el Gran Buenos Aires desde un cementerio judío" highlight this treasured connection the poet maintains with her father. Kamenszain passes through three stages of separation in the poem: Freud's lost object of the father ("Qué es un padre? / y todavía no tengo respuesta") to

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<sup>178</sup> Quote is from Leon's article "Ghetto y poesía. La pérdida del hogar lingüístico." <http://www.ucm.es/info/especulo/numero35/ghettop.html>.

his absence in the home (“Un portafolio vacío”) to his final burial (“...desde un cementerio judío”). In a palpable approach, these lines question the memory of her father while at the same time examine her own place as a Jew and as a poet. The interconnected relationship “En tu apellido instalo mi ghetto” with “lo que estoy viendo pasa a tu campo” suggests the fluidity of “el ghetto” as a place which holds memory within yet calls the poet to question that which is beyond, for which she writes, “todavía no tengo respuesta.”

The passing of the Kamenszain’s mother, as alluded to, was a much different experience from that of her father, and as such, was more traumatic due to its prolonged duration and the cruelty of the infirmity’s destructive nature. These conditions cause the poet to experience this death on two levels, beginning with the mother’s loss of recognition of herself and her family, and later with the physical death that occurred as a result of this disease. ECO is a poetic chronicle of a family history that resists becoming a poetic confessional and characterizes the experience of exposing oneself when memory loss imprisons one within the human body. By bringing to the forefront the traces of her mother’s voice, that is, the echo of her mother’s conscious being, Kamenszain illustrates her subject’s defenselessness, asking the reader that in this echo of her voice, we take a moment to listen to one who has vanished before moving forward in our own lives.

### ***A Neoborroso Aesthetic of Experience***

In past years, Kamenszain has catalogued her poetry as “vanguardia doméstica” to refer to her own carefully detailed observation of interior spaces, where she claims, “Es

en la sala de estar donde la madre imprime al hogar el espacio artesanal, obsesivo y vacío de sus tareas diarias” (*Medusario* 235). Jorge Monteleone in “Letra y música sentimental” writes that in *Tango Bar* Kamenzain illuminates the passage of her life from the family home to the streets and neighborhoods of Argentina’s tango bars: “del tú al vos, de la madre a la mina, de la lengua materna al lunfardo.” Kamenzain “se apropia de lo cursi, de lo sentimental... de las mitologías porteñas...” *Tango Bar*, for Monteleone,

es un libro de vanguardia muy bien disimulada en la tradición popular... un libro sobre el sentimentalismo donde toda declaración sentimental puede ser tomada a broma... de la emoción se vuela en el sitio verdadero del sentimiento donde esta simulación tiene el nombre que se llama literatura.<sup>179</sup>

In this description Monteleone articulates the ways in which Kamenzain’s previous works have exemplified her method of thinking poetically about sentiment. Svetlana Boym in *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001), uses the term “reflective nostalgia” to refer to individual and cultural memory that is “oriented toward an individual narrative that savors details and memorial signs, perpetually deferring homecoming... it cherishes shattered fragments of memory and temporalizes space...” (50). In Monteleone’s and Boym’s words, we begin to understand the source of Kamenzain’s mourning poems within the fragmented space of her past memories.

Reflective nostalgia can be ironic and humorous, as it “reveals that longing and critical thinking are not opposed to one another since affective memories do not absolve one from compassion, judgment or critical reflection” (50). In Kamenzain’s case, I

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<sup>179</sup> <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/215171-letra-y-musica-sentimental>.

make the claim that sentiment also expands the use of compassion (along with judgment and critical reflection) as she moves away from the past style of the Neobaroque approach to poetry, and toward a new style of writing that engages with sentiment.

Beginning with ECO, this new approach is based on the poet's choice of a more direct method to her poetry, which diverges from the previous aesthetics of the Neobaroque and toward a new chapter in her lyrical production. I see this departure originating with Kamenzain's subject matter of memory and mourning and the idea that every memory has an emotion. Appropriate to this line of thinking is T.S. Eliot's<sup>180</sup> concept of *dissociation of sensibility*, in which he claims that intellectual experience is a part of man's complete experience, including the "cerebral cortex" as well as the heart, "the nervous system, and the digestive tracts" (SE, p. 250). For Kamenzain, emotion is not a way of expressing or understanding love and death [of which there is no understanding] but an aesthetic of the language the poet uses to write poetry. In this way, there is no message, nothing to understand about death, and what remains is poetry that is written and must be read with an appreciation of how the poetic mind functions.

Kamenzain's poetic mind is revealed in ECO through the strategies of *experiencia*, *presentificación*, and *espiritismo*,<sup>181</sup> as she constructs a primary philosophical engagement within her mourning poetry. Kamenzain arrives at the *neobarroso* through Nestor Perlongher's (1949–1992) *neobarroso*, a designation that refers to the muddy waters of the River Plate of Argentina, and Eduardo Espina's

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<sup>180</sup> From *Selected Essays*, (New York, 1950). p.248

<sup>181</sup> *Neobarroso*, *experiencia*, *presentificación*, and *espiritismo* are concepts Kamenzain refers to in our personal interview.

*Barrococó*, which highlights the Baroque and Rococo. *Neoborroso* takes Kamenzain to a new level as she diverges from the Neobaroque in the application the Spanish term *borrar*—to erase— to imply this designated shift. As she explains: “Con el *neoborroso* se trata de *borrar* lo ya cristalizado, ahora podemos pasar a otra cosa, como una vuelta de página. Lo que una vez fue útil, ya no lo es más”<sup>182</sup> Kamenzain’s aesthetics erase many of the techniques of the Neobaroque by eliminating everything that stands in the way of a more direct, more realistic approach to the poems she is currently writing. In this way, we can begin to look at her poems through the optics of a *neoborroso* aesthetic that expresses the poet’s narrative method of writing poetry demonstrated throughout ECO.

Kamenzain sees the sentimentality of the romantics or Pablo Neruda as something resolved within movements like those by the vanguards (including the Neobaroque) in which there is no going back to former times and forms of expression. What concerns her more today is what she refers to as “los nuevos sentimentalismos” found in the interruption of intimacy in media, from online sources to autobiographic novels that pass as confessionals, as they create new modes of stereotypical language. Seeing the new sentimentalism as spectacle, the poet calls for caution in these trends:

Son los sentimentalismos que nos impone la sociedad del espectáculo y entonces me parece que hay que estar muy alerta de no permitir que esto se cristalice. De ese sentimentalismo actual yo estaría alerta. Que tiene que ver también con la tecnología, porque hoy hay un entendimiento rápido de códigos, de tipo, estoy pensando en Facebook cuando la gente dice “ay, cómo te quiero” o

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<sup>182</sup> Appendix B.

él “me gusta”, esos son los nuevos sentimentalismos que me parecen peligrosos.<sup>183</sup>

In addition, the *neobarroso* also becomes a way of describing the textual content of the titled work. The word ECO represents the erasure and fading away of her mother’s memory and her voice. For Kamenzain, not only the mother’s memories but her own as well have been erased as a result of the loss of her mother as the family’s memory maker. Kamenzain (as with Kozer) sees her father’s voice as one that represents his ideas, commands, precepts and thoughts as opposed to a particular mode or speech pattern.

In her mother’s case, Kamenzain searches her own mind for the echo of her mother’s voice in what she calls “la lengua materna” to create poetry that reflects a certain mode, rhythm, and cadence reminiscent of this way of speaking. As memory loss begins to obstruct her mother’s once fluid Spanish, Kamenzain writes to preserve the world her mother gradually leaves behind, as she searches through language for the support and the courage to deal with the terrible pain that results from her mother’s forgetting.

Kamenzain’s poetic production is prompted by the experience of mourning she writes about in ECO, and discusses in our personal interview: “Entonces, no sé, estoy en otras búsquedas. Creo que esos ‘golpes de la vida’ que dice Vallejo ayudaron también a buscar nuevas alternativas para decir.”<sup>184</sup> Instead of helping the poet in her search for new means of expression, the Neobaroque “ya en vez de ayudarme, como una búsqueda

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<sup>183</sup> Appendix B.

<sup>184</sup> Appendix B.

de cambio, de ruptura, me estaba limitando.” This search for new modes of representation is explored throughout this chapter by means of the various approaches to the study of memory and memory loss.

The poet’s relationship to death is a topic of her literary works as well as an issue of close personal understanding. Kamenzain’s life story is one of multiple estrangements and conflicting identifications as she adds to her role as poet: critic, Jew, exile, woman, mother, sister, wife, and daughter. Kamenzain writes about the effects each of these roles plays upon her life without explicit self-description and idealization, and she has a clear idea of the significant role death and sentiment play in her poetry. She defines sentiment not as love but as death; as with poetry, love and death are the only means by which subject and object cannot survive apart from one another.

Kamenzain further elaborates:

El amor sería la pulsión que se lanza a la caza de un objeto que nunca termina de encontrar mientras la muerte marca el límite del encuentro del sujeto consigo mismo. Y, la poesía recorre la trayectoria que la conecta entre esas dos verdades extremas. Una trayectoria que, por cierto, se escribe con la grafía de la vida. Bio y grafía, sujeto y objeto, amor y muerte, quiebres de una pérdida que la poesía, obstinadamente, seguiría tratando de unir. Tal vez por puro instinto de sobrevivencia.<sup>185</sup>

Seeing sentimentality as “self-commiseration” or as a fault of thinking too much in the poetic “I”, Kamenzain’s utilization of the expression *experiencia* as opposed to “sentiment” becomes a strategy in her mourning poetry for avoiding sentimentality. In a personal interview with the writer of this dissertation she explains her preference for

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<sup>185</sup> Appendix B.



*experience* as opposed to “sentiment” or “emotion” when dealing with the pain of loss, “En ese sentido me parece que el dolor, la expresión del dolor, es más una experiencia que un sentimiento. Porque la experiencia es algo menos personal, más compartible.”<sup>186</sup> In this way, the expression of sentiment is best described as part of the experience that we *live* as human beings, as opposed to an experience that is *felt* as such.

Another strategy useful in Kamenszain’s mourning poetry is the term *presentificación*, in which she sees the use of the lyrical “I” acting not as the regulator of daily experience, but as an act of presentification, in which the actual lived moment becomes instead the subject of that experience, which the poem then expresses. Of the various ways in which poets strive to find new ways of expression, Kamenszain’s use of *presentification* states that poetry is the presentification of the present meaning that within the context of a poem written in the past it always brings the past to the present, it presentifies it by making it present again:

Es decir, que aunque pueda estar escrita en pasado siempre trae ese pasado al presente, lo presentifica. Lo cierto es que la actividad poética trae el pasado no como evocación o nostalgia de algo que ya fue, sino para hacerlo presente nuevamente, en ese sentido es *presentificación*, es un doble presente: hace presente a la experiencia y así ésta vuelve a suceder de nuevo.<sup>187</sup>

Thus the moment becomes a dual present in that it makes the past experience extant to the current experience and thus allows the event to return to happen again. The idea of *presentification* takes root in Kamenszain’s proposal written in the epilogue to *Medusario* in which she questions how poetry should be written after Oliverio Girondo’s

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<sup>186</sup> Appendix B.

<sup>187</sup> From an email with the poet dated May 12, 2014.

(1891–1967) celebrated masterpiece *En la masmédula* (1954). Girondo's final book constitutes the poet's journey into uncharted territory as it re-envision the Spanish language by focusing on form in which he utilizes language as an unstable ground for poetic creation. Kamenzain proposes that as a result of "...los intimísimos remimos recaricias de la lengua y de sus regastados páramos y reconjunciones y recópolas y sus remuertas reglas y necrópolis y reputrefactas palabras cansado, simplemente cansado del cansancio" (487), in order to escape language's fatigue, poets must find new ways of writing:

Para producir un nuevo lleno estamos reciclando viejos recursos olvidados en la memoria del trabajo poético: algunos volvemos a caminar por aquella vía que Góngora trazó para el verso desde el corazón de la sintaxis; otros nos perdemos por las filigranas de una narración instantánea cuyo reaseguro será, siempre, quedar suspendida; o afinamos el oído a ras de las hablas para incorporar al decir no solo las delicias del sobresalto metonímico sino, sobre todo, otros modos de lo dicho. (487)

*Presentification* brings the past to the present and puts the future into motion.

The point for Kamenzain is not to look nostalgically to the past, but rather to create poetry with a new way of speaking about the past, which goes beyond what has been said or what is generally accepted as being said, as in the case of mourning. In this way, her poetry continues to narrate and recount; yet it brings something new to the conversation as it gives new reasoning to past ideas.

The final component explored in Kamenzain's mourning poetry is her use of *espiritismo*.<sup>188</sup> In an effort to reach the lost subject found in ECO, the poet resorts to the

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<sup>188</sup> Appendix B

pharmakon she calls *espiritismo* to unite speech with silence, representation with silence, and to uncover the poetic link she seeks between herself and the voices of the lost that allow her to connect on an unconventional level. In a personal email, Kamenzain further explains this term:

El espiritismo es una doctrina que considera que se puede hablar con los muertos y hay prácticas especiales para lograrlo. Pero por supuesto que en mi poesía aparece como algo metafórico: no es que yo creo en esa doctrina, por cierto. Lo que pasa es que la poesía es una forma de comunicarse con los muertos, por eso lo que uno escucha son los “ecos” de ellos y los transmite. No es que haya que tomárselo literalmente, eso sólo una metáfora!<sup>189</sup>

The pharmakon of *espiritismo* in Kamenzain’s mourning poems allow her to work toward consolation in facing death. Paradoxically for the poet, writing can work to cure or to poison “porque tampoco es la escritura una enfermera samaritana que quiere curar a la gente, no; pero si alguien sabe cómo tomarla, lo puede curar, ¿no?” In, “Como la torcaza que de transparencia en transparencia,” the poet describes the reaction of others to this sensibility that allows her to connect with the dead: “aunque nos tomen por locos tenemos que atrapar / en *el espiritismo* de esa garganta profunda / un idioma para hablar los muertos.” / As to how this strategy works, Kamenzain further describes the process as follows:

La poesía empuja la lengua hacia el “espiritismo”, tratando de empujar para ver si se puede decir lo que no se puede decir. Eso, yo creo que es una pulsión de vida que tiene la poesía de avanzar más y de decir más aunque no se encuentren las palabras. Me parece que esa es una pulsión de vida, y la única manera que tenemos de hablar de la muerte es desde esta pulsión. Eso es

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<sup>189</sup> From an email between this author and Kamenzain on February 28, 2015.

también una elección de vida que a su vez sale de la muerte,  
digamos. No se puede pensar muerte sin vida, no es pensable.<sup>190</sup>

A word frequently used by Kamenszain, “pulsión” translates to English as “instinct”, “urge,” “drive,” or “impulse.” In mourning poetry, the need expressed by poets to say what cannot be said is insatiable. The impulse to go further and to say more for this poet results from the close connection she felt with her mother while she was alive, thus allowing her to draw on this impulse even in death. As she further explains, “Uno puede poner máscaras, crear disfraces, pero no puede con la muerte, no puede con lo que no se puede decir. Uno se muere y listo, no?” Kamenszain sees this impulse as one that moves toward life, and for that reason, it is one that holds no place for sentimentality.

In Calabrese’s chapter on “Complexity and Dissipation,” he details the paradox in which new structures dissipate energy and the belief that this dissipation “does not lead toward entropy, but toward a new formation, a new order, and new structures based on bifurcations, fluctuation, and rupture” (145). Kamenszain, while moving away from the Neobaroque, is still invested in many of the ideas of this spirit on an internal level. The means of expressing the subject of death becomes a crisis with which she must deal, and she chooses to do so through poetry. The suggestion is made here that this crisis results in a process of renewal and revitalization expressed within the creative experience of ECO. This renovation seen through the process of “complexity and dissipation” can best be described as *neoborroso*.

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<sup>190</sup>Appendix B.

One possible area in which Kamenszain's *neobarroso* poetry shows a new order and structure is through the trend in American poetry known as "poet's prose."<sup>191</sup> Poets of this style refuse to separate imagination and intellect from the inner experience and the world. The range offered in prose poetry allows for freedom to emphasize the imagination rather than the form of the line, which speaks to the narrative structure found in Kamenszain's mourning poems. Additionally, instead of relying on emotion to speak for the poet's experience, the emphasis is on intelligence with an undercurrent of emotion, as opposed to a lyric form in which the emphasis is on the emotion and the intellect acts within the undercurrent (56). This distinction is explored further in the following discussion to determine if aspects of the poet's prose can be found in Kamenszain's poems as a viable means of explaining this new impulse toward freedom from her former Neobaroque forms of expression.

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<sup>191</sup> The consensus on poetry and prose and the mixing of these modes is still out. Michael Davidson argues that as of yet, no clear distinction has been made between the "conventional prose poem" and what he suggests to be "the new prose," "non- or inter-generic prose forms," and "the prose of fact," or, what Stephen Fredman calls "poet's prose" (95). Fredman points out that it would be difficult to mistake certain works for fiction or for purely discursive prose, and offers the term "poet's prose" as opposed to the French Prose Poem to cover the gamut of non-versified poetry: Fredman claims that "Prose Poetry remains redolent with the atmospheric sentiment of French Symbolism, and is a more encompassing term to cover all (not just lyric) poetry written in sentences rather than in verse" (49). David Ignatow explains the range he finds in prose poetry offers freedom to emphasize the imagination rather than the form of the line:

...By imagination I mean the intelligence within the imagination.... Of course it has a form, but it is a form, which constantly renews itself because the intelligence is restless. Emotions tend to repeat themselves over and over again, whereas the intelligence is constantly renewing itself, recreating itself. Therefore, I feel in the prose poems the emphasis is on the intelligence with an undercurrent of emotion. In the lyric form the emphasis was on the emotion and the intellect is the undercurrent. (56)

## Echoes From a Collective Experience

ECO opens with the extension of César Vallejo's simple yet extraordinary verse from *Los heraldos negros*, "Hay golpes en la vida tan fuertes..." (13). Kamenszain says she turns to Vallejo in search for words of her own ("que me demoro en el verso de Vallejo"). Everything that is left to be said is done through the link between her and her mother, the *espiritismo* of the mother's maternal voice, which now resides within the ellipses of the poet/daughter's poem. As Vallejo's words are repeated, "yo no sé...yo no sé...yo no sé," Kamenszain's added repetition duplicates the emptiness felt at the loss of the mother, the memory of the past, and thoughts about the future. Yet the words make clear there are no doubts, "Para dejar dicho de entrada" that from this first poem forward, her mother's voice will reside within the verses of her poetry. The repetition echoed in the final line adds to the effect of the mother's fading, and defines the collective voices of the Mother, Kamenszain, and Vallejo, who jointly create a polyphony that takes the poem beyond a single voice to form a collective memory shared by others:

Hay golpes en la vida tan fuertes  
que me demoro en el verso de Vallejo  
Para dejar dicho de entrada  
lo que sin duda el eco de mi madre  
rematará entre puntos suspensivos:  
yo no sé... yo no sé... yo no sé. (13)

Maurice Halbwachs analyzes and advances the concept of collective memory in *La mémoire collective* (Paris, 1950), defining this concept as the shared collection of information held in the memories of two or more members of a group. The philosopher

and sociologist writes that collective memory can be shared, passed on, and constructed by groups both small and large. As Halbwachs points out, the only means of preserving specific remembrances is to write them down in a coherent narrative, for writings are all that remain when the thought and the spoken word die.

In ECO, Kamenzain cites a brief epitaph written by Alejandra Pizarnik who also borrows from Vallejo: “Golpes en la tumba. Al filo de las palabras golpes / en la tumba. Quién vive, dije. Yo dije quién vive.” In these words, not only does she share and pass on the memory of Vallejo, but Pizarnik does so as well. Halbwachs’ idea that every collective memory requires the support of a group delimited in space and time is demonstrated throughout ECO. Kamenzain takes as the subject of several of her mourning poems the voices of other poets as a means of commiseration with those who have had the same experience of loss as she.

Nicolas Russell<sup>192</sup> renews aspects of Halbwachs’ ideas first by reviewing previous interpretations of his work and then by offering new or redefined meaning of the differences between personal and collective memory. For Russell, the distinction between the terms collective memory and personal memory lies within the

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<sup>192</sup> Russell clarifies these terms, beginning with procedural memory, which he refers to as the ability to remember and repeat certain performances, as in the type of memory used to develop skills like swimming. Semantic memory involves the storage of abstract information and facts. Russell explains that semantic memory is not of the same type as a moment of individual experience in order to be remembered. For more on this subject, see Russell’s article “Collective Memory before and after Halbwachs,” useful in contextualizing and defining many of the ideas presented here. Russell points to Paul Ricœur’s definition of memories as those attributed to a single person as personal memories, and those attributed to more than one person as collective memories (793).

understanding of the use of procedural, semantic, and episodic memory.<sup>193</sup> Most important for this investigation is episodic memory, which allows individuals to remember past personal experience and to mentally reconstruct past time. Episodic memory is of the type that is highly personal and subjective, particularly as it relates to poetry.

Russell's points out that great artists, and particularly poets, (whose claim to ethics and aesthetics is inscribed within the collective memory of others), allow these exceptional ethical and aesthetic accomplishments to continue. As the author surmises, "the fact that poetry is eternal and that it is preserved by posterity, distances it from the contingency of human temporality" (794). Kamenzain's accomplishments also live on in perpetuity through the poems she creates [influenced by others] that are then able to sustain the legacy of which Russell speaks.

Sylvia Molloy and Tamara Kamenzain, in a discussion on ECO and Molloy's book *Desarticulaciones*, both released in 2010,<sup>194</sup> point out that these books are poetic works based on their own individual situations and presented through autobiographic memory. Consistent with Guy Debord's ideas on the construction of situations as the

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<sup>193</sup> Russell points to research done in the last thirty years that places a distinction between three types of personal memory: procedural, semantic, and episodic. Procedural memory refers to the ability to repeat a certain performance, the type of memory used to develop skills, like swimming. It is non-conceptual; it does not involve producing representation of ideas or events but rather the ability to repeat a procedure or develop a skill (797). Semantic memory involves the storage of abstract information and facts. It preserves information about abstract concepts independent of past time or past experience, remembering the Pythagorean theorem is an example, as it is not tied to past experience. It is not a memory of a moment in time that an individual experience in order to be remembered. And most importantly here, episodic memory allows individuals to remember past personal experience and to mentally reconstruct past time.

<sup>194</sup> From a round table discussion at Middlebury College on August 8, 2012 with Sylvia Molloy, Tamara Kamenzain, and Jacobo Sefamí.



central idea of the process he describes as “the concrete construction of momentary ambiances of life and transformation into a superior passional quality,”<sup>195</sup> any method of making one or more individuals critically analyze their own personal life is considered situationist. With this in mind, collective memory is analyzed through the ways in which these poets consider their own personal lives. The construction of situations such as those found in Kamenszain’s autobiographical mourning poems is executed deliberately in order to reawaken and pursue authentic feeling and desires as they revolve around “the material environment of life” and “the behaviors which it gives rise to” as they “radically transform it.”<sup>196</sup>

Section I of ECO contains four poems in which Kamenszain elaborates on the collective memories of other friends and poets, including Lucía Laragione, Coral Bracho, Diamela Eltitt and Sylvia Molloy.<sup>197</sup> Each poem expresses one poet’s personal, episodic memory of an event that marks the parent’s decline, to which Kamenszain merges her own similar experience. Each individual poem becomes a cohesive narrative on the remembrance of the parent in which their personage is preserved through poetry. Kamenszain (along with her cohorts) safeguards memory and memories when they are no longer available or possible to share with the primogenitor.

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<sup>195</sup> “Report on the Construction of Situations and on the International Situationist Tendency’s Conditions of Organization and Action.” <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/report.html>

<sup>196</sup> “Report on the Construction of Situations and on the International Situationist Tendency’s Conditions of Organization and Action.” <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/report.html>

<sup>197</sup> Kamenszain’s poem on Sylvia Molloy’s experience will be discussed in detail in the section of this dissertation on Intercorporeal Memory and the Maternal Body.

The idea that all cultural transmission (language, customs, values) is a product of imitation is generally accepted, and Kamenzain's deliberate treatment of echoing the words of other poets helps to convey a sense of prophetic authority, moving the poems from a personal toward a collective core of concern. This methodology moves subjectivity from the singular "I" to the collective "We", a shift that moves these poems from an explicit biographical to a more collective form, creating a sense of *ostranenie* in the process. Remembering Hugo Friedrich's commentary on "the abnormal divorce" of the poetic "I", Kamenzain disassociates the empirical self as a biographical testimony, preventing an interpretation that stands alone as the single explanation of these poems. In addition, Kamenzain's use of *presentification* emphasizes the subject of memory loss and mourning for each of these poets, as each one tends to relive their own individual experience, *presentified* through each succeeding poem. Kamenzain's goal is that the lyrical "I" not acts as regulator of the experience, but instead become the lived moment that the poem expresses. As a characteristic of *anti-sentimentality*, each of these poetic devices of distancing allows a space for poetry to speak of the universal experience of mourning we all face.

Each poem in this grouping begins with an apposite epigraph in which the selected poet speaks in her own words about the loss of cognitive abilities that include word production and the capacity to express one's thoughts. Lucía Laragione's epigraph (*Se inclina copiando una a una las palabras del libro que tiene al lado*) informs the reader of the subject matter to follow. In "El padre de Lucy copiaba un libro ajeno" there is an echoing effect that results from Laragione's father's plagiarism of someone else's

work while believing he is writing his own, which Kamenszain's mother also attempts (as does Kamenszain) by using the words of other poets. Kamenszain expresses the desire to do for her mother what she is no longer able to do for herself. Diachronic and synchronic time are interspersed as verbs fluctuate between the distant past, the present past, and present time; "copiaba," "decía," "fuerza," "tuvo," "se copia," "plagiando," "trata," "escribe." In this way, the collective frameworks of memory mediate between the present and the past, between self and other. Temporality puts into play the action of *experiencia* as opposed to emotion in dealing with the irony and confusion in which these elders find themselves as they struggle to maintain what is left of their former lives in the face of memory loss. Kamenszain's use of specific word phrases, "...libro ajeno," "...gesto senil la desmemoria..." "...se copia de la que era / mientras yo plagiando al plagiario," "trato de pasar..." create a sense of *ostranenie* in which the poet's inclination toward defamiliarization is done so contextually, giving the reader a sense of the disorientation of memory loss:

El padre de Lucy copiaba un libro ajeno  
 mientras decía que lo estaba escribiendo.  
 En ese gesto senil la desmemoria del escritor  
 fuerza un homenaje doméstico  
 a lo que letra por letra tuvo para su vida  
 la transcendencia de un asunto impreso.  
 Mi madre también se copia de la que era  
 mientras yo plagiando al plagiario  
 trato de pasar en limpio ese diario de vida  
 que la autora de mis días escribe como puede. (23)

Without words to express their bereavement, parents struggle with memory loss, while daughters search for ways to express anticipated grief.<sup>198</sup> The individual search becomes collective in Kamenzain's poetic creation of a tribute to domestic life, "fuerza un homenaje doméstico." The poem takes on a transcendental nature, "...letra por letra... la transcendencia de un asunto impreso" when the poet holds firm to the belief in the power of the written word as she expresses the testimony of the shattered fragments of memory that reflective nostalgia represents. The focus on language reminds the reader that we cannot think about language unless we also think about death and remembrance. The short poem is descriptive yet direct in its subject matter and formal turn. The role reversal of the mother-daughter relationship reveals a world turned upside down as the poetic "I" distances *pathos* in order to speak explicitly of a traumatic event in the lives of both elders. In the final two lines, Kamenzain offers her rationale for why she has written not only this poem but also the entire collection of ECO, "de pasar en limpio ese diario de vida, que la autora de mis días escribe como puede."

There is no sentimental expression of emotion or the poet's cry for consolation. Instead, we find a superbly written account of her choice to tenderly and respectfully acknowledge her mother as she was. Kamenzain turns the page of her past writing aesthetic of the Neobaroque and uses the *neoborroso* to exemplify the textual content of the poem; and as her mother's memory fades away, so does all that came before,

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<sup>198</sup>Anticipatory grief is the normal mourning that occurs when a patient or family is expecting a death. Anticipatory grief has many of the same symptoms as those experienced after a death has occurred. It includes all of the thinking, feeling, cultural, and social reactions to an expected death that are felt by the patient and family. <http://www.medterms.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=26258>.

expressed in a more forthright and formal style. The poet engages with emotion as she extends to the reader a sense of what memory loss is like within the erasure and fading away of recollection.

In Coral Bracho's epigraph we see the fortitude and desire one needs to hold on to the essence of someone when knowing him or her as they once were begins to wane (*Eso que atraviesa los patios y se aleja en su silueta doble, en su diálogo perfilado entre murmullos de luz es lo familiar*). In "Coral le contrató una profesora de baile" Kamenszain expresses Bracho's personal experience with the memory loss of her mother and the ensuing search for a means of recuperating what has been taken ("reencontraría el camino por el que se estaba perdiendo").<sup>199</sup> The poem is short, the alliteration of the consonants *c* and *q* contribute to a sonorous rhythm in the first four lines, while the enjambment adds to the continuity and rhythm as well: "Coral le contrató," "confiada en que|," "camino," el que." The first two lines are narrative in structure, there is no need of interpretation, while the last two lines of the stanza are more poetic and elusive in nature: "su madre reencontraría el camino / por el que se estaba perdiendo." Here the reader must infer symbolically what has been lost and what is hoped to be reencountered on the new path they each travel:

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<sup>199</sup> The Alzheimer's Foundation of America reports that music has power—especially for individuals with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias, and it can spark compelling outcomes even in the very late stages of the disease. When used appropriately, music can shift mood, manage stress-induced agitation, stimulate positive interactions, facilitate cognitive function, and coordinate motor movements. This happens because rhythmic and other well-rehearsed responses require little to no cognitive or mental processing. They are influenced by the motor center of the brain that responds directly to auditory rhythmic cues. A person's ability to engage in music, particularly rhythm playing and singing, remains intact late into the disease process because, again, these activities do not mandate cognitive functioning for success. For more information on this topic see <http://www.alzfdn.org/EducationandCare/musictherapy.html>.

Coral le contrató una profesora de baile  
confiada en que memorizando los pasos  
su madre reencontraría el camino  
por el que se estaba perdiendo. (24)

The poem shifts in the next five lines to the journey of Kamenszain's mother along a similar path, as the poem highlights the terms of her own mother's ordeal with that of Bracho's. The poem places side-by-side Bracho's "profesora de baile" and Kamenszain's "el lazarillo" who guides her mother on daily walks until it is time to return to her room. Kamenszain's word play, taken from Bracho's "*en su silueta doble*," is "doubled" in her own "tiene que doblar," reinforcing the idea of the double existence of knowing and not knowing and the collective estrangement felt by both poets that follow as a result of uncertainty.

Kamenszain continues the technique of doubling with the imagery of dancing, but here the dance is performed beneath a light bulb that mirrors the "nueronas alarmadas" that are going off within the brain. As the guide makes the turn, her mother performs a dance of sorts as the "neuronas alarmadas" replicate the action in the brain that occurs with Alzheimer's when the neurotransmitters that produce acetylcholine begin to break connections with the other nerve cells:<sup>200</sup>

La mía camina por un pasillo  
que conoce desde siemprey cuando tiene que doblar  
el lazarillo que la acompaña baila  
bajo un foco de neuronas alarmadas. (24)

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<sup>200</sup> For more on this discussion, see Luke Masden.<http://www.human-memory.net>.

For the poet's mother, the feeling of estrangement continues as passing by the bathroom mirror creates another un-reality for the patient: "Al pasar por el baño el espejo / recibe a una señora que saluda a otra / las dos se dejan ver enlazadas." The image in the mirror and her mother "doubled" become intertwined as one image. The feeling of strangeness that overcomes the reader is similar to the one Walter Benjamin alludes to Pirandello's estrangement felt before seeing one's own image in the mirror. In this case, the sense of estrangement arises when looking in the mirror; the mirrored image become detached from the person mirrored. Benjamin questions epistemology and the relationship between the self and the world as the essentially destabilizing function of mirrors creates an endless movement that can never be overcome.<sup>201</sup>

There is a sense of irony in the following verses, a sign of the poet's awareness of the absurdity of the situation, yet this irony also produces a sense of tender emotion toward the object of this irony, "recibe a una señora que saluda a otra / las dos se dejan ver enlazadas /en una única silueta trenzan para nadie." The enjambment, seven lines without pause, replicates the synchronized movement of a dance step in which both partners are interlaced, while combined assonantal and consonantal sounds of evident word groupings add to this sense of movement:

Al pasar por el baño el espejo  
recibe a una señora que saluda a otra  
las dos se dejan ver enlazadas  
en una única silueta trenzan para nadie  
esa danza que repite todavía  
lo que hace rato traspuso sin retorno

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<sup>201</sup> For more on this discussion, see Esther Leslie's, *Walter Benjamin: Overpowering Conformism*, 103 – 04.

las puertas de lo familiar. (25)

Kamenzain's poetic narration shows both intellectual clarity and artistic adroitness through the verses "trenzan para nadie..." and "traspuso sin retorno/ las puertas de lo familiar." Her exceptional sense of the experience of the inner as well as the outer world exemplifies Stephen Fredman's "poet's prose." This new order breathes renewed life into her poems while maintaining an undercurrent of controlled emotion without resorting to past aesthetics. Kamenzain's intellect allows her the freedom to emphasize her imagination while maintaining an emotional element to express her great loss.

In "Coral le contrató una profesora de baile," we see Kamenzain at the height of her engagement with each of the proposed levels of a poetics of mourning, as the *neoborroso* allows her to describe the textual content of memory loss in a straightforward manner. She uses *experiencia* to go past this pain without excessive sentimentality. With *espiritismo* she speaks for those who can no longer speak for themselves, and by *presentification* she speaks in a new way, not just of the events of her own experience, but as the subject of a collective, universal approach to mourning.

Diamela Elitt's poem, "Diamela le construyó una casa atrás de la suya," is preceded by her epigraph (*Mi madre estuvo toda la vida y nunca me dejó pensar que yo podría estar sin ella*). The apportionment of memories held by both poets defines and then extends the collective experience a step further. Through poetry Kamenzain speaks to the individual circumstances we each face in moving forward after the loss of those we thought we could not live without. The tone of the poem reflects the downward spiral



of knowing that few options are left. As we saw in Kozer, and will see further with Espina, Kamenszain expresses the attainment of *areté*, a form of virtue that gives her the strength to overcome her thoughts, feelings, and the current circumstance of her life. Through poetry's link with human knowledge, Kamenszain, as a poet working at the highest level, resorts to the use of all her faculties to surpass the need for overly sentimental expression in these poems.

The poet expresses a sense of self-sufficiency that she delivers through open frankness in oral verses, direct in nature. The device of anadiplosis, "Cerca y lejos / lejos y cerca también," emphasizes the fact that while physically close, on a conscious level, they are far apart. As with Bracho, "el camino por el que se estaba perdiendo", Kamenszain writes of the finality of the anticipated outcome of memory loss "de todos los caminos que la conducirían hasta el último camino", in which contemplation becomes knowledge due to external circumstances. Kamenszain and Diamela fulfill their roles as daughters and poets through *areté* as they comply with the virtuous duty of caring for their mothers:

Diamela le construyó una casa atrás de la suya  
para tener a su madre cerca y lejos  
lejos y cerca también  
de todos los caminos que la conducirían  
hasta el último camino. (29)

The following verses shift the focus ("Yo en cambio") from Diamela's mother to her own mother. The emphasis on words associated with death and suffering, "muerte," "sufrimiento," "caída," are juxtaposed with those expressing the desire to protect the mother, "asilo," "ampare." The poet expresses her guilt over exposing her mother's

situation to others in writing about the situation, “del suyo por dejarme anotando los detalles de su caída.” This brings to mind the similar concern of Jacques Derrida in *Circumfession*; the distasteful gaining at the expense of the suffering of a loved one that many poets must endure. He writes of this guilt toward his mother’s memory for “publishing her end” and “exhibiting her last breaths and, still worse, for purposes that some might judge to be literary” (25–26):

Yo en cambio a un paso de su muerte  
le ofrecí a la mía un asilo que la ampare  
de mi sufrimiento por ella y del suyo por dejarme  
anotando los detalles de su caída. (29)

Kamenszain voices the challenge she experiences in expressing emotions of grief through the fracturing of her mother into two distinct bodies: “A través de la radiografía lo que puede verse es una fractura que la dividió en dos mujeres.” The distinction is clearly marked between the two; the one as she remains in the poet’s memory, the other as she has become within the limbo of memory loss. She writes that “una se atrasa ahora en mi recuerdo otra se apuró tanto que reportada la enfermera desde su limbo.” Unable to recognize her daughter, the mother takes Kamenszain to be her own grandmother, “se fue la abuela.” The loss of the mother’s memory is the loss of the daughter’s own selfhood. As Shenk writes, “One tangled neuron leads to another tangled neuron, leads to another... until the retrieval of formed memories becomes unreliable, when identity vanishes” (118):

A través de la radiografía lo que puede verse  
es una fractura que la dividió en dos mujeres:  
una se atrasa ahora en mi recuerdo otra se apuró tanto  
que reportada la enfermera desde su limbo dijo:

“se fue la abuela.” (29)

Poems tend to echo prior poems for the benefit of the poet, as poets seem to echo earlier voices, whether by accident or by plan, with the same spirit that gives shape to newly reflected sounds. Tamara Kamenszain in *ECO* begins a new phase in her poetics in which her *neobarroso* aesthetic galvanizes her move away from that of the Neobaroque. After the death of her mother, memories solidify when they become locked as part of the past. Kamenszain’s mourning poems, written in open and straightforward narrative, voice all our concerns with the advancement of traumatic disease and death.

The poems in Kamenszain’s first section of *ECO* have revealed verses by César Vallejo taken from the personal memories of the death of his mother, “Hay golpes en la vida tan fuertes... Yo no sé,” and extended them as the collected memories of women poets including Lucía Laragione, Coral Bracho, and Diamela Eltit. Personal and collective histories are acknowledged and shared with others in order to listen, to learn, and to understand through links that connect women with one another. Kamenszain’s poems as part of the social framework of individual recollection utilizes aesthetic influence to create a work of art that upholds common intelligibility as it helps to explain human experience.

### **Exiled in Memory Loss**

Facing Cerberus, Tamara Kamenszain has lived to look this three-headed watchdog of Hades in the eyes in her experience with memory loss, bereavement, and exile. The adjustment to life on a personal level (home and the “lengua materna” of her

mother) parallels the dynamics of exile found within the loss of homeland on a national level (homeland and the “native language” of Argentina), when both result in the dissolution of the subject in first person. As those suffering from memory loss begin to turn more inward, the state of isolation further intensifies for those intimately connected, as neither side is any longer able to access those drifting away. Toward the ubiquitous, uninhabited, or undesirable space of “no man’s land” is where we look to find Kamenszin’s *espiritismo*, the link she uses to communicate with those lost to this in-between space of bereavement, memory loss, and exile.

ECO contains no elegant or melancholic idealization of illness, nor mythification of a political message on exile. Instead, much like the works of Kozler, we see exile through the poet’s reflections on the play among absence, emptiness, and nothingness as language is no longer useful to describe reality: “¿alguna novedad? / nada nada nada repite ahora / en este limbo que día a día la repite / la que lee aviso fúnebres del lado del revés / dio vuelta *La Nación* a la mañana y la deja dada vuela hasta quedarse dormida / porque de nada se enteró.” Kamenszin’s poems speak instead of existence in jeopardy, as one she knows on an intimate level no longer has the memory of past experiences. Like exile, memory loss has stripped away the essential meaning of existence. Hannah Arendt writes in her essay “We Refugees”<sup>202</sup> on the status of refugees in exile, which may be applied to the state of exile created through memory loss and mourning:

We lost our home, which means the familiarity of daily life. We lost our occupation, which means the confidence that we are of some use in this world. We lost our language, which means the naturalness of reactions,

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<sup>202</sup> “We Refugees” from Arendt’s *The Jewish Writings*, 2007.

the simplicity of gestures, the unaffected expression of feelings. We left our relatives... our best friends... and that means the rupture of our private lives. (264–65)

Each aspect targeted by Arendt is affected when exile, memory loss, or mourning come into play, from loss of home and the experience of daily life, to the occupation and the personal confidence we find in the development of our skills, and the loss of private and public language we use to express our wants and needs among colleagues, friends, family, and acquaintances. As the three converge in ECO, it is a “perfect storm” in which those affected are caught in a maelstrom, impossible to distinguish where one begins and the other ends. Written through the enduring medium of intellectual poetic language in which the representation of the lack of language and memory reduce emotion, we see Kamenzain’s poetic legacy as it preserves for posterity all that remains of a family facing adversity.

“Del otro lado del dormitorio familiar” begins with language expressing dislocation: “Del otro lado del,” “al espacio inhóspito del desalojo,” “más allá,” “el fantasma del asilo,” and “para volverse.” In addition, the poet uses expressions communicating nothingness and abandonment, “ya nadie usa,” “que esperan de pie,” and “espera paciente.” Enjambment of the first seven lines breaks with only one caesura in the third verse after “ahí,” becoming a poetic device Kamenzain utilizes to denote the endlessness of loss and dislocation. In the next to the last verse, “Ahí es donde crece el fantasma del asilo,” “asilo” can have a double meaning: one, the slightly pejorative “nursing or old people’s home,” or the other the other signification of refuge, asylum, or

sanctuary from the loss of memory that isolates and prevents her return to herself as she once was:

Del otro lado del dormitorio familiar  
fijo como una roca al espacio inhóspito del desalojo  
ahí, más allá de los retratos de abuelos  
señalando esa almohada que ya nadie usa  
pegando a las valijas que esperan de pie  
ahí es donde crece el fantasma del así  
que espera paciente a mi madre para volverse real. (31)

The echoes of sounds emanating from the nursing home are heard throughout the poem in the repetition that, at its core, mimics the echo of the mother's voice and the experience she now faces as a result of the exile of memory loss. Kamenszain's honest account makes a frontal assault on the sounds and smells of those exiled and captured in this "death camp" as the poem brings to mind Norman Mailer's words from the *The Naked and The Dead* (1948).<sup>203</sup> Kamenszain describes the daily battle fought by those exiled, first by the smell ("detrás de un olor hay otro olor hay otro olor hay otro olor") and then the sounds ("los desnudos y los muertos ponen el freno de sus sondas"). Going beyond the smells are the moments filled with daily activities in which Kamenszain paints a grim picture of what lies ahead for her mother as well as the other exiles.

Existence now consists of isolation and nothingness, as the experience of daily life erodes, along with confidence and the development of language skills that are replaced by the discharge of "los desnudos y los muertos" as they blast the horns of

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<sup>203</sup> *The Naked and the Dead* is the title of Norman Mailer's 1948 novel based on his experiences with the 112<sup>th</sup> Calvary Regiment during the Philippines Campaign in World War II. Mailer's story is one of an imaginary battle in the Pacific that highlights the brutality of modern war. It was later adapted into a film by the same title.

their wheelchairs. All are placed at the mercy of their captors, “a disposición de las enfermeras” who do their job with “fruición de sepulturero.” Mailer claims that “Every moment of one’s existence one is growing into more or retreating into less. One is always living a little more or dying a little bit.” For Kamenszain’s mother and the other members of this pitiful company, through memory loss and physical decline, existence has become one of retreat into less and dying more:

En puntas de pie entramos a espiar  
detrás de un olor hay otro olor hay otro olor hay otro olor  
todavía más atrás de un quejido un ruido avanza  
son sillas de ruedas que caminan sola  
los desnudos y los muertos ponen el freno de su sonda  
a disposición de las enfermeras  
alguien tiende la cama con fruición de sepulturero  
en la sala de kinesiología inmovilizan a los inválidos en  
/zapatillas (31)

Kamenszain becomes lost as well, and unable to find her way out of the circumstances, “no encuentro la salida aunque las flechas la indican a cada / paso,” as the nightmare of abandoning the mother is repeated in the echoes of their betrayal for leaving her in such a place: “que no doy /no la dejemos no la dejemos acá decimos a coro / con mi hermana.” The loss of home is real, and the daughters are no longer protected by their mother: “que ella nos cuide, que ella nos proteja de lo que le toca.” Consolation becomes a commodity no one is able to provide (“consólanos mamá de tu propio sufrimiento”) as the role reversal becomes one in which the daughters are incapable of finding the words to console the mother in her own suffering.

The poet breaks with the use of the *neoborroso* in the following selected stanza as sentence structures become longer and more descriptive. Disoriented and distressed at

the prospect of leaving her mother alone in her exile (“no encuentro,” “no la dejemos no la dejemos”) she turns to the pharmakon of *espiritismo* to relieve this angst and to link speech and silence directly to the exiled subject of this mourning poem. Instead of speaking to herself or to no one in particular, she overcomes the silence of the fading voice of her mother in this unconventional manner that allows her to connect with the dead:

no encuentro la salida aunque las flechas la indican a cada paso  
/que no doy  
no la dejemos no la dejemos acá decimos a coro con mi hermana  
que ella nos cuide, que ellas nos proteja de lo que le toca  
consolamos mamá de tu propio sufrimiento...(31)

The final verses return to the figuration of “exit” signifying banishment and exile, as the poem escalates in emotion in its build up to the end and finality where the mother is freed from her daughters, “va expulsándote sola suelta de tus propias hijas.” The poet returns to language associated with exile and loss (“nos ahuyenta,” “como locas al borde de la salida”/ “ya atravesó tu cuerpo” / “entrada marcha atrás”) in the process of letting go of the feelings of abandonment.

Kamenszain metaphorically represents the mother’s womb, birth canal, and giving birth as their first home, “ése que desde el primer parto programado,” and her death as the moment of their expulsion, “hasta el punto muerto de la última cesárea,” “nos espera en una entrada” / “marcha atrás por el túnel de tu deterioro.” She echoes her mother’s distancing, as each moves further from the mother and the womb as the original home, “afuera más afuera muchísimo más afuera todavía de nuestro primer hogar.” Home no longer exists as a place where Kamenszain shares memories with her



mother. Writing is like washing dishes for Joseph Brodsky, whose mother, he writes, did so because, “it’s therapeutic.”<sup>204</sup> Kamenzain writes,

porque el gasto de tu vida nos ahuyenta  
poniéndonos como locas al borde de la salida  
aunque la flecha que la señala ya atravesó tu cuerpo  
y ahora todo lo que nos espera es una entrada  
marcha atrás por el túnel de tu deterioro  
ése que desde el primer parto programado  
hasta el punto muerto de la última cesárea  
va expulsándote sola suelta de tus propias hijas  
afuera más afuera muchísimo más afuera todavía  
de nuestro primer hogar. (31)

For Kamenzain’s mother, homecoming is no longer possible. The isolation that comes from being locked in, both mentally and physically, haunts Kamenzain in this poem. Exile, memory loss, and bereavement result in the experience of solitude by a member of the family who no longer functions as a part of the familial group. Anguish is felt by those who are a part of this group for the one who is no longer able to do so. Alzheimer’s is a form of exile in which the alienation of memory loss results in the dissolution of the subject in first person. The act of *presentification* is the moment in which this particular experience (or something very similar to it) is itself the subject, and the manner in which the poet has chosen to express it in this poem.

Kamenzain, much like Kozler, writes about the presence of “absence,” which can be felt in the nuances of the poet’s language of “intimacy.” Edward Said<sup>205</sup> writes: “Seeing the entire world as a foreign land makes possible originality of vision” (366).

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<sup>204</sup> Quote is from “In a Room and a Half” in *Less Than One: Selected Essays* (1986): 461.

<sup>205</sup> “Reflections on Exile” by Edward Said in Ferguson, Russell. *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*. New York, N.Y: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990. Print. 357–366.

Through Kamenzain's originality of vision, we see how the world as a foreign land represents her perspective on writing poetry. This perspective then determines the level of emotion she is willing to demonstrate, thus allowing the poems themselves to make the distinction between literature and unnecessary sentimentality.

### **Autobiographical Memory: "Realer Than Real"<sup>206</sup>**

Memory, as a dynamic and enduring intellectual process rather than merely a reaction to past experiences or static information, forms an essential role in creating identity. And while claiming to preserve the past in the present, it is intrinsically inconsistent and unsteady, and prone to invention, seeing that memory and thought are tightly intertwined. In actual fact, our memory of past events is continually shaping our understanding and expectations of the future as the use of past experience affects as well as influences current behavior.<sup>207</sup> The desire to make memory endure is challenged when the ability to remember past events has been lost. When the need to imagine the past becomes all that is left of previous memories, learning to reinvent through poetry helps one to re-imagine the future and thus initiate a means of re-invigorating the possibility for new memories to be made.

Evelyn Ender's notion that "Autobiographical memory is fundamental to the act of imaginative construction of human subjectivity" (19) helps to explain the relationship between memory and subjectivity in Kamenzain's mourning poems. As part of the

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<sup>206</sup> Realer than real is a term used by Mark Freeman in "Telling Stories: Memory and Narrative."

<sup>207</sup> [http://www.human-memory.net/intro\\_what.html](http://www.human-memory.net/intro_what.html).

human experience, Ender explains that autobiographical memory is essential to make sense of our lives and to convey feelings and emotions “symbolically and formally in external objects such as poems, paintings, or symphonies.” Thus it follows “that we need memory to ward off our fears and our tragic awareness of death, but it also attests to our remarkable resilience” (19).

Ender sees the writing process as a complex combination of thought, emotion, and words and contends that memory does not simply act as a storehouse of information but is instead a site of continuous activity. Since writers recall an event from whatever their current state of mind is at the time, an event may be seen differently at different times. In other words, Ender remarks, “remembrance is an act of imagination forged by the thinker through introspection that embraces conceptualized images of the past” (19). In this way, an individual’s sense of the past is crucially necessary as a connection to his or her existing sense of reality.

Mark Freeman, in “Telling Stories: Memory and Narrative,”<sup>208</sup> continues Ender’s ideas regarding the lyrical “I” through Ernst Schachtel, who writes in his classic essay “On Memory and Infantile Amnesia” that the greatest problem of the writer or poet is

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<sup>208</sup> In Radstone and Schwarz’s *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates* (2010): 263–277 Freeman concurs with Ender’s idea as he makes the claim:

“Autobiographical memory and autobiographical narrative alike entail present constructions of the past according to recollections, added to the observations of what has subsequently become since. As much of what we remember about the personal past is suffused with other memories, which are themselves suffused with *other* other’s memories. Added to this is the fact that much of what we remember is also suffused with stories we have read, images we have seen, in books, and movies, and beyond. Through a process of narrativization, this secondhand material is turned into first hand material through a process of transforming memory into narrative. The effects this process has upon the selection of a genre mode, some texts will become memoirs, other autobiographies, and still others, the work of fiction” (267).

“the temptation of language,” since at every turn “a word beckons, it seems so convenient, so suitable, one has heard or read it so often in a similar context, it sounds so well, it makes the phrase flow so smoothly” (275). Poetry, Freeman writes, “seeks to depict the “realer than real” in an effort to move beyond the exterior of things and thereby to actualize the potential of meaning the world bears within it” (275).

Freeman claims that the parallel between poetry and memory exists by the fact that “just as memory may disclose meanings that might have been unavailable in the immediacy of the moment, poetry may disclose meanings and truths that might otherwise have gone unarticulated”(275). Both are thus potential vehicles of what he calls *recuperative disclosure*, acting as agents of insight and rescue, recollection and recovery, and serving to counteract the forces of oblivion (276). In autobiographical narrative, memory and poetry meet.

In our interview Kamenzain points out that within the context of ECO, in order for the poetic voice to speak for the mother, the daughter had to abandon her. But it is then that the daughter realizes that it is she who has been abandoned by the mother. It is the commentary on this estrangement that Kamenzain refers to as testimony and that can be seen also as biographical. In ECO, over time, Kamenzain’s mother forgets the memories associated with her two daughters and ultimately passes away. Here, there is a slippage in the mother’s role through this abandonment.

In the case of death, it is always the testimony of the other that is of importance, and the challenge for Kamenzain has been to pass on this experience to her readers. For her, these experiences have typically been found through public and private spaces that

make room for the traditions of the Jewish culture and those literary traditions close to her native Argentina. In addition, the private space of the home and the spoken language of the maternal have enriched and contributed to the poet's biographical testimony, as Denise León confirms:

El espacio físico se transforma así en espacio biográfico. Hay lugares protegidos para recordar, y desde donde recordar, sitios privilegiados en los que se elige inscribir los recuerdos. Estos lugares de la memoria generalmente se encuentran fuera del alcance del sujeto que recuerda, ya sea porque están alejados en el tiempo o en el espacio, o porque el tiempo los ha transformado hasta dejarlos irreconocibles. La forma más frecuente que adopta este espacio para recordar en los textos autobiográficos es la casa familiar. Refugio de la memoria, escenario natural de la novela familiar, la casa natal no es simplemente un lugar físico sino también un espacio virtual o retórico.<sup>209</sup>

Kamenzain asserts that to give testimony in poetry is to say something for someone who cannot speak for herself. In this case, the subject is her mother, for whom the poet records the “echo” of her voice and thereby gives memory to memory loss. Referring to this in our interview as something akin to folly, the poet points out that “poetry is also a foolish act,”<sup>210</sup> so that opening the possibility of testimony through lyric serves as a useful means of curtailing emotion when words are inaccessible. The poet turns to narrative verse in which mourning poems frame the act of telling through the rhythmically and sonically constructed language of verse.

Autobiographical memory, told in fragments and in short form, captures the mimetic perspective of memory loss. Referred to as acoustic encoding, the processing and encoding of sound, words and other auditory input is stored for later retrieval. “This

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<sup>209</sup> From “Ghetto y poesía. La pérdida del hogar lingüístico.”

<sup>210</sup> Appendix B.

is aided by the concept of the phonological loop, which allows input within our echoic memory to be sub-vocally rehearsed in order to facilitate remembering.”<sup>211</sup> After the mother’s death, the poet is haunted by the inability to answer repeated, unanswerable questions: “Después de que murió me sentí culpable / de haberle confrontado con sus fantasmas / a ver qué mamá a ver qué a ver qué”, and later in the same poem, the repetition continues, “me fui rumiando las razones de todos los asuntos del mundo / que en la cadencia insoportable de su repetición / no tienen, no tienen y no tienen /ninguna respuesta” (41).

Forgetting prohibits the retention of memories, keeping language in the present, one that is not layered and does not allow for the advancement of the narrative, as Kamenszain is caught answering the same unanswerable questions. The additional use of repetition allows the poet to describe the echo of the movement of human memory as it leaps back and forth across time, creating difference between that which the human mind and memory hold onto, and what they discard while living in the suspended state between the singular moment and the idealized perception of constancy.

One of the essential issues this chapter deals with is how Kamenszain responds to the preservation of memories while situated within the clutches of memory loss. In order to respond to this uncertainty, the following section sheds light on the ways in which the poet focuses on memory and memories using the aesthetics of poetic language to replicate both internal as well as external triggers of its recovery and its final loss. The

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<sup>211</sup> [http://www.human-memory.net/processes\\_encoding.html](http://www.human-memory.net/processes_encoding.html).

autobiographical aspect of Kamenzain's poems and the use of *syntactic thought* work to replicate the echo of her mother's voice, which allows the poet to hold on to memories while extending and carrying forward those of her mother.

### ***Autobiographical Syntactic Thought***

Julia Kristeva uses the term *concatenation*<sup>212</sup> to describe the speech of the depressed as repetitive and monotonous. While this term is associated with inconsolable sadness that conceals a predisposition for despair (not necessarily the case with Kamenzain),<sup>213</sup> it is productive to think of it as a way of describing certain characteristics of her *neoborroso* poems in which the trauma of grief is related to short-term depression. In this state, emotions, gestures, actions, or words usually considered normal become hampered during crisis as the rhythm of overall behavior is shattered. While perhaps hyperbolic in the description of Kamenzain's reaction to her mother's death, certain aspects of Kristeva's term are useful as a tool for the expression of the poet's experience as a result of the range of emotions she has lived throughout this time

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<sup>212</sup> "Faced with the impossibility of concatenating, they (the depressed) utter sentences that are interrupted, exhausted, come to a standstill. Even phrases they cannot formulate. A repetitive rhythm, a monotonous melody, emerges and dominates the broken logical sequence, changing them into recurring, obsessive litanies. Finally, when that frugal musicality becomes exhausted in its turn, or simply does not succeed in becoming established on account of the pressure of silence, the melancholy person appears to stop cognizing as well as uttering, sinking into blankness of asymbolia or the excess of an unorderable cognitive chaos." (*Black Sun*, 33)

<sup>213</sup> In a personal interview with the author of this dissertation, Kamenzain expresses her own perspective on this subject: Mi poesía que tiene que ver con la muerte, estos libros sobre todo, no son pesimistas, no son dramáticos, no son melancólicos. Hay una pulsión de vida siempre en la escritura. Enrique Lihn tiene ese impulso, muriéndose ya, escribiendo en el hospital, evidentemente tenía muchas ganas de vivir. Porque si no, la escritura no aparece en un estado de melancolía. El escritor, como dice Deleuze, es médico de sí mismo. Yo creo que Enrique Lihn ahí, en ese proceso donde se estaba muriendo, está dándose su propia medicina, y eso es muy interesante, me parece.

period of her life.

The intention is not to make a supposition as to whether or at what level the poet has experienced depression, or a state of melancholia described by Kristeva as “an abyss of sorrow, a noncommunicable grief that at times, and often on a long-term basis, lays claims upon us to the extent of having us lose all interest in words, actions, and even life itself” (3). However, it would be safe to envisage the use of the poet’s term *presentification* to describe the life experiences she describes in the lyrical “I” acting not as the regulator of daily experience, but as a presentified act in which the actual lived moment becomes instead the subject of that experience and characteristics of *concatenation* express through poetic diction those experiences.

Familiarizing the mind with the unknown through points of repetition is a technique that has been used by poets for centuries. While a primitive tool, when used deliberately and carefully it is a source of powerful literary effect. The traditional poetic devices that utilize echo include various figures of repetition such as *epistrophe*, *epanalepsis*, and *anadiplosis*.<sup>214</sup> In the following discussion, the reader is asked to consider how Kamenszain focuses attention on poetic expression that may otherwise be overlooked while at the same time recognizing the importance of the narrative form. This focus allows autobiographical memory to reveal significance as it relates to

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<sup>214</sup> *Epistrophe* is the rhetorical term for the repetition of a word or phrase at the end of successive clauses, *epanalepsis* is repetition that occurs at the end of a clause or sentence of the word or phrase with which it began, for the repetition of the last word or phrase of one line or clause to begin the next. *Anadiplosis* is the term for the repetition of the last word or phrase of one line or clause to begin the next. Anadiplosis often leads to climax, also known as *gradatio*. A *chiasmus* includes anadiplosis, but not every anadiplosis reverses itself in the manner of a chiasmus. Chiasmus includes anadiplosis, but not every anadiplosis reverses itself in the manner of a *chiasmus*. <http://grammar.about.com/od/ab/g/anadiplosis.htm>.



memory loss. Fundamental to this study is the understanding of how we think and how we learn; repetition's aura lies in its ability to balance and decipher varying associations and underlying meanings.

Through the build-up of repetition, the life of the poet's mother unfolds. There is a sense of resolution, as if the narrator needs to write in order to understand the story unraveling before her. The telling of a life lived on a larger scale is now reduced to imitation based on murmurs, repetition, and fragmentation. The poems in *ECO* are seen as a game of memory, forgetting, fragmentation, echo, and reflection in which the play between memory and forgetfulness along with the lack of language and memory work to reduce emotion. "Mamá mamá mamá" begins with the repetition of the autobiographical "I" calling to her mother. Repetition throughout the poem focuses on variations of the word Mamá.

"Mamá" begins the first verse; the first word in its capitalized form, then subsequently repeated twice, "Mamá mamá mamá." This string is again repeated three times in the seventh verse, "y sin embargo mamá mamá mamá," then in the tenth verse the poet changes form in which the words are spelled out, "voy y vengo dos veces de la eme a la a de la eme a la a." The poem completes the ecolalic adnomination of "mamá" in the fifteenth and sixteenth verses of the eighteen lines of the poem using the variations: "mami mamita mamina mamucha / pero mamá mamá mamá." The elaborated morpheme "ma" in various formations emphasizes the mother/daughter relationship:

Mamá mamá mamá  
grito en un ataque de ecolalia  
a quién llamo qué respuesta espero

los que escuchen voces terminan mal  
Alejandra en la *Sala de Psicopatología*  
Osvaldo en el *Instituto de Rehabilitación*  
y sin embargo mamá mamá mamá  
repito y viajo desde el sonido hasta la furia  
no me alcanza lo que digo para no tropezarme  
voy y vengo dos veces de la eme a la a de la eme a la a  
pero me retraso analfabeta entre sílabas que se borran  
y no me escuchan más los que entienden las lenguas  
me miran sordos desde su propia neurosis familiar  
ellos se dicen unos a otros  
mami mamita mamina mamucha  
pero mamá mamá mamá  
eso sólo lo digo yo  
¿se escucha? (39)

As opposed to the previously analyzed poems written in a manner that placed the emphasis on collective memory, the use of first person here as “I speak” maintains the tone of the poem within a personal context throughout: “grito en un ataque de ecolalia,” “a quién llamo,” “qué respuesta espero,” “repito y viajo,” “no me alcanza lo que digo para no tropezarme,” “voy y vengo,” “me retraso,” “no me escuchan,” “me miran,” “lo digo yo.” Relying on her own lengthy association with poetic language and form (“pero me retraso analfabeta entre sílabas que se borran,” “y no me escuchan más los que entienden las lenguas”), *syntactic thought* allows the poet to call attention to the formal properties of poetry. Repetition gives additional meaning to the word *mamá*, “mami mamita mamina mamucha / pero mamá mamá mamá” multiplying its meaning, a meaning that is known only to the poet and must be interpreted individually by others.

Kamenszain refers to fellow Argentine poets and personal friends Alejandra Pizarnik<sup>215</sup> and Osvaldo Lamborghini,<sup>216</sup> “los que escuchan voces terminan mal, / Alejandra en la *Sala de Psicopatología* / Osvaldo en el *Instituto de Rehabilitación*,” to make the point that those who hear voices end up institutionalized, and yet she takes this risk, as she continues to call out “y sin embargo mamá mamá mamá.” The poet refers to her contemporaries Pizarnik and Lamborghini, whose issues with mental health were publically acknowledged, and understands that her current state of mind and the level of her emotions are overcome by crisis. Yet she is unable to do anything about it, as she continues to call out in language that is reduced to the repetition of the single word, “Mamá.”

The poet reaches an animated state of distress that approaches depression or melancholia. The repetition or *concatenation* of “voy y vengo dos veces de la eme a la a de la eme a la a / repito y viajo desde el sonido hasta la furia” along with the hearing of voices and subsequent avoidance by others, “y no me escuchan más los que entienden las lenguas,” and the speaking out of family neurosis, “me miran sordos desde su propia neurosis familiar,” all fit with Kristeva’s ideas associated with inconsolable sadness that conceals a predisposition for despair. The poem strongly expresses short-term depression

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<sup>215</sup> Alejandra Pizarnik (1936–1972). One of the most widely read Argentine poets, her work has an international readership. Pizarnik died from an overdose of barbiturates, and since her untimely death, she has become a mythical figure. Themes including depression, alienation, and the difficulty of communication are found in her principal works: *La última inocencia* (1956), *Árbol de Diana* (1962), *Los trabajos y las noches* (1965), *Extracción de la piedra de locura* (1968). *El infierno musical* (1971).

<sup>216</sup> Osvaldo Lamborghini created an inventive form of writing that challenged every existing Argentine literary form. His works are not found in the traditional narrative form, but rather written to purposely undermine traditional expectations by intertwining violent language and sexual and political references as a form of social criticism.

brought on by the expressed emotions as words are hampered by this crisis. The rhythm of Kamenszain's behavior is disrupted as she communicates with her mother through *espiritismo*, "eso sólo lo digo yo," in the reduced language of the *neborroso* that results in language reduction that consists of questioning in just two words, "¿se escucha?"

As Kristeva explains, "If in the nondepressive state one has the ability to concatenate, depressive persons, in contrast, riveted to their pain, no longer concatenate and, consequently, neither act nor speak" (34). The enjambment of rhythmically and sonically constructed verses such as "repito y viaje desde el sonido hasta la furia / no me alcanza lo que digo para no tropezarme," formed by assonantal vocalic sounds juxtaposed in contrast to the utilization of alliterated consonants ("voy y vengo dos veces de la eme a la a de la eme a la a") demonstrates the way in which autobiographic memory is told in fragments and in short form to capture the mimetic perspective of memory loss:

repito y viaje desde el sonido hasta la furia  
no me alcanza lo que digo para no tropezarme  
voy y vengo dos veces de la eme a la a de la eme a la a  
pero me retraso analfabeta entre sílabas que se borran  
y no me escuchan más los que entienden las lenguas  
me miran sordos desde su propia neurosis familiar[.] (39)

The final verses of the poem close with the colloquial language of the "mother tongue." The use of diminutives, "mami," "mamita," as well as other variations ("ellos se dicen unos a otros") for the word *mother* is apparent as the poem climaxes in one single thought, when the poet tries to reach out through the *espiritismo* that connects the two, in an effort to reach the one who is no longer able to be reached: "eso sólo lo digo

yo / ¿se escucha?” The maternal language of her mother, the way she spoke to the daughters before her memory loss and death, becomes the prosaic language of Kamenszain’s poetry as it joins the echo of her mother’s voice with that of her own. Through *presentification* Kamenszain draws on her state of mind at the time of writing in which her remembrance is imaginatively forged through introspection to embrace the conceptualized images of the past as it connects her to her existing sense of reality:

me miran sordos desde su propia neurosis familiar  
ellos se dicen unos a otros  
mami mamita mamina mamucha  
pero mamá mamá mamá  
eso sólo lo digo yo  
¿se escucha? (39)

Kamenszain’s poem is intoxicating through its hypnotic and insistent repetition. Repetition as imitation is used to grasp the reader’s attention. Her poems capture a synchronic moment with a particular state of affairs to which she responds in an affected manner that incites a strong *experience* found within the repetition of the resonating echo of her mother’s voice, for whom she speaks. As Peter Sacks writes in *The English Elegy* (1987), “Repetition creates a sense of continuity, of an unbroken pattern such as one may oppose to the extreme discontinuity of death” (23). Kamenszain’s obsessive fight against the discontinuity of her mother’s death through the mnemonic device of repetition creates a sense of expectation, which in the end is frustrated as the only outcome is death.

Certain forms of memory work in art and literature are complicit in the use of personal memory that Marjorie Perloff<sup>217</sup> highlights as one aspect of Wittgenstein's language games and is applicable to Kamenszain's poetry: "the recognition of the self as, in no small measure, a social construct, a cultural construction lies in the notion that languages of the self depend on social context, culture, and class" (20). Kamenszain's use of family archives as a basis of the search for origins and identity finds that the past is redeemed through the minutiae and contingencies of everyday life. She invokes the securities of the past against the insecurities of the present and future.

Calabrese's reference to Umberto Eco's term "consolatory" (33) calls for repetition as that which can reassure the subject through the process of rediscovering that which he or she already knows or to which he or she is already accustomed.<sup>218</sup> In "Mamá mamá mamá" Kamenszain utilizes all tools in her repertoire as an accomplished poet, including *syntactic thought* through the aesthetics of repetition, the *neobarroso* as she communicates through *espiritismo*, Kristeva's *concatenation*, and aspects of the Neobaroque and Baroque (that emerge through organized variation, polycentrism, regulated irregularity, and frantic rhythm) to create a powerful anti-sentimental *experience* of a conciliatory act.

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<sup>217</sup> From Wittgenstein's Ladder.

<sup>218</sup> Umberto Eco's *La struttura assente* (Milan: Bompiani, 1969), quoted in Calabrese: 33.

## Involuntary Emotional Memory

Marcel Proust's<sup>219</sup> (1871–1922) *À la Recherche du temps perdu* [*Recherche*] (1913–1927) brings autobiographical memory and involuntary memory<sup>220</sup> together in the life story of the narrator, named after himself. At the end of the novel Marcel has achieved all of his life's goals, except the most important, which is to become a writer. Drained of hope, he realizes his life has been wasted and his time has been lost.

Marcel begins to reflect on the meaning of memory, the nature of sensations, and time itself. He understands that through this process, he has regained his lost life, and as death approaches, he finally realizes his lost ambition to become a writer. In the following quotation, the narrator proceeds to recall these yearnings and ambitions of his youth, to see the world, and to become a writer:

No sooner had the warm liquid mixed with the crumbs touched my palate than a shudder ran through me and I stopped, intent upon the extraordinary thing that was happening to me. An exquisite pleasure had invaded my senses, something isolated, detached, with no suggestion of its origin. And at once the vicissitudes of life had become indifferent to me, its disasters innocuous, its brevity illusory—this new sensation having had on me the effect which love has of filling me with a precious

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<sup>219</sup> Biographical information on Proust's *Recherche* is taken from David Richter's *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, 1989.

<sup>220</sup> While Kamenszain exhibits several of the following traits of Proustian involuntary memory proposed by Dorthe Berntsen (2007), it is not the suggestion here that this is specifically the type of autobiographical memory followed in this discussion. Berntsen claims that involuntary memories described by Proust typically have the following main characteristics: (1) Proustian memory is a spontaneous recovery of a seemingly long-forgotten scene. (2) The scene is usually (though not necessarily) about a remote event as from childhood. (3) The retrieval is heavily cue-dependent. It seems to be a process characterized by ecphory (Tulving, 1985), with no intervening motivational factors, such as current concerns (Klinger, 1978) or constraints by the ego (Greenwald, 1980). (4) They are typically activated by sensory cues. (5) They involve a strong sense of reliving the past. (6) They are accompanied by a strong feeling of joy. It seems to be an extra emotional quality associated with the retrieval of memory rather than a part of the remembered event per se. (2007): 26–27.

essence; or rather this essence was not in me it *was* me.<sup>221</sup>

Walter Benjamin (who co-translated *Recherche* into German),<sup>222</sup> in his own memoir, *Berlin Childhood*, conjures up the memories of spaces, textures, patterns, atmospheres, and relationships. Esther Leslie<sup>223</sup> writes that memory for Benjamin, while used in a Proustian manner, is appropriated to sensuous experience: “If not the visual, then the smelled, the tasted, or the heard,” as he “dredged up an enchanted world where the shock of sensual experiences impacts indelibly on mind and memory”. For Benjamin, temporal displacement involved *déjà vu* or what he preferred to call “already-heard,” noting how some events reach us like an echo awakened by a call from the past: “It is a word, a tapping, or a rustling that is endowed with the magic power to transport us into the cool tomb of long ago, from the vault of which the present seems to return only as an echo”.<sup>224</sup>

While involuntary memory can be thought of as a phenomenon of nostalgia, this dissertation instead follows ideas based on neuroscience which suggest that involuntary autobiographical memories (IAMs)<sup>225</sup> are set off by triggers within our unconscious (26)

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<sup>221</sup> M. Proust. *Remembrance of Things Past: Within a Budding Grove* (48).

<sup>222</sup> Peter Szondi writes in the introduction to *Berlin Childhood* that he did not wish to read a word more of Proust that what he was needed to translate at the moment, because otherwise he risked “straying into an addictive dependency which would hinder his own production.” Szondi claims this remark suggests that there is more involvement than just the influence of Proust’s novel on Benjamin; it hints at an elective affinity between the two authors (3).

<sup>223</sup> From *Walter Benjamin*, 2007 (131).

<sup>224</sup> *Selected Writings*, 2:2 p.634.

<sup>225</sup> Luke Mastin. [http://www.human-memory.net/intro\\_what.html](http://www.human-memory.net/intro_what.html). (2010).



in which such experiences come to mind with no conscious attempt at retrieval and are seen as part of an automatic memory process known as “ecphory” (from the Greek *ekphorein*, “to reveal”). In this instance, when cued by a trigger such as a picture, odor, or name one recollects a past event. It is the central component of autobiographical memory, which allows one with no effort on the part of the rememberer to “travel mentally back in time” and re-experience specific events from a personal past.<sup>226</sup>

As with Proust and Benjamin, how it is we can be transported to another place and time is a testament to the emotional space of domestic life and the highly charged sensory experiences that can survive and resurface involuntarily through memory. The echoes of past experiences resurface for Kamenszain within various manifestations of involuntary autobiographical and emotional memory that emanate from the mother’s voice. The desire for the maternal voice of the mother, through the speaking body, the abjection of the maternal body, and the aged body of the mother and the crisis of “lateness” are components of involuntary and emotional memory as well. “Un osito de peluche asoma la cabeza” demonstrates each one of these phenomena:

Un osito de peluche asoma la cabeza  
como en los dibujos animados por el agujero del zócalo.  
¿Y si en realidad fuera un ratón disfrazado?  
te pregunta mi miedo cuando aparecés en el sueño  
No sé qué edad tuve yo durante esa trama onírica  
pero despierta me queda claro que fui la que soy  
una grandulona entrada en pánico  
esperando que la madre le diga de una vez  
no es nada no es nada no es nada. (43)

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<sup>226</sup> <http://analysis.oxfordjournals.org/content/72/4/641.full.pdf+html>.

Emotional memory, abjection, and “lateness” are each intertwined in the above lines portrayed through a dream sequence. Emotional memory takes form through the poet’s autobiographical remembrance of childhood cartoons, as instead of expressing knowledge, the poet expresses the construction of memory through how she *feels*. However, in the third line, the image of a teddy bear that takes on a sinister presence changes the tone of the poem to one that expresses an aspect of fear in the poet, “un ratón disfrazado.” Ecphory is revealed when the poet recollects the past event of watching cartoons, triggered by the image of a teddy bear.

However, this image quickly becomes one of the abject body of the disguised rat, and when personal boundaries of identity are threatened. A crisis ensues for the poet as she questions whether she is the child or the adult, “No sé qué edad tuve yo durante esa trama onírica / pero despierta me queda claro que fui la que soy / una grandulona entrada en pánico.” The poet fluctuates between a return to infancy and the questioning of her own death to come found in the desire for the return of the maternal figure, “esperando que la madre le diga de una vez / no es nada no es nada no es nada.” Our bodies, including our voices and the emotions that emanate from within, give way to our desires or our psychosomatic memories of past times. This discussion continues with the exploration of Kamenzain’s own circumstances addressed through the use of autobiographical narrative, memory, and poetry. The act of imagination in her poems depicts the realer than real, and in so doing, avoid pathos in mourning the death of the mother.

### *Emotional Memory Through the Eternal Maternal Voice*

The *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (2012) claims that beginning in the 1960s and 1970s anti-emotion theories have been challenged by literary theorists influenced by the explosion of research conducted in various branches of the sciences.<sup>227</sup> The result has been a clearer understanding of what emotions are and why we have them (404–5). In turn, this has enabled critics to examine the relationships between emotion and poetry from an empirical perspective. Despite continuing disputes about more specific issues, a consensus has emerged on the most important components of emotion, confirming that it works as the force behind the construction of memory, and as such, is a dynamic phenomenon that shapes our existence.

“Con mi hermana hablamos de ella” opens with a declarative statement in which two sisters speak of the mother’s existing circumstances. The use of “hablamos” (which signifies time in the present or past preterite form) is assumed to represent diachronic time as indicated by “viste” in the next line. Parataxis joins declarative statements to one another in a series: “Viste lo que dijo escuchá lo que no dice / te acordás lo que decía.”

The language of the *neoborroso* takes on a personal quality that expresses a sincere and gentle emotion from which two sisters, speaking in a shared register, connect themselves to the past. From this past, a sense of proximity develops in which their individual identity as sister and daughter is brought to the present to become a site of

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<sup>227</sup> Philosophers (Solomon, Nussbaum, de Sousa, Wollheim, Prinz), Psychologists (Lazarus, Ekman, Scherer, Frijda, Zajonc), neuroscientists (LeDoux, Damasio), anthropologists (Harré, Lutz), and others. The result has been a clearer understanding of what emotions are and why we have them. In turn, this has enabled critics to examine the relationships between emotion and poetry from an empirical perspective. Despite continuing disputes about more specific issues, a consensus has emerged about the most important components of emotion.

continuous activity that connects them with an existing sense of reality. Each sister demonstrates the ability to fulfill their role as they assume the responsibility to discharge their duties:

Con mi hermana hablamos de ella.  
Viste lo que dijo escuchá lo que no dice  
te acordás lo que decía. (21)

The next stanza begins with the repetition of “Con mi hermana” but then shifts to the *presentification* of an event in which two sisters make present the temporal and spatial past. The enjambment of dependent hypotactic shorter sentence structures and longer expressive sentences enumerates in parallel yet disjunctive form “una vida de muñeca la investimos,” that which is left of this past life shared with their mother. The shared caring of the mother “le damos / la investimos / la vamos” adds to the emotional intensity that begins to escalate as there is slippage due to the estrangement of the mother, who becomes almost doll-like (“la vamos decorando”). Yet they strive to maintain her dignity, “con lo que permanece de su dignidad presente”:

Con mi hermana le damos  
una vida de muñeca la investimos  
con lo que nos queda de sus grandezas pasadas  
a vamos decorando  
con lo que permanece de su dignidad presente (21)

Emotion grips each in the following verses, as the daughters, “con mi hermana,” are helpless in knowing what to do. Hearing themselves speak their mother’s words, using her mannerisms of speech, they find themselves saying things that only those caught in the “estirpe pánica” would say. The least accessible emotional memories become encrypted in the language of the lineage to which they are forever connected.

Proust's "intermittences of the heart" connects the daughters' emotions with the family history as the maternal tongue speaks of the memories significant only to them.

Grief for these sisters foments memories as they join together to recollect and even laugh about their mother's ways of being. Benjamin's *déjà vu* becomes an echo that locates both in a time and place, as involuntary memory awakens the maternal voice, overwhelming them by the unexpected memory upon hearing her words within themselves, thus transporting them to another dimension:

no sabemos qué más hacer es nuestra protagonista  
la letra de ella sale por nuestras bocas  
y decimos cosas que nadie  
que no provenga de una estirpe pánica  
podría llegar a comprender. (21)

As in the above verses, the maternal voice is one that triggers memory, one that brings about memory as the daughters are shocked at hearing her words fall from their own lips. Kamenszain's self-quoted "dos pérdidas en familia" refers both to herself and her sister Rut, who are newly situated within the family lineage. Autobiographical memories are repeated by the poet in the rest of the stanza, and diachronic time and past emotion are marked by the use of "cuando" in reference to a past time in which her father's voice, "cuando el padre escuchaba y respondía," as well as her mother's, "cuando la madre sostenía el eco de su voz," could still be heard.

The repetition continues with "hola" in the next two lines, the first used to refer to the maternal language with which her mother spoke, "hola hola," and then the way in which the daughters would echo in unison her voice, "¿alguna novedad?" The stanza is constructed again through the use of enjambment in which the poet narrates in a

colloquial manner (“mandamos señales guiños a otros tiempos”) the customs and patterns of speech of a typical family in a contemporary society. In an emotional yet unsentimental style, the memory of the individual is expressed by “Son monólogos” and is played out in narrative style through the poet’s prose, composed by a blending of succinct and prolix, essential and descriptive, as well as transcendent with elements of the mundane.<sup>228</sup>

Son monólogos de dos pérdidas en familia  
mandamos señales guiños a otros tiempos  
cuando el padre escuchaba y respondía  
cuando la madre sostenía el eco de su voz  
hola hola decía en el teléfono  
hola le respondíamos nosotras al unísono  
¿Alguna novedad? (21)

Kamenszain *presentifies* a moment in which a particular state of affairs incites emotion through the repetition of her mother’s voice and the daughter’s reconstruction of their past. Similar to Lucía Laragione’s father, who wrote a book by copying the words of another author, her mother reads the funeral notices in the newspaper, “lee aviso fúnebres del lado del revés...” to no avail, “porque de nada se enteró.” The repetition of alliterated consonants including *l*, *d*, and *r* appears both at the beginning of words and within words to create an auditory scheme for holding the changeable vowels *a*, *e*, and *i* in each of the following verses, “en este limbo,” “día a día la repite,” “la que lee,” “del lado del revés,” la “deje dada vuela,” “hasta quedarse dormida.” This binding

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<sup>228</sup> In his Introduction to *Poet’s Prose*, Fredman calls attention to these “opposing or complimentary qualities normally attributed to poetry and prose.” (9)

by alliteration applies to the content about what is coming unbound as the mother's inaction and the limbo that exemplifies the repeated image of nothingness:

nada nada nada repite ahora  
en este limbo que día a día la repite  
la que lee avisos fúnebres del lado del revés  
dio vuelta *La Nación* a la mañana  
y la deje dada vuela hasta quedarse dormida  
porque de nada se enteró. (21)

The transportation to another time and place is a testament to the emotional space of domesticated life in which involuntary memory returns to the poet through the sensory experience that resurfaces as a result, "Antes no era así decimos con mi hermana." A shift occurs in the next verses as the alliterated consonants *m*, *r*, *s*, and *ll* dominate the sound structure both at the beginning and end as well as within the words. Along with all vowel sounds, the poet creates a half-rhyme scheme through the repetition of the final consonant *s* and the vowel *a* in the words "decimos," "hermana," "seguimos," "huella," "mismas," "componemos," "también," and "mamushka." Using the Russian term of endearment for mother, "mamushka" the poem again focuses the reader's attention on the loss of the mother's voice and memory, as now the two daughters are forced to take on new roles. The figuration of the Russian mamushka or nesting dolls is symbolic of the mother's womb in which again the imagery of nothing expresses loss. Finding words to capture this nothingness, the poet turns to the language of emotional expression for consolation:

Antes no era así decimos con mi hermana  
eso nos consuela seguimos esa huella  
y nosotras mismas nos componemos  
como muñecas también de la otra

metidas en la panza de la mamushka (21)

The final stanza returns to a narrative structure in which the poet faces the reality of what lies ahead as the daughters and mother are left to grope in the darkness, “nosotras tanteamos esa oscuridad.” Kamenzain explains her *neoborroso* aesthetic<sup>229</sup> as the attempt to erase all artifices in order to discover what remains, “Toda la poesía de distintas maneras busca ir al punto ése del que nada se puede decir. Y bueno, ahí esta el desafío.” The poet writes until she reaches the point that there is nothing left to say and accepts this challenge as she finds the means in memories that give her the inspiration and understanding needed to accompany her mother on toward the darkness of death.

In light of the fact that she and her sister protect their mother, “poniéndonos a nosotras a cubrir su revés,” Kamenzain expresses the quality of *areté* through the noble deeds that enable two daughters to fill their particular role. As Ender has shown us, as a part of the human experience, autobiographical memory is essential to making sense of our lives and to conveying feelings and emotions. It is memory that helps us to ward off our fears and our tragic awareness of death, as it also attests to our remarkable resilience:

nosotras tanteamos esa oscuridad  
que mi madre descifra sin anteojos  
la acompañamos hasta donde vaya  
los avisos fúnebres no la encuentran todavía  
y ella, analfabeta reciente, se protege bien  
poniéndonos a nosotras a cubrir su revés. (21)

The correlation between emotion and poetry from an empirical perspective takes the issue of sentimentality out of the interpretation of the poems found in ECO.

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<sup>229</sup> <http://www.diariouno.com.ar/espectaculos/Kamenzain-Quiero-transitar-hacia-el-neoborroso-20131011-0012.html>.



Kamenszain's elucidation of mourning manifests itself through remembrance and imaginative autobiographical writing derived from emotional memory, which is a basic phenomenon that shapes our lives. These combined features work to activate involuntary memory for the poet, who, much like Proust and Benjamin, is then able to regain time and memories from the past. In addition to emotional memory, intercorporeal memory is largely determined by earlier experience, and implicitly and unconsciously affected as such. Next, how the form of the maternal body reveals the involuntary perceptual ties the human corpus may encompass as the body serves as a physical record of existence through its posture and decline. The reader is asked to consider a reading of the human form in connection to an individual life once lived.

### **Memory, Desire, and the Maternal Body**

From birth, as we begin contact with the maternal body, we interact and begin to communicate through what Merleau-Ponty called *intercorporeality* (1960). Thomas Fuchs<sup>230</sup> points out that these embodied interactions are to such a large extent

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<sup>230</sup> Thomas Fuchs' findings are from his article "The Phenomenology of Body Memory" in *Body Memory, Metaphor and Movement*. Fuchs explains that these embodied interactions are to such a large extent determined by earlier experience that we may speak of an intercorporeal memory, which is implicitly and unconsciously effective in every encounter. Early intercorporeality has far-reaching effects: early interactions turn into implicit relational styles that form personality called "embodied personality structure" (Fuchs 2006). Fuchs explains that our entire personality is based on the memory of the body. Each body forms an extract of its past history of experiences with others that are stored in intercorporeal memory, in the structures of the lived body, and the others are always implied: They are meant in expression and intended in desire. Thus, a person's typical patterns of posture, movement, and expression are only comprehensible when they refer to actually present or imaginary others. Embodied personality structures may be regarded as procedural fields of possibility that are activated in the encounter with others and suggested certain types of behavior. "I do not need to look for others elsewhere, I find them within my experience, they dwell in the niches which contain what is hidden from me but visible to them" (Merleau-Ponty 1974:166). The embodied structure of one's personality is therefore most accessible in the actual intercorporeal encounter (10–22).

determined by earlier experience that we may speak of an intercorporeal memory, which is implicitly and unconsciously effective in every encounter. Research shows that motor, emotional, and social development in early childhood do not proceed on separate tracks, but are integrated through the formation of affective-interactive schemata (10). Fuchs points out that even when dementia deprives a person of all of her explicit recollections, she still retains her bodily memory:

The history of her life remains present in the familiar sights, smells, feel, and handling of things, even when she is no more capable of accounting for the origin of this familiarity and of telling her life history. Her senses become the carriers of personal continuity, of a more felt than known recollection—the tacit, but enduring memory of the body. (20)

The connection between body and memory on a primary level starts with the pragmatic assertion that the body provides the structural support for remembrance and provides purpose to the primary impulse of memory. On a broader level, as announced at the very outset of Proust's *Recherche*: “the body is the guardian of the past” and therein lies the notion that body memory provides the foundation for the rememberer's biography. Proust describes *la mémoire du corps*, “body memory,” as that which is summoned up internally by a bodily state, suggesting that the most profound fibers of our personal memory overlap with a somatic topography<sup>231</sup>—a map whose landmarks are sites of pleasure and pain.

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<sup>231</sup> Evelyn Ender goes into detail on the philosophical implications of Proust in *Recherche* via Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* in which Sartre points out that under the rubric of “affective images” the notion of a “psychical body” carries our subjective history. Sartre writes, “As the body is the contingent and indifferent matter of all our psychical events, this body defines a *psychical space*.” In this psychical space constituted by our bodily awareness, Sartre finds a justification for a psychoanalytical model of the mind: the psychical body “justifies psychological theories such as that of the unconscious, and questions such as

### *The Speaking Body*

One of Kamenszain's more lyrically descriptive poems in ECO, "Como la torcaza que de transparencia en transparencia," articulates the subject matter of memory and desire when her mother's body relinquishes its outward appearance. Desire is expressed in the simile "como la torcaza" as the lyrical "I" longs for the return of the mother through the figuration of her corpse embodied within that of the "morning dove." For Kamenszain, the repressed, instinctual, maternal element that has been lost in death is reactivated through the use of poetic language. The use of enjambment creates one line of poetry that flows into the next as the syntax courses through the line-break, emphasizing the upward movement and ephemeral nature of the subject matter contained within the poem.

The spasm of the memory of the maternal body through its voice becomes clear in the fifth line, "y me dejó sin oído buscando sonidos reconocibles," as the lyrical "I" longs for the recognizable sound of her mother's words. In these last two lines, the poet returns to the direct approach of the *Neoborroso* to speak about language, "sonidos reconocibles," "letra viva," campana fónica," as the emotion of longing as a form of desire moves from an active state in the first four lines to a more passive form in the last two lines. The active-passive distinction gives the sense of what can be controlled and what cannot. The departure of the mother indicates an active leaving in which she has taken with her not only her physical presence but the ancient sound of her voice. The

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that of the preservation of memories (386–87). Overlapping with Proust's idea, Ender claims that Sartre's theory suggests that the body is ultimately the keeper of memories.

passive state in the last two lines leaves the lyrical “I” searching for the intangible presence, “indicios de letra viva,” of this voice:

Como la torcaza que de transparencia en transparencia  
anuncia muy claro lo que no sabe decir  
mi madre voló llevándose con ella todo el repertorio  
duplicó lo que no dijo puso en eco el viejo acento familiar  
y me dejó sin oído buscando sonidos reconocibles  
indicios de letra viva bajo la campana fónica del tiempo[.]  
(37)<sup>232</sup>

The first line of the following stanza is expressed in language framed in the form of a learned expression, “porque si es cierto que la voz se escucha desde lejos,” which returns to the subject of the maternal voice. The poet manifests specific concerns regarding sound judgment, which are then pushed aside, “aunque nos tomen por locos tenemos que atrapar,” through her yearning for connection with her mother. These *neoborroso* verses announce to the reader Kamenszain’s concept of *espiritismo*. “[E]n el espiritismo de esa garganta profunda un idioma para hablar con los muertos” is a means of liberation through poetry, “un idioma” in which the poet connects with the memories and maternal voice of her mother:

porque si es cierto que la voz se escucha desde lejos  
aunque nos tomen por locos tenemos que atrapar  
en el espiritismo de esa  
un idioma para hablar con los muertos. (37)

Kamenszain further explains this idea in a personal interview in which she proposes *espiritismo* as a universal link--one that extends subjectivity in the poem beyond one personal mother/daughter relation to that which includes all human

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<sup>232</sup> Translation of “Como la torcaza que de transparencia en transparencia” provided by Peter Boyle.

relationships: “es un vínculo universal, no es mi madre solamente, creo que es un vínculo que yo llamé ‘espiritista.’” Searching for a form of language not only to communicate with the dead, but to connect on a more spiritual or metaphysical level, Kamenzain further explains,<sup>233</sup> “escuchar la lengua materna, lo que queda en lo que permanece en uno. Y en el eco de lo que ella nos dijo; de cómo ella habló, del ritmo que tenía su decir. Y bueno, me parece que es con eso que me conecto.” While Kamenzain does not speak openly or extensively of her belief in the afterlife,<sup>234</sup> when asked about the link that exists for her between the living and the dead in her poems, she explains:

Con el caso de mi padre, creo que me conecto más con las ideas;  
con los mandatos, con los preceptos que con el modo de la lengua.  
Con mi madre es más un ritmo, un modo, una cadencia. En  
cambio, con mi padre es más “ah, mi padre hubiera pensado esto  
así si viviera,” creo que son modos muy diferentes de conectarse.  
Muy diferentes. Pero los dos están, y los dos me permitieron  
escribir, me permitieron que eso aparezca en mi poesía.

The poet, through *espiritismo*, connects with the rhythms, tones, and movements of the signifying practices established with the maternal body of the mother as the first source not just for Kamenzain, but for all human beings of these rhythms, tones and movement. Accordingly, as she returns to the original relationship with her mother, prior to the entry into language, and therefore prior to the original separation, this estrangement reappears and extends into death.

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<sup>233</sup> Appendix B.

<sup>234</sup> Kamenzain speaks of her religious beliefs in our personal interview as follows: “Yo en relación a la religión, si me preguntas, soy muy agnóstica, tengo un contacto muy grande con la tradición, con la tradición judía, pero no es un contacto creyente, de creer por ejemplo que hay vida eterna, ese tipo de cosas. Tampoco creo que el judaísmo sea muy afecto a pensar en la vida eterna, o en la resurrección. Me parece que el judaísmo es muy crudo también en eso... Uno se muere y listo, no? La vida eterna, ¡no!”

### *The Abject Body and the Return to Infancy*

Kristeva's concept of *abjection*<sup>235</sup> begins as a process in which the maternal body is central. Our reactions to the abject in the form of specific objects that disgust us can often evoke a bodily reaction of nausea. Kristeva points out that open wounds, nail clippings, menstrual blood, and even the skin on top of milk can evoke our responses. These responses for Kristeva are a reaction to aspects of the world that threaten our sense of boundaries between the world and ourselves or between ourselves and others: "It is thus not lack of cleanliness that, causes abjection but what disturbs identity, what does not respect borders, positions, rules" (4).

This irruption into our lives, Kristeva proposes, has its origins with the maternal body. As the original relation to this body is one in which there is no sense of a separate self, separation can be fully achieved only when we enter the symbolic and learn language. But, this entry requires a prior phase, a process by which a sense of bodily boundaries is tentatively achieved. And for that there is a rejection of the maternal body, as well as other aspects of the world, as a pushing away of that which is *not me*, if there is to be a discrete sense of self to emerge. The opening chapter of *Powers of Horror* [PH] describes:

There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies quite close, but it cannot be assimilated. It beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire,

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<sup>235</sup> *Powers of Horror* (1982). Kristeva's notion of abjection is often used in diagnosing the dynamics of oppression, which goes beyond the scope of the discussion here. As Kelly Oliver points out, "the main threat to the fledgling subject is his or her dependence upon the maternal body. Therefore, abjection is fundamentally related to the maternal function." <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/feminism/kristeva.html>.

which, nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced. Apprehensive, desire turns aside; sickened, it rejects. (1)

For Kristeva, abjection involves a reaction to certain aspects that threaten our sense of boundaries within the world around us, those that link us to others, and even to our own selves. Separated through memory loss and death, Kamenszain begins not only a new life journey in which the daughter must accept physical separation from the mother, it is also a path that leads the poet on a journey in which she must rely on the language of emotional expression to speak of this separation. The poet begins this journey by searching out vocabulary and poetic structures as a process of bringing *expeerincia* to language in a new way; and in this process, the poet begins to understand.

The mother-daughter relationship is one of memories and past experiences that must be carefully negotiated and can be positive, negative, or even ambivalent. In the art of working mourning, Kamenszain touches on the functions of birth in which she expresses the separation of the semiotic and enters into the symbolic of learned language. Kristeva describes this process as matricide, seen as a vital necessity, for the reason that in order to become subjects, we must abject the maternal body. Kristeva describes the origin of this process in birth:

Cells fuse, split, and proliferate; volumes grow, tissues stretch, and body fluids change rhythm, speeding up or slowing down. Within the body, growing as a graft, indomitable, there is an other. And no one is present, within that simultaneously dual and alien space, to signify what is going on. "It happens, but I'm not there." "I cannot realize it, but it goes on" Motherhood's impossible syllogism. (*Language in Desire*, 237)

Kristeva's syllogistic argument places the site of the material embodiment, as do the following verses from "Del otro lado del dormitorio familiar," within the context of birth, home, and the resulting expulsion of the two daughters from the womb. The selected stanza begins with the poet seeking consolation from the mother for the suffering the daughters must endure as they witness their mother's decline, "consólanos mamá de tu propio sufrimiento /porque el gasto de tu vida nos ahuyenta / poniéndonos como locas al borde de la salida." Kamenszain's poem evokes a bodily reaction through words like, "la flecha," "atravesó tu cuerpo," "el túnel de tu deterioro," "el punto muerto," and "va expulsándote." The disturbance induced by death and the sense of loss of boundaries between the poet and the world, between herself and others, disturbs the poet's identity and creates the irruption of the bodily into her life, an irruption that has its origin in the subject's relations with the maternal body:

aunque la flecha que la señala ya atravesó tu cuerpo  
y ahora todo lo que nos espera es una entrada  
marcha atrás por el túnel de tu deterioro  
ése que desde el primer parto programado  
hasta el punto muerto de la última cesárea  
va expulsándote sola suelta de tus propias hijas  
afuera más afuera muchísimo más afuera todavía  
de nuestro primer hogar. (31-2)

Kristeva's idea that the existence of that which is *between* her and *the other* is life is expressed in Kamenszain's poem as the poet draws attention to "ése que desde el primer parto programado / hasta el punto muerto de la última cesárea." The instability of the boundary that separates her own death from that of her mother's is blurred. From her delivery to the symbolic last Cesarean is the release from her daughters through death.



The poem echoes Kristeva's words regarding abjection of the original interdependence of our body with that of the maternal. For Kamenszain, the subject matter of abjection provides a means of voicing emotion without sentimentality.

### ***The Aging Body, Role Reversal, and the Subject of "Lateness"***

The subject of late-life works again surfaces as an important feature in Kamenszain's treatment of death and grief in her mourning poems. Diana Hume George<sup>236</sup> explains that in the poems of aging women poets, there is a "studied, intentional preoccupation with memory, loss, with personal history and the representation of it, with childhood, parents, and unfinished business" (135). Hume George finds that the writing of women poets on aging addresses issues that are confrontational, angry, tender, unashamed, and naked, yet these poets "do their aging and dying fearlessly" (135).

Yet, Hume George points out that this project of becoming fearless is enormous, and thus their poems record the process rather than the result. Their poems written on death and loss in each case, she points out, "use their fears in the continuing process of coming to terms with their own aging and death." Hume George describes being surprised to find that the bodies resurrected in the poems studied were most often those

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<sup>236</sup> From her chapter "Who is the Double Ghost Whose Head is Smoke?" in Woodward and Murry Schwartz's *Memory and Desire: Aging--Literature--Psychoanalysis*. 134–153. Hume George investigates contemporary women poets confronting the aging process as a "daughter" looking toward "mothers" for power and authority. Questions Hume George searches out in her research deal with what women poets in their maturity (ages fifty to seventy) write about. More than twenty-five poets were included in this study including: Denise Levertov, Maxine Kumin, Louise Bogan, Elizabeth Bishop, May Swenson, Marie Ponnosot, Charlotte Mandel, May Sarton, Muriel Rukeyser, and Adrienne Rich.

of the mother and father and their “familiar and familial substitutes” (136). Surprising as well was the recognition,

that at a mature age of fifty or sixty or seventy, the poetic “self” would have “washed its hands of such sacred blood?” Did I think that the preoccupations of all poetry would have been magically outgrown, or outlived...?” Apparently, as a daughter supposing the mothers to be omnipotent, I did expect to find just that. (136)

Additionally, noted by Hume George is the notion that while most of the poets she studied spoke of the mother and father, the mother was to occupy a unique place in the “haunting of the dead by the living, the living by the dead” (128). This special relationship between the mother and daughter (as with Hume George) is expressed by Kamenszain through poems written on her mother’s ultimate illness and death and may be studied from the perspective of preparation for her own death. We see examples of this phenomenon in verses like, “la dememoria de mi madre señala para mí / una dirección retrógrada,” “Desmadrada entonces detengo / antes un estado de cosas demasiado presente: / ser la descudada que la cuida / mientras otros la descudían por mí,” and “dirigió un mensaje para mí por boca de mi padre / ahora sos todo lo que nos queda ahora sos todo.”

Concise *neoborroso* poems act as the last word in the dissipating energy of the poet who speaks to a dead and absent presence. Kamenszain recognizes her own death in the death of the mother. In narrative as well as descriptive poems that speak of the maternal corporeal form, the poet connects the past and future and moves the reader toward a poetic reading that speaks of the changes that occur as a result of memory loss and the process of aging. The desire for a return to the maternal body becomes a

necessity in the memory work found in ECO as Kamenzain takes over for her mother as the family memory-keeper. In this body of work, we see an example of that which Kristeva writes, “By giving birth, the woman enters into contact with her mother; she becomes, she is her own mother; they are the same continuity differentiating itself” (239).<sup>237</sup>

The scrutiny of research into the effects of one’s own aging on the writing process through the consideration of other mature women poets becomes a means of analyzing the nature of Kamenzain’s poems in this volume. One aspect of lateness falls within the exploration of what Karen Painter confirms as the line of reasoning that the relationship between biography and artistic creation may be more consequential in late works than in any other phase of life, as she explains:

This thematization of the self, works to show the poet’s own significance and vulnerability. Old age may bring contemplation, greater life experience, more spiritual insight, and enhanced powers of understanding to artistic genius—all leading to what Goethe implied, to epiphany, transcendence, a withdrawal from outer appearances, and an emphasis on essentials. (1)

Kamenzain’s life experiences have allowed her to witness the implications of many of these characteristics. Through the strategy of *presentification* of the lived moment, creative expression is not about Kamenzain herself, nor the lyrical “I,” but the subject itself as it becomes the essential emphasis of the poem. This emphasis of which she has been able to speak highlights the limitations of life and achievement and allows the poet to focus on what still seems most important to her. As we know, life is full of

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<sup>237</sup> *Desire in Language*, (1980).

endings; it is in facing them that requires courage different from that of beginnings. For Kamenzain, “emphasis on the essentials” includes the ability to name the unnamable and express the inexpressible and is demonstrated through poems written in a direct nature, which she refers to as *neoborroso*.<sup>238</sup> As life liberates what time constrains, Kamenzain’s imaginative lyrics reflect the underlying theme of lateness, or what Calabrese refers to as a “restruck balance” in a poetics of mourning that that engages with sentiment without sentimentality.

Works written with a focus on the mother-daughter relationship naturally entail a sense of the daughter’s preparation for her own inevitable death. Kamenzain’s representation of childhood memories, parents, and unfinished business reflects this studied and intentional focus through the maternal body. In “Sentada al borde de su memoria,” Kamenzain moves from Freud’s “unique uncertainty” of a former existence of “the primal home” of the maternal body to one situated within the context of an external uncertainty.

The chiasmus aesthetically and rhythmically balances the first two verses, yet creates a mirror image of oppositions that produce a sense of disjointedness in the subject’s lives, “vienen/van,” “pasados/futuros” “compartidos/distanciándose.” The past and the future are doubled over into a paradoxical irony as to the outcome not only for

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<sup>238</sup> Kamenzain describes this crisis as follows: “En ese límite estoy trabajando, es un desafío conmigo misma, Y por momento, entro en crisis porque no encuentro maneras de expresarme que me convenzan y ahí vuelvo a recurrir a mis “habilidades” como artesana que me tranquilizan un poco. Es como un desafío que propongo. A ver si borrando, sacando, despojando, a ver que queda de hueso en esa búsqueda de lo real, porque yo creo que no solo yo, creo la poesía en general va en busca de decir lo real. Que es un imposible, pero toda la poesía de distintas maneras busca ir al punto ése del que nada se puede decir. Y bueno, ahí esta el desafío.”

her mother but for herself as well, as the poet is assailed by doubt and despair as to the resolution. This tone continues into the following verses, “ella no sabe lo que yo no sé me pregunta, ¿yo qué hago?” For the poet/daughter, there is nothing more to be done that the basic steps of “comé vestite dormí caminé sentate:”

vienen y van nuestros pasados compartidos  
van y vienen nuestros futuros distanciándose  
ella no sabe lo que yo no sé me pregunta ¿yo qué hago?  
le contesto comé vestite dormí caminé sentate. (17)

Later in the poem, Kamenzain cites the words of another poet, quoting the last four verses from Giuseppe Ungaretti’s second poem in *El cuaderno del viejo* (*Cuaderno*) in which the Italian poet asks himself, “¿Sucederá que vea / extenderse el desierto / hasta que también le falte / la caridad feroz de los recuerdos?” Kamenzain uses the final words of Ungaretti’s poem to begin the following stanza of her own poem in which “mi vieja se aleja encorvada” moves toward the “desierto público” of memory loss. Ungaretti’s *Cuaderno* is the diary of the poet’s experience of diminishing life and the awareness of transience. Autobiographical in character, the theme of memory also holds an important place in the elder poet’s poetry. As Kamenzain writes:

se pregunta Ungaretti en *El cuaderno del viejo*  
mientras mi vieja se aleja encorvada  
hacia el desierto público de su desmemoria[.] (17)

Through the role reversal of the mother-daughter constellation, the traditional roles have come unbound, and the daughter assumes the role of the mother: “nos encuentran sueltas nuestras maternidades adoptivas / soy ahora por ella la hija que crece sin remedio.” In verses more in keeping with the elaborate language of the Neobaroque

than the more recent direct style of the *neoborroso*, the poet returns to a figurative association using poetic language to describe this complex exchange: “trabajamos hasta el borde un abismo de sonrisas” (18). In Kamenszain’s description we see an example of what Kristeva alludes to when she writes, “By giving birth, the woman enters into contact with her mother; she becomes, she is her own mother; they are the same continuity differentiating itself” (239).<sup>239</sup>

The mother now becomes the child who diminishes in size, and the daughter becomes the caregiver, “para dejarla decrecer tranquila entre mis brazos.” The antithesis in the next to last line, “así juntas nos vamos separando,” draws the reader’s attention to this constellation and the fact that while the mother is becoming childlike, the daughter is aging and each day comes closer to facing her own demise. In “Sentada al borde de su memoria,” Kamenszain presents an astute recognition of memory, loss, parents, and her own sense of time running out:

Avanza protegido por lo que no dice su amnesia  
y me pierde a mí en otro idioma  
nos encuentran sueltas nuestras maternidades adoptivas  
soy ahora por ella la hija que crece sin remedio  
para dejarla decrecer tranquila entre mis brazos  
así juntas nos vamos separando  
trabajamos hasta el borde un abismo de sonrisas[.] (18)

As an eternal form that connects us to the past and future, the body shows us that through the involuntary perceptual ties it encompasses, we must consider how it serves as a physical record of times gone by through its posture and action. This process loosens the visual representation of the body from the linguistic process of naming and

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<sup>239</sup> *Desire in Language*, (1980).

narrative to open a window to understanding on a perceptual level. The body and mind are inseparable as the body acts as an extension of the human experience and of the pains and pleasures of memory. As part of the human experience, Ender reminds us that autobiographical memory is essential to make sense of our lives and to convey feelings and emotions “symbolically and formally in external objects such as poems, paintings, or symphonies,” and thus it follows “that we need memory to ward off our fears and our tragic awareness of death, but it also attests to our remarkable resilience” (19).

ECO expresses the vacuum created within the union of desire and memory when memory is impeded. In these poems, Kamenszain expresses a personal crisis in which her own sense of “self” merges with that of her mother’s memory through the connection with her mother’s body. The poet’s self-awareness is challenged through memories that emerge from the relationship between her own body and bodily sensations and the image of her mother’s body as she struggles to create a renewed sense of self in order to go beyond this life crisis. This relationship between the poet and “the other” is the very essence of memory as a self-referential base with a self-consciousness that is ever evolving and ever changing, intrinsically dynamic and subjective. Kamenszain’s poetic response to these issues echoes the original interdependence of her own body-memory with that of her mother’s maternal body.

### **Visualization of the Imagination**

The past is key to self-understanding, and memory provides the raw material for this process. However, at times and for some, holding back or forgetting reveals as

much, if not more, than what is expressed. Poetry and photography independently can reveal hidden truths, those not always expressed on the surface of a text or visible to the naked eye. For Tamara Kamenszain, credibility of this assertion is revealed through the combined affects of poetry and photography when they lead the reader to clarity in understanding the nuanced events surrounding the poet's response to grief and loss.

Kamenszain's first mention of photography in *ECO* is situated within the poem "Del otro lado del dormitorio familiar" in which she writes "fijo como una roca al espacio inhóspito del desalojo /ahí, más allá de los retratos de abuelos / señalando esa almohada que ya nadie usa..." / "ahí es donde crece el fantasma del asilo que espera paciente a mi madre para volverse real." The reference of a photograph composed of family members activates the reader's mind to consider the ways in which memories are externally represented through family photographs. Yet as we will come to understand, for the poet's mother, visual cues will fail to work not only as memory aids, but also as memory itself.

Roland Barthes' famous photograph of his mother known as the Winter Garden Photograph shows how the frozen memories found in photographs represent a good analogy for memory. Barthes compares his own experience as remembrance in the manner of Proust (while one day putting on boots, the image of his grandmother's true face came to him), "whose living reality I was experiencing for the first time, in an involuntary and complete memory" (70).<sup>240</sup> For Barthes, photos have the capacity to prick one's emotions, which he names the *punctum*, to describe a singular accident that

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<sup>240</sup> Barthes' quote.



joins the viewer and the image. Revealed by the *punctum* is not that which is visible, but that which remains concealed. In this way, that which then makes an image so affecting is not the appreciation of the identifiable, but the recognition of differentiation.

Kamenszain's mourning poems require an expansion of Barthes' idea of the *punctum*. When one is enveloped by memory loss, the accident of which Barthes speaks, that which joins the viewer and the image takes a different turn, as recognition of one's own image and the moment preserved in the image is forgotten. The "sting, speck, cut, little hole—and also a [the] cast of the dice" (27) of which he speaks, results only in the case for the one in the know (here, Kamenszain) and comes from the recognition that her mother is lost not only to the present, but to past memories as well.

Poems that take these images as their subject normally speak of the value and place family members assume before and after their deaths, yet for Kamenszain, they serve only as reminders of loss. Susan Sontag's claim that "every family constructs a portrait-chronicle of itself--a portable kit of images that bears witness to its connectedness"... "a rite of family life" (8) is suspended when its value as the visual chronicle of a family is destroyed when memory loss and death erode this tradition.

Lost is the idea of permanence, when the shock of the transience of life is made known. Kamenszain explains, "Convocar el nombre de los muertos es cerrar el círculo y traerlos al espacio doméstico, allí donde la escritura asume la forma y la función del duelo" (3).<sup>241</sup> It is within this domestic space, usually occupied by women, and

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<sup>241</sup> "Apuntes sobre los primeros textos" de Tamara Kamenszain by Nancy Fernández in *espéculo/número* 48.

particularly the mother, where the preservation of family memories and tradition is upheld. As Armando Silva explains, it is generally the women of the family that conserve the photo albums of a family:

El álbum es de la mujer como su casa. Es la manera de traer el exterior (las ceremonias, los paseos, las fiestas, los viajes, el trabajo) a los límites de la casa, pero sin duda para desmaterializarlo como espacio y hacer de la experiencia más bien una instalación temporal, pues la foto aparece como de otra parte, sin lugar[.] (1998:155)<sup>242</sup>

The collecting of photographs adds another worldliness as it brings the activities associated with the outside world into the confines of the home, and the past into the present, to create its own space within the abode. Silva further explains the importance of photography as it relates to Kamenzain, as he makes the connection between the visual aspect of photography and the textual economy of Kamenzain's use of *espiritismo* as both useful tools in communicating with the dead:

Tamara practica la invocación a los muertos, y no la mera evocación que los fija en un recuerdo estabilizador de la conciencia. La imagen y la visibilidad de los objetos (rostros, ajuares, espacios, mensajes) funciona en la fotografía, como motivo mismo o procedimiento textual que apunta a construir una imagen para dotarla de sentido. (155)

The language of description that accompanies a photograph cannot fully account for its mystery, and in order to transform the picture from a static representation to something far more complex, Kamenzain demonstrates what Evelyn Ender claims that, “photographs can present the qualities of ‘temporal hallucinations’ and thus help us believe in the existence of something ‘that has been’ (115). Photography is used as a

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<sup>242</sup> From Denise Leon's, “Ghetto y poesía. La pérdida del hogar lingüístico” (2007).

visual means of expressing time through diachronic flashback to speak of the past, and synchronic flash-forward to speak of the present, as the movement of human memory leaps back and forth across time. Kamenszain's diachronic use of language is used to articulate the changes that occur over time and is expressed through time in the past tense while synchronic time limits its concern to the present, as the remembrance of the past no longer exists for her mother nor the concern for how life has developed to its present state. It is this difference that the reader absorbs and holds onto, becoming suspended in a state between the singular moment and the idealized perception of constancy.

In "Sentada al borde de su memoria" the mother is unable to recognize her own image and that of her husband in a photograph at the head of the bed. Without understanding, she correctly answers her own inquiry ("es tu mamá es tu papá?"), yet she fails to recognize that she is part of the pairing. Time is suspended in the synchronic present through verbs utilized in the present tense, "la interrogan," "ella no encuentra," "quiero guiarla," "se le suelta," "es," and "te acordás," yet there is diachronic shift or flashback to a form of the past with the use of "si llamaban?" Ron Burnett <sup>243</sup> writes that photographs create a kind of present tense out of experiences that are historical but traumatically felt as if time had not passed, and contribute to this sense that time has been marginalized even as they come to stand for events from the past (15):

desde la cabecera de la cama doble la interrogan dos retratos  
pero ella no encuentra la contraseña

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<sup>243</sup> Ron Burnett makes this point in *How Images Think* (2005).

quiero guiarla pero se le suelta la lengua  
es tu mamá es tu papá  
¿te acordás cómo se llamaban? (17)

The *punctum* in the photograph lies not in the recognition of the mother's own countenance, but in Kamenzain herself when the shock of what is hidden is revealed. Distressed by the recognition that her mother no longer remembers the past, the image takes on the quality of what Barthes calls the *unitary photograph*, one that emphatically transforms "reality" (421). For Kamenzain, there is no vacillation or indirection at the recognition that her mother's consciousness is no longer part of the present. In this moment, the daughter faces the reality that it is in her photograph and the pain of her memory loss, that her mother is seen and will be remembered.

In the final stanza, the poet recovers from the recognition of this fate, knowing well that there exist other photographs, "porque hay otras fotos," and that her mother is still present in body and will always remain her mother. Kamenzain falls back into a mother/daughter relationship and the role reversal previously discussed as she takes control of the situation through the recognition that "...nada le impide seguir siendo mi madre."<sup>244</sup> As Barthes points out, "The punctum has more or less, potentially, a power of expansion" (45) and calls attention to the metonymic quality it possesses. As the

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<sup>244</sup> In *Camera Lucida* Roland Barthes writes of the role-reversal constellation with his own mother: I nursed her, held the bowl of tea she liked because it was easier to drink from than from a cup; she had become my little girl, uniting for me with that essential child she was in her first photograph. In Brecht, by a reversal I used to admire a good deal, it is the son who (politically) educates the mother; yet I never educated my mother, never converted her to anything at all...; we supposed without saying anything of the kind to each other, that the frivolous insignificance of language, the suspension of images must be the very space of live, its music. Ultimately I experienced her, strong as she had been, my inner law, as my feminine child... From now on I could do no more than await my total, undialectical death. (72). That is what I read in the Winter Garden Photograph.

photograph transcends itself, the *punctum*, the detail that “pricks” Kamenszain, comes to represent this mother/daughter relationship, one that eclipses memory loss and death:

porque hay otras fotos  
y ella bien puede no acordarse de mí pero no importa  
entre mi nacimiento y su muerte la de la alegría fotogénica  
ésa que me legó generosamente un parecido  
todavía está viva y nada le impide  
seguir siendo mi madre. (18)

Within Walter Benjamin’s ideas on the cult of remembrance of dead and absent loved ones, he claims that it is in this cult value where the image finds its last refuge: “In the fleeting expression of a human face, the aura beckons from early photographs for the last time. This is what gives them their melancholy and incomparable beauty” (258).<sup>245</sup> The urge to externalize an internal world, to project the self and one’s thought into images and into words, are fundamental to human experience and are universal characteristics of every culture, social, and economic structure.

Kamenszain remembers for the mother who cannot remember for herself, and as the daughter, she becomes the memory holder of the family history. A photograph taken long ago exceeds the boundaries of its frame and goes beyond the silence that surrounds it. As the material place where memory and longing occur, the idea that a photo can go from a virtual space to reality takes place. Within this site of a contingent world of possibilities is where Kamenszain’s imagination takes hold and functions as a way to add to her life story and the circumstances surrounding the loss of her mother. In a direct

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<sup>245</sup> From *Berlin Childhood Around 1900*. Begun in Poveromo, Italy, in 1932, and revised in 1938.

manner that pulls no punches, Kamenzain achieves her goal without resorting to sentimental gestures to do so.

### **Expressing More Than Feeling**

Previously, within the Neobaroque aesthetics, it has been incumbent upon the reader to understand these works as art forms that avoid a systematic labeling of any of their components. This requirement has become more imperative in the case of Tamara Kamenzain as a result of the crisis actuated by the loss of her mother, which now necessitates a new way of reading her poetry. As shown with José Kozer, and as we will see with Eduardo Espina, the purpose of any aesthetic must take into consideration the poet's vision, which for each, occurs at a time when looking toward a universal and precise way of dealing with consciousness has become a part of the uncertainty of contemporary experience, of which death and grief are a part.

Kamenzain's *neobarroso* aesthetic allows her to move beyond the Neobaroque with its tendency to disregard emotion, and toward a more authentic, direct approach to her poetry. The result has been one that emphasizes the intellect as a quality of *poetic areté*, which allows for an engagement with sentiment but is never sentimental in expression. *El eco de mi madre* while continuing to rely on poetic diction to express many of the complex emotions experienced by memory loss and death has also displayed an imaginative narrative structure that emphasizes the inner experience of her new reality.

The *neoborroso* demonstrates an inspired means of writing, initiated by the “golpes de la vida,” that has led the poet to search beyond the Neobaroque aesthetic, taking her to a dynamic new direction within her poetic *oeuvre*. The Spanish verb *borrar*—to erase—prompts Kamenzain to put aside past styles in the search for what comes next in her poetic practice. In addition, *neoborroso* symbolically represents the content of ECO to express the erasure and loss of her mother’s voice.

Kamenzain’s use of *experiencia* leads her to redefine sentimentality as the attachment to emotion, which has been “overdone” and “done with” for some time. For this poet, emotion becomes the aesthetic of language she uses to write poetry. The role of love, death, and sentiment in this approach is important, as her preference for *experience* is less personal and more able to be shared by others. In this way, *experience* is a poetic device that takes the focus off of the poetic “I” and in so doing, becomes a means of going beyond sentimentality in her mourning poems.

*Presentification* (*Presentificación*) is a term Kamenzain designates as a way of looking at the actual lived moment as the subject of the poem, that is, the *presentification* of the present moment, which is then expressed in the poem.

*Presentification* brings the past to the present and puts the future in motion. Poetic activity through this strategy, the poet points out, does so, not as an act of nostalgia, but with the twofold effort, to *presentify*, that is to make the experience present, and in so doing, to make it new. In this way, in looking for a new way to speak about the past as with the life and death of a loved one, Kamenzain’s interpretation goes beyond what

has been said or generally accepted to be true. *Presentification* allows her poetry to recount the past as it simultaneously breathes new life into previous ideas.

The important question as to the subject Kamenzain is addressing her mourning poetry is answered through the use of *espiritismo*. This unconventional means of communication uncovers the poetic link she seeks between herself and the voices of the loved ones she has lost. In the continuous search for new ways of expressing what cannot be said, *espiritismo* is the metaphorical poetic impulse that allows the poet to find the necessary words to do so. For Kamenzain, this pharmakon as a form of communication originates with the close connection she feels for her mother when she was alive, and which continues after her death.

The extraction of these three strategies is done through the investigation of memory and memory loss from such diverse fields as the social sciences, literary theory, psychology, philosophy, and the neurosciences. From the social sciences, Maurice Halbwachs' concept of collective memory as the shared collection of information held in the memories of two or more members of a group provided a better understanding of the shared frameworks that make up our individual recollections and lead us to the appreciation of artistic works as well as to explain human experience.

Through the enduring medium of poetry, Kamenzain expands our knowledge of the close connection that exists among exile, memory loss, and bereavement. When language and memory are reduced, those suffering from memory loss turn more inward, increasing the state of isolation for themselves as well those intimately connected. Yet through her poetic legacy, we understand the preservation for posterity of all that



remains of one family, which essentially represents us all, as we each face the joys and adversities of what family means as a convention in contemporary society.

Poetic language as the representation of memory shows us how Kamenszain uses poetry to express mourning. Autobiographical *syntactic thought* through the application of repetition echoes her mother's voice. In this repetition, we see the replication of the ways in which memory works, as involuntary emotional memory through the maternal voice becomes the force behind the construction of memory as a dynamic phenomenon that shapes existence.

Memory and desire through poetic language and the use of the maternal body provide the poet a means of expressing her former contact with the maternal language and her remembrance of childhood. Kristeva's process of abjection offers the reader a way of understanding Kamenszain's use of the maternal body within the context of birth, home, and the disturbance induced by death as a sense of a loss of boundaries that results in the disruption of the poet's identity. And lastly, the subject of late-life works resurfaces with Kamenszain in which the poet displays an intentional preoccupation with memory, loss, personal history and the representation of unfinished business. The scrutiny into the effects of one's own aging on the writing process shows the reasoning behind Kamenszain's biographical and artistic creation as a means of processing mourning.

The combined fields of the visual arts and literary theory help to explain the various ways by which the visual component of photography plays an important role in Kamenszain's mourning poems. Understanding the past as part of self-understanding

reveals hidden truths, which Kamenzain, through the use of poetry and photography uses to clarify the more nuanced events surrounding her response to grief and loss. The valued place of family members in Kamenzain's poems reveal the fact that memories externally represented through photographs serve to express memory itself, but also show us how visual cues fail to work as memory aides when memory is lost. The desire to externalize an internal world and to project the self and one's thoughts into images and words are fundamental to the human experience and Kamenzain through her poems becomes the memory holder of this family's history.

ECO marks a departure from the previous Neobaroque style of writing to one in which mourning triggers an emotional response to memory. For Kamenzain, this sentiment becomes an aesthetic that focuses on the language used to write mourning poetry in which emotion is not a way of expressing or understanding love and death [of which there is no understanding] but an aesthetic of the language the poet uses to write verse. Kamenzain offers no final message regarding poetry as a form of consolation, there is nothing new she reveals about death itself, but what the reader does find in this work, is poetry that is written and must be read with an appreciation for how this ingenious poetic mind functions.

As to what is next for Kamenzain, humor helps her to avert an overly emotional reaction and an attempt at consolation in ECO. She expresses this future in the closing lines of the last poem of the volume in which, characteristically through poetry, she tell us what that will be: "Acompañé a mi madre a morir dos veces / Y en estas fechas /¿qué más puedo decir? / Diga lo que diga /en presente me siento libre / y hasta me parece que

a lo mejor /...quién te dice... / mañana empiezo una novela,” which with the publication of *La novela de la poesía* in 2012 is precisely what this remarkable poet and writer has done.

## CHAPTER VI

### EDUARDO ESPINA: SOUNDS SEEK TO REMAIN UNTIL THEY CAN<sup>246</sup>

Eduardo Espina's *poetic areté* is both intellectual and original in its approach to profundity. George Steiner<sup>247</sup> points out that literature and philosophy are products of language, while in poetry, "the poetics of thought are deeds of grammar, of language in motion" (306). Espina's incisive poetic proposition in mourning exercises originality as a means of reaching beyond the unspeakable through a philosophical approach to death. Described by José Kozer as "tragic when comical and comical when tragic,"<sup>248</sup> *Todo lo que ha sido para siempre una sola vez / Poemas a partir de la muerte del padre y de la madre* (TLQ), much like Picasso's *La Guernica*,<sup>249</sup> is created as a response to a tragic event, growing rapidly to become an exemplary work that now stands on its own merit.<sup>250</sup> The choice of Picasso, as well as that of, Espina to represent the subject matter

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<sup>246</sup> In addition to the English translation of this first line from Espina's poem, "Cuando incluso el tiempo está de más (*Viaje de ida al deseo de las preguntas*)" all English translations found in *Todo lo que ha sido para siempre una sola vez / Poemas a partir de la muerte del padre y de la madre* are done by Carl Goode.

<sup>247</sup> From *The Poetry of Thought: From Hellenism to Celan* (2011).

<sup>248</sup> In *Letras Libres* "El *cutis patrio* de Eduardo Espina". April, 2007.  
<http://www.letraslibres.com/print/60433>.

<sup>249</sup> Gijs van Hensbergen writes in *Guernica: The Biography of a Twentieth-Century Icon* (2004): "Guernica has had its own life, forging a relationship with its audience that has often been entirely separate from the life of the genius who brought it into our world...It has never lost its relevance, nor its magnetic, almost haunting appeal" (7).

<sup>250</sup> *The PEPP* states that all literary works are occasioned in some sense and further points out that occasional verse differs in having not a private but a public or social occasion. On the other hand, to be dismissive is to violate the most serious conceptions of much of the world's lyric poetry, and even narrative and drama may arise from occasion (966).

of a specific occasion for the creation of great art have in both cases come to express a universal truth rather than the moment of the particular event depicted.

The poet's originality in the act of writing poetry began with a structure related to the long tradition of the sonnet, known as a medium for poets to explore the joining of feeling and thought, as well as the lyrical and the discursive.<sup>251</sup> Mona Van Duyn (1921–2004),<sup>252</sup> [a Poet Laureate in 1992] describes the sonnet as “the most available to poets for deconstruction” (Hirsch, 596), a characteristic not readily apparent in Espina's poems. The poetic process for Espina requires dismantling the sonnet form from the bottom up in its re-creation, much like constructing an object from a mass of unassembled parts.<sup>253</sup>

The non-adherence to the fourteen-line rhyming construction of the sonnet form is found in “El ahora ha de ser seguramente un lugar semejante / (*Las horas siguen como si nada*).”<sup>254</sup> “El ahora” is a deconstructed, fourteen-lined, unrhymed form following the

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<sup>251</sup> Edward Hirsch provides a lengthy description of the history of the sonnet in *A Poet's Glossary* (2014).

<sup>252</sup> Quote is from Hirsch's *A Poet's Glossary*. Van Duyn (1921–2004) was a distinguished writer whose honors included a Bollingen Prize, a National Book Award, and a term as Poet Laureate of the United States. Van Duyn was co-founder and co-editor of the journal *Perspective / a Quarterly of Literature* in 1947. <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/mona-van-duyn>.

<sup>253</sup> All references to this personal interview with the poet can be found in Appendix C of this dissertation. Hereafter footnoted as Appendix C.

<sup>254</sup> All poems analyzed are from *Quiero escribir, pero me sale Espina* unless otherwise noted.

La mirada hace decir a las palabras hablándoles al oído.  
Aquí descansan mi padre y mi madre. Cada uno como  
ahora son, países separados por ninguna razón a ciegas.  
Al llevárselos, el zarzacán no siguió un orden alfabético.  
no terminaron sus cenizas en algún mar –hay uno a mano,  
por si quisieran– sino bajo el mármol, mar hasta la mitad.  
Sus nombres vienen del viento en noches como esta, en las

sonnet tradition. The poem's expressive potential lies in the ambiguity of the main title, which is then clarified by the subsequent subtitle. The reader must extrapolate meaning through the poet's use of time to mark the subject matter of the death of his parents.

Espina's revitalized sonnet opens the selected poems from TLQ found in his recent anthology, *Quiero escribir, pero me sale Espina* (2014). This remarkable collection includes several of his poems written between 1982–2012, beginning with his first book *Valores personales* (1982) up to the most recent creations, which to date are still unpublished in book form. The poet's mourning poems express his intensified search for meaning within the uncertainty of life and the consequential subject of death. Poetic consonance absorbs the senses in the opening lines through vibrant imagery that awakens the senses of sight, speech, and sound as we see with, "La mirada" / hace decir a las palabras / "hablándoles al oído."

The significance of the poem's meaning is found within the second and third lines, "Aquí descansan mi padre con mi madre, cada uno como / ahora son, países separados por cualquier razón a ciegas." The poet's disconnected psychological state expresses the centralized conflict he explores in TLQ and resurfaces in many of the poems throughout the collection. While the issue of grief is never fully resolved, the

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demás tienen la valentía de quedarse sin que el aire lo sepa.  
El silencio les alcanza y sobra para no morir un poco más.  
Como suele suceder con las horas elegidas por el infinito  
cuando quedan para el final, la imposibilidad consuela  
a quienes ha dejado fuera para hacerlos visibles.  
Aquí descansan, ambos de una vez por todas.  
La cuerda que los une no está hecha de seda. (255)

splendor of poetry allows Espina to respond to his circumstances and to still his perplexity through a life of creative actualization.

Edward Hirsch's reference to T.S. Eliot's claim that the Shakespearean sonnet "is not merely such and such a pattern, but a precise way of thinking and feeling" (594) is a fitting description for understanding Espina's creative process. The poet demonstrates this proposed process by imaginatively joining a series of words closely related by the theme of death, first in the separation of the pairing, metaphorically described as "countries," "países separados..." then by their being carried away by the north wind, "Al llevárselos..." / "no terminaron sus cenizas..." / "Sus nombres vienen" / "El silencio les alcanza." They then move to their final resting place, "cuando quedan" / "Aquí descansan, ambos de una vez por todas." This repeated thematic construction honors his parent's memory as an example of the sense of fragility and permanence, spaciousness and constriction, characteristic of the sonnet (Hirsch 596).

An additional element of the sonnet found in Espina's poems is the use of the *volta*, characterized as a logical action with metaphorical power.<sup>255</sup> This poetic device has traditionally been used to provide resolution or a shift in a sonnet as it heads toward its conclusion. In Espina's sonnet, this device creates a turn in order to make a philosophical point, which often provides a sense of resolution, not only to the subject matter, but to the construction of the poem itself. The *volta* in "El ahora" occurs in lines

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<sup>255</sup> <http://wcupoetrycenter.com/master-class-art-turn-techniques-change-sonnets-and-villanelles-0>. It is argued further in this dissertation that the use of the *volta* has previously been used as a device to create humor for Espina, but in the case of his mourning poetry, humor is replaced with a sense of surprise, shock, or a philosophical statement instead. Espina claims that there is little humor used in TLQ to offset sentimentality.

ten through twelve, where the poet places time in metaphysical terms in which the hours “elegidas por el infinito...” lyrically make the unbearable bearable, and hope is found in the poet’s despair.

The caesura in line eleven opens the poem to a possible shift in interpretation, from speaking about time, to those left behind with “la imposibilidad consuela / a quienes ha dejado fuera para hacerlos visibles.” In the final line, the poet leaves the reader with a shocking thought to consider: “La cuerda que los une no está hecha de seda.” Espina explores the joining of feeling and thought, as well as the lyrical and the discursive, as he contemplates the multiple levels of life and transcendence found within the state of mourning.

In addition to the sonnet, Espina’s poems are composed of aspects of the *décima*,<sup>256</sup> a form brought to the shores of Latin America by Spanish sailors and conquistadors. The *décima*’s ten line, or ten-line stanza, has been practiced throughout Latin America since the early sixteenth century. The orality and musicality of Espina’s poems are laced with aspects of the *décima* through their correspondence to the *gauchesca* poetry of Uruguay. Through traces of the sonnet and the *décima*, the poet associates himself with the family history that, in turn, provides him with material to

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<sup>256</sup> Edward Hirsch quotes Richard Bauman’s claim that as a form of oral poetry, “the *décima* is one of the most widely distributed forms of folk poetry in the Western Hemisphere” (155). Flourishing in the nineteenth century in Mexico, it is still a favored genre in Cuba and Puerto Rico today. More on these forms in Espina’s poetry will be discussed later in this chapter.

Jacobo Sefamí in his unpublished article, “Eduardo Espina: La reinención del lenguaje poético” (2014), writes that Espina’s intent in using the sonnet and *décima* is to, “escribir una mezcla que oscilaba entre la *décima* y el soneto (combinación extraña, puesto que se tendría que atender en términos métricos tanto al octosílabo popular en la *décima*, como al endecasílabo culto en el soneto)” (3). In addition, Sefamí quotes Espina on a book of *gauchesca* poetry he had written, which he claims was a Neobaroque postulation of the genre he converted to what he called “poesía *gauchesca* heavy” (3).



express colorful yet accurate descriptions of the wisdom and family pride that are part of his Uruguayan heritage.

The poem entitled “La música que dejamos entrar hace un rato / (*Bienvenidos al país de los factores*)” (“La música”) symbolically represents Espina’s desire to capture eternity through the remembering of his chronographic lineage. In order to achieve this objective, Espina utilizes deconstructed remnants of the poetry of the “*décima popular*” and *gauchesco* found in the local and colloquial language of family members and the everyday life of his native Uruguay. Espina, as *decimero*, musically captures the idiosyncrasy of the voices he honors. The metonymy of “Las manos” works throughout the poem as a literal representation of the family as a whole and the various endeavors each performed, “También allí las manos entre las vacas y mi abuelo.” In addition, the poet brings to bear local language with an internal rhyme scheme, “de día, gran chalán de ticholos” as a way to recall their voices, as with “creo oír su nómada modo al decirlo...” the poet recalls his grandfather’s voice. In an attempt to expand life beyond its temporal moment, the poet includes himself in the family story through the use of the third person plural verb form “Tuvimos.” Espina separates his lyrical self from his poetic persona in the selected last line, “con el pampero regio como heredero,” in order to return the reader to the visionary force in the interpretive measures of the poem:

También allí las manos entre las vacas y mi abuelo,  
de día gran chalán de ticholos, de noche guitarrero  
en algún arrabal del cual lo más seguro es que nadie  
sabe qué palabra para hablar los esperó en el puerto.  
La descendencia bajó de los barcos lentos para decir.  
Tuvimos, fue una suerte, creo oír su nómada modo al  
decirlo, la época ideal pero faltó saber cuándo y qué

adverbio darle a cuantos recorrieron el lar a lo largo  
de las índoles, con el pampero regio como heredero. (273)

In addition to the poetic influences of the sonnet and the *décima*, Enrique Mallén<sup>257</sup> observes that beyond the ornamental characteristic of the Baroque, Espina's poetic strategy establishes as its principle objective "a detailed focus on poetic language understood at a representational level, through which the author seeks to achieve a more consciously accurate vision of reality" (38). This detailed focus toward poetic language, combined with a conscious vision of the world around him, allows the poet to express this reality in TLQ.<sup>258</sup> Espina's extraordinary poems of elegiac lamentation<sup>259</sup> clear a space between the dead and the living in which his unique perspective and poetic acumen allow the reader to reflect on the essential meaning of life and death in today's contemporary western society. In this way, through the poet's creative attempt to assimilate his experiences, the process of writing poetry simultaneously becomes the subject of mourning itself.

As with Kozer and Kamenszain, Espina's recent personal approach to the poems in TLQ has led to the question of a new direction in his poetics. This current approach

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<sup>257</sup> From "Conciencia poética y lenguaje en la obra de Eduardo Espina" in *Revista de Estudios Hispánicos*, 34 (2000). Mallén's original statement is:

"un enfoque detallado sobre el lenguaje poético entendido como nivel representacional, a través del cual el autor se propone alcanzar una más adecuada visión consciente de la realidad" (17–18).

<sup>258</sup> Poems from *Todo lo que ha sido para siempre una sola vez* (*Poemas a partir de la muerte del padre y la madre*) are found in Espina's recently published anthology, *Quiero escribir, pero me sale Espina*. Santiago de Chile: Editorial Cuarto Propio. 2014.

<sup>259</sup> For more on the elegy see Edward Hirsh's definition in *A Poet's Glossary* as a poem of mortal loss and consolation, derived from the Greek *élogos*, "funeral lament" (196). Hirsh points out that since the sixteenth century, the elegy has designated a poem mourning the death of an individual... or a solemn meditation on the passing of human life (197).

includes the use of emotion, not as a confessional outpouring, but as a newfound freedom to express feeling. The difficult moments thus endured have strengthened the poet's resiliency and illumination, resulting in unconstrained elucidation, which he now shares with the reader. This claim is authenticated in Randolph Pope's "Introduction" to QEP, in which the poet clarifies this innovative transformation:

...aquello que ya empezó con *Todo lo que ha sido para siempre una sola vez*: -, puede terminar siendo 'un no-barrocó', esto es, un barrocó más allá del barrocó; esto es, un barrocó que 'se emociona y deja que el pensamiento sienta, que las ideas hablen sobre lo que sienten sin confesar demasiado. El lenguaje ahora es la experiencia del ser que siente y que de pronto, quiere decir lo que siente'.<sup>260</sup>

The acknowledgment of this change gives substance to the claim that a shift is unequivocally occurring within Espina's poetics. The development of this innovational approach has the expectant outcome of opening advanced ways of speaking about death through poetry. This shift, made clear in the poet's preceding acknowledgment, "El lenguaje ahora es la experiencia del ser que siente y que de pronto, quiere decir lo que siente," takes the reader to the very core of his experience, not only through his public persona and expertise as a poet, but through his own individual and private sense of loss as a grieving son. Espina<sup>261</sup> elaborates on these recent life-changing events in our personal interview with a series of questions in which each word is a philosophical investigation that questions What is life? What is death? At what point does memory reappear? Espina's unique response to these queries open the door to understanding his

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<sup>260</sup> Asserted by Eduardo Espina in an email between the poet and Randolph Pope in June of 2013.

<sup>261</sup> Appendix C.

*poetic areté* as a philosophical interrogation of life's essential issues as they are exposed in his mourning poetry where we locate, explore, and develop his aesthetic of *Ne Plus Ultra*.

### ***Ne Plus Ultra: A Poet's Poet***

Espina's *ne plus ultra* attitude<sup>262</sup> is an appropriate description for the creative approach he takes to mourning poetry. *Ne plus ultra*, as with *areté*, represents the highest level of excellence capable of being attained, to the most profound degree of one's endowment. This approach is composed of three strategies used by Espina that contribute to its formation, including *horror vacui*, *syntactic thought*, and *fractured thought* or *fractured mind*. *Horror vacui* [as with Kozer's strategy of *nothingness*] allows Espina to turn the blank page into words, into thoughts and ideas on both the formal as well as representational level a process which gives meaning to his poetry, and contributes to his rich intellectual life, where he finds refuge from death.

*Syntactic thought*, as was shown with Kamenzain, represents poems in which syntactic and semantic indeterminacy create a deviation from the established rules of usage and occur as the means by which Espina attends to his poems in their poeticity. And *fractured thought* [or *mind*] evokes Espina's psychological state of mind in distress and/or rapture as a result of death and is reflected in poems that show a heightened sense of this state through their grammatical structures. Each of these strategies is covered

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<sup>262</sup> In defining the Neobaroque as a style, Paul Christensen uses the term "attitude", which in the case of Espina becomes an appropriate means of describing his poetic form.

extensively within the context of their use to determine how Espina tests the limits of poetic language to reach beyond sentimental notions in order to fill the emptiness left by mourning. However, it is important first to develop an understanding of the formation leading up to Espina's mourning poetry by shedding light on the origins that have shaped his deeply rooted involvement in the artistry of poetry.

### **Historical *Barrocó* Moments**

From the Baroque era with Góngora and Sor Juana,<sup>263</sup> in TLQ Espina begins an originative exploration through time. While the Neobaroque found in his poems is characterized as an “aesthetic in which artifice, figuration, and consciousness of textuality are highly developed,”<sup>264</sup> there is a sense of resolution in many of these poems that by no means fails to inform our perception. And it is through uncertainty and

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<sup>263</sup> Espina finds a connection with Spain's Baroque through Luis de Góngora y Argote's (1561–1627) *culteranismo* with its focus on style and pure language through affected vocabulary, complex syntactical order, and elaborate metaphors. Roberto Echavarren suggests two distinct moments in the poetical baroque. The first is found within Góngora's Baroque *Soledades*. Formed by the metaphor and the reality it represents, Góngora's poem offers a realistic impression of the flight of a flock of birds, leaving the reader with what Echavarren calls “a sensible and strong impression that while obscuring the meaning, enlightens the perception.” So while the reader may not always know what Espina's poem is referencing, we are privy to clear, precise, and sensual impressions, given meaning by word choice and placement (62). The second moment of the Baroque suggested by Echavarren is that found in the Mexican Sor Juana de la Cruz's *El sueño*. In her poem, the poet describes the corporeal organs (lungs, stomach, heart) in which the soul is framed by its physiological functions. Echavarren writes that this “poetical flight of fantasy” fails to reveal anything but uncertainty, as the Baroque's decentering of man is a source of anguish and doubt. The testing of limits and the exploration of desire within the Baroque poem lead to the manifestation of shock, a sense of loosening of previous fixity, and a challenge to identity and previous roles defined by tradition, each of which contributes over time to current ideas on the Neobaroque (Echavarren 62).

<sup>264</sup> From *PEPP*. (2012), 927.

instability that Espina pushes the limits of new ways to “shock and awe,”<sup>265</sup> manifested through his *ne plus ultra* attitude toward mourning.

Within the Baroque in general, death is regarded as the “cure” for much of the attitude previously described, promising peaceful rest and eternal salvation away from the agony of life’s tragedies. This idea gives way to a deep preoccupation with the passage of time and a distrust of everything earthly, followed by melancholy in which the brevity of life becomes a popular subject. This leads to different literary reactions to this pessimistic feeling, and each author comes to develop his own style of expressing the unhappiness and dissatisfaction that the political, social, and economical situation in Spain would cause them.

Louise Parkinson Zamora<sup>266</sup> in *The Inordinate Eye* (2006) connects the structures of exuberant inclusion as a response to the *horror vacui* of political and social void of the Baroque period and compares works in her study designed to fill the vacuum of Latin American historical and cultural identity with the European Baroque’s reaction to the voided universe of the seventeenth century (112–113). Adding to this development, Christine Buci-Glucksmann<sup>267</sup> writes that all Baroque art is “perpetually obsessed with

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<sup>275</sup> Used in this context, shock and awe refers to the way in which Espina grabs the reader’s attention at the beginning of a poem, and then continues to awe the reader throughout the reading. In military strategy shock and awe is the use of overwhelming force at the outset of a conflict in order to break the enemy’s will to resist. Also referred to as rapid dominance.  
<http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/shock-and-awe>.

<sup>266</sup> As an example, Parkinson Zamora’s comparatist study shows how these “inordinate” qualities of the Baroque follow a circuitous route in which elements of indigenous culture, colonial, and European fine arts and architecture are found examples of Mexican mural and paintings.

<sup>267</sup> For more on subject of the Baroque, see Buci-Glucksmann’s *The Madness of Vision*. (2013).

nothingness in all its forms, in all its languages (*il niente, Nichts*, the void, the vacuum, emptiness, and the abyss)” (79).

The influence of the Baroque *horror vacui* runs through Kozer and Kamenszain’s mourning poems as well. Espina’s fear of the empty space found within his *ne plus ultra* attitude is centered on the blending of the Baroque with the Rococo.<sup>268</sup> When speaking of his own poetics, Espina uses the *Barrococó* to speak of the convergence of the Baroque and the Rococo penetrating his work. Espina blends these two aesthetics to speak of the transcendent nature of the universal ideas he expresses in his poems. As with Baroque times, concern with our postmodern condition<sup>269</sup> is inherent in Espina’s poetry; yet it is through his adherence to the concept of *areté*, based on the belief that life’s brevity is transcended by the purpose of a higher calling, that the poet finds poetry, not death, to be the “cure”:

En el “barrococó” que identifico en mi texto hay cruce de épocas, viniendo desde las palabras griegas habladas en un jardín, pasando por los tormentos religiosos medievales, hasta llegar a los enunciados que diré pasado mañana. No es barroco ni rococó (ni siquiera “rockocó”): sino eso, “barrococó”. No es el uno que se disuelve en la página, sino el Uno y el Universo enlazados en un único verso. El milagro de lo trascendente

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<sup>268</sup> Poets composed *rococó* works as early as 1600, while the heyday of the style extends from 1685–1770. Thematically, *rococó* poetry lauds seduction and inconsistency, anacreontic conviviality and frivolity. The tone is often humorous with a smile as opposed to a laugh. Formally, monotony is avoided by keeping poems short or employing seemingly negligent “variation (use of the *genre mêlé* [e.g., mixing poetry and prose in the same piece] and verse with irregular rhyme schemes and line lengths; mixing formal diction with colloquialism).” (*PEPP*, 1204).

<sup>269</sup> Chapter I of this study is a comprehensive overview of how the “postmodern” is used in this dissertation. As a philosophical notion, Omar Calabrese notes that Jean-Francois Lyotard himself describes “postmodern” as “the state of a culture and transformation undergone in the rules governing science, literature, and the arts since the end of the nineteenth century.” For Calabrese, “postmodern” takes on an ideological meaning that represents “the revolt against functionalism and rationalism that characterized the Modern Movement” (Calabrese, 13).

habla por lo contingente.<sup>270</sup>

The centralization of the “One” and the “Universe” succinctly joins all parts of the human experience together in Espina’s *ne plus ultra* approach. The blending of past elements of poetry [Baroque and Rococo] with more contemporary aesthetics [the Latin American Neobaroque and its North American counterpart found in US Language Poetry] places this poet into the world arena of current trends, not only within Latin American but North American poetics as well.

### **The Vanished Object Within**

Enrique Mallén in *Antología crítica de la poesía del lenguaje* explains that the correspondence between Neobaroque and Language poetry is centered on the role generally played by lexicon in poetic composition as it is utilized for aesthetic purposes.<sup>271</sup> The scholar further points out that this lexicon is used to join correlated structures found in different sub-modules, a correspondence that is blurred by the parts of the correlated structures, resulting in a complex “polireferencial text” (17).<sup>272</sup>

Additionally, with regard to syntax, both Latin American and US poets convert traditional syntax (grammatical or spatial) into a game of complexities, focusing on the

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<sup>270</sup> Quote is taken from the introductory pages to Espina’s selected poems in *Medusario*, (426).

<sup>271</sup> Mallén’s original statement: “se concentran particularmente en el papel que tiene el léxico en la composición poética general, utilizándolo con fines estéticos” is found in *Antología crítica de la poesía del lenguaje* (17). (2009) (ACPL). Mallén’s *Poesía del lenguaje de T. S. Eliot a Eduardo Espina* (PDL) (2008) is also useful in developing a full understanding of the this relationship as well.

<sup>272</sup> “sirve de unión entre estructuras que se encuentran en diferentes submódulos, y ya que se da una correspondencia “borrosa” entre las partes de las estructuras que están correlacionadas, el resultado es un complejo “texto polireferencial.”



artistic object as an object with its own value, one which must be observed in its opacity (Mallén 19).<sup>273</sup> In each example Mallén proposes, the connection between the Neobaroque and Language poetry lies in a mutual adherence to language as the principal characteristic upon which both are based.

American poet and critic Lyn Hejinian<sup>274</sup> continues in this vein, writing that L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets “have all concentrated on how language determines and dictates meaning rather than the other way around” (342). For these poets, poetry is viewed as a cultural production as opposed to official power structures. They depersonalize poetry and follow a central modernist recognition: all poetry, even the most subjective, is language-centered (342). Henceforth, we understand that to date, the essential correlation between Latin American Neobaroque and US Language poetry is the strong emphasis on the originality of language and the need for creative means of communication as a primary focus of their poetics.

In recent years, life-changing events that have inspired Kozer, Kamenzain, and Espina to write mourning poetry have also been noted within current works by US Language poets Susan Howe, Charles Bernstein, and Peter Gizzi. The subject of this current syncretization has recently become a critical interest to many scholars as mourning is shown to be a universal subject in which death becomes the object of poetry

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<sup>273</sup> “convierten la sintaxis tradicional (gramatical o espacial) en un juego de complejidades, centrando la atención en el objeto artístico como objeto con valor propio, uno al que hay que observar en su opacidad.”

<sup>274</sup> From *The Language of Inquiry* (2000). Hejinian includes Charles Bernstein, Bob Perelman, Bruce Andrews, Ron Silliman, and Susan Howe in this group of poets.

that unfolds into illuminative reflection. Susan Howe<sup>275</sup> (1937–) writes a prose poem about her deceased husband, philosopher Peter Hare; Charles Bernstein<sup>276</sup> (1950–) poeticizes the unexpected death of Emma Bee, his young daughter; and Peter Gizzi<sup>277</sup> (1959–) dedicates *Threshold Songs* to the memories of his brother, the poet Michael Gizzi, his Mother, and a close friend, Robert.

The viewpoint of the previously discussed subject of lateness found within Kozer, Kamenszain, and Espina again surfaces with Howe, Bernstein, and Gizzi as the natural response to the transience of time and their own inevitable encounter with death. Freud suggested in “Mourning and Melancholia” that the mourner who gradually detaches from the lost love object carries the image of the vanished object within, only to become a part of “oneself” (244). It is suggested that this suffering through the carrying of death within is the impetus for the shift to a more personal style due to the recognition of death’s proximity. Accordingly, it is this shared element of each poet with

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<sup>275</sup> Early works include Howe’s first book, *Hinge Picture* (1974). In the 1970s Howe’s continued works include *Chanting at the Crystal Sea* (1975), *Secret History of the Dividing Line* (1978), and *The Liberties* (1980). The next collections, including *Defenestration of Prague* (1983) and *My Emily Dickinson* (1985), are among her most celebrated volumes. Howe’s most recent works include *Pierce-Arrow* (1999), *The Midnight* (2003), and *Souls of Labadie Tract* (2007). <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/susan-howe>.

<sup>276</sup> Charles Bernstein is a poet, essayist, theorist, and scholar and is a foundational member and leading practitioner of Language poetry. Between the years 1978–1981, along with fellow poet Bruce Andrews, Bernstein published L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E magazine, a forum for writing that focused on the boundary between poetry and critical writing about poetry. Bernstein has published four collections of essays—*The Attack of the Difficult Poems: Essays and Inventions* (Chicago, 2011), *My Way: Speeches and Poems* (Chicago, 1999), *A Poetics* (Harvard, 1992), and *Content’s Dream: Essays 1975–1984*. In addition to *Recalculating* (Chicago, 2013), his books of poetry include *All the Whiskey in Heaven: Selected Poems* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux), *Girly Man* (Chicago, 2006), *With Strings* (Chicago, 2001), and *Republics of Reality: 1975–1995* (Sun & Moon, 2000).

<sup>277</sup> Poet Peter Gizzi is the author of several collections of poetry, including *Threshold Songs* (2011), *The Outernationale* (2007), and *Artificial Heart* (1998). <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/peter-gizzi>.

a concern for the biographical features of their advancing years, in addition to mourning lost loved ones, that is directly responsible for the poignancy of these poems.

Michael Hutcheon and Linda Hutcheon in “Late Style(s): The Ageism of the Singular”<sup>278</sup> write that “late style” in English is a combination of the German *Spätstil* (late style) and *Altersstil* (individual old-age style) and, when used as such, “becomes a vague term, that is nonetheless used with authority to describe works by artists, no matter the age at which they died” (1). Despite this vagueness, the authors conclude that “late style” functions “in a distinctly universalizing manner” that transcends “boundaries of culture, location and chronology, manifesting itself in remarkably similar ways at different times and in different places” (1). Under these circumstances, it is proposed that the subject of aesthetic lateness permeates the poetic discourse of all the mentioned poets’ mourning poetry, in dramatically different, yet similar ways.

In Howe’s *That This*<sup>279</sup> (2010), the poet seeks to come to terms with the sudden death of her husband. Howe’s elegy to Hare speaks not only of grief, but also of issues related to one’s own death through prosaic as well as poetic form. Howe’s book is divided into four parts in which each section takes a different formal approach to loss. In her chapter “The Disappearance Approach,” the poet searches for a means of

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<sup>278</sup> In *Occasion: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Humanities* v.4 (May 31, 2012).

<sup>279</sup> <http://wings.buffalo.edu/epc/authors/howe/that-this.html>.

Is one mind put into another  
in us unknown to ourselves  
by going about among trees  
and fields in moonlight or in  
a garden to ease distance to  
fetch home spiritual things

understanding in which the steps needed to move forward are explored. In this section the poet uses a prose form to merge information from Hare's autopsy with a collection of eighteenth-century epistolary condolences.

Several selected prose segments offer a view of Howe's meditation on life, lateness, *horror vacui*, and the afterlife. In the first segment, Howe expresses a concern with time and the remembrance of childhood: "Once you admit that time past is actually infinite, being a child gradually fades out" (13). In another passage, Howe writes: "I've been reading some of W.H. Auden's *The Sea and the Mirror*. One beautiful sentence about the way we all reach and reach but never touch. A skinny covering overspreads our bones and our arms are thin wings" (18). This meditation speaks to our vulnerability and transience as human beings. The "skinny covering" of which she speaks, much like Kamenszain, creates an image of the fragility and temporality of our corporeal existence.

On poetry as a counteragent to *horror vacui*, Howe writes, "Poetry, false in the tricks of its music, draws harmony from necessity and random play. In this aggressive age of science, sound-colored secrets, unperceivable in themselves, can act as proof against our fears of emptiness" (24–25). And on the afterlife, Howe concludes, "This sixth sense of another reality even in simplest objects is what poets set out to show but cannot once and for all. If there is an afterlife, then we still might: if not, not" (34). There is a sense of calm serenity in Howe's words and the same unsentimental, intelligent approach to death found in all of the poets mentioned.

*Recalculating* (2013) is Charles Bernstein's latest collection of poems. The poet's preface is dedicated to his daughter, Emma Bee Bernstein, who died in 2008.

Adam Fitzgerald's online review of *Recalculating* in *American Reader*<sup>280</sup> reads, "There is no easy way to decide how this death is or is not present on every page of the collection." In a personal email<sup>281</sup> with the author of this dissertation, the poet validates Fitzgerald's claim by his disclosure that the subject of death is explicit and central for him, and one that runs from beginning to end in both *Recalculating* and *Shadowtime*.<sup>282</sup>

The first five pages of *Recalculating* begin with an epigraph page topped by a tribute passage to Emma by Bernstein's colleague Bob Perelman. Another bears an epigraph from Emma's own writings, one that seems to refer to the cover image of his book and reads, "The road tells you what to do. Throw on some shades, / pump up the radio, put your hands on the wheel. / Retrace your route in reflection, but look only as far / as the blur of passing yellow lines to see the present. / Race your future to the finish line." Emma's words are prophetic in their relevance to time and her early passing.

"Before You Go"<sup>283</sup> is the last poem of the volume and is also dedicated to the

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<sup>280</sup> <http://theamericanreader.com/micro-review-on-charles-bernsteins-recalculating/>. Web. 7 March, 2015.

<sup>281</sup> From a personal email with the poet dated June 28, 2014.

<sup>282</sup> Charles Bernstein wrote the libretto to Brian Ferynhough's opera *Shadowtime* (1999–2004) and premiered on May 25, 2004 at the Prinzregententheater in Munich. It is in seven scenes (Bernstein 2008).

<sup>283</sup> Thoughts inanimate, stumbled, spare, before you go.  
Folded memories, tintured with despair, before you go.  
Two lakes inside a jar, before you go.  
Flame illumines fitful lie, before you go.  
Furtive then morrow, nevering now, before you go.  
Lacerating gap, stippled rain, before you go.  
Anger rubs, raw 'n' sweet, before you go.  
Never seen the other side of sleep, before you go.  
Nothing left for, not yet, grief, before you go.

Suspended deanimation, recalcitrant fright, before you g  
Everything so goddamn slow, before you

poet's daughter. The structure of the poem is built around the repetition of the phrase "before you go," which begins to diminish in line twenty-eight and continues to do so in subsequent lines until the phrase completely fades from the poem eleven lines later with the final "Two lane blacktop, undulating light" concluding the poem without end stop. The personal aspect of the book is unanticipated, as in the past, the poet's focus has centered on language and the self-reflexive aspect of poetry. As the title suggests, when the GPS voice announces it is "recalculating," it is telling you that you are about to take a different route toward your destination.

In addition to the mourning of his daughter, Bernstein writes poetry in *Recalculating* that, in his epigrammatic technique, satirizes his own future passing. The title of his poem "And Aenigma Was His Name, O!" recalls the words of the childhood song "Bingo" ["...and BINGO was his name, O!]. "Aenigma" in the title metonymically embodies the inexplicable intangibility of life and death, the "*ultimate not*." The poet reutilizes the seventeenth-century poet Robert Herrick's well-known poem "To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time" by transposing Herrick's oft quoted first line, "Gather ye rosebuds while ye may"<sup>284</sup> with his own contemporary style, "Gather ye rosebuds while you can." Recalling the genre of *carpe diem*, Bernstein's *aabb* quatrain allows each line to speak independently, yet as a stanza, it bears unified meaning as a complete

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Take me now, I'm feelin' low, before yo  
Just let me unhitch this tow, before y  
One more stitch still to sew, before  
Calculus hidden deep in snow, befor  
Can't hear, don't say, befo... (184-5)

<sup>284</sup> "Gather Ye Rosebuds While Ye May" is also the title of an oil painting on canvas (1909) created by British Pre-Raphaelite artist, John William Waterhouse.

utterance. In the face of the tragic loss of his daughter, Bernstein's concern with the biographical features of his own advancing years is present:

Gather ye rosebuds while you can  
Old times are locked in an armored van  
Story's told, hope's shot  
Chill out for the ultimate *not*. (127)

Gizzi's dedication in *Threshold Songs* (2011) reads "for Robert, for Mother, for Mike / called back." Alain Gilbert<sup>285</sup> writes that Peter Gizzi's new book of poems, much as with Kozer, Kamenzain, and Espina, makes a return to poetic devices like the first-person speaker and lyrical metaphorical languages. Gizzi writes of his mother in "Basement Song,"<sup>286</sup> which bears a striking similarity to Kozer's poems in *ACTA* in which he writes "...llevo la ropa / impregnada de olor a / muerte de mi madre, /...lo

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<sup>285</sup> <http://www.kenyonreview.org/kr-online-issue/2013-summer/selections/threshold-songs-by-peter-gizzi-738439>.

<sup>286</sup> Out of the deep  
I dreamt the mother.

How deep the mother  
deep the basement

the body, odor of laundry  
the soul of a bug.

The grass inside me  
the song stains me.

The mother stains me.  
That was the year

they cut my throat  
and toads bloomed

on my voice box  
I have kept my head up. (37–8).

ígneo reduce lo ígneo debajo, y restalla.<sup>287</sup>

*Analemma* expresses the poet's concern with "lateness" through direct poetic language, a strategy that reflects a no-nonsense approach to his own death: "my parents died into / that I will die into.../ and it's not morbid / to think this way." Enjambment of the verses creates an insistent self-examination of his concern with his own death, of which the poet confirms, "does not *grow* out of, but rather *dies* into" (Hutcheon and Hutcheon 11). The last line of the selection uses time, "to see things in time," as a means of placing his individual concern with death into a universal perspective:

That I came back to live  
in the region both  
my parents died into  
that I will die into  
if I have nothing else

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<sup>287</sup> That I came back to live  
in the region both  
my parents died into  
that I will die into  
if I have nothing else  
I have this and  
its not morbid  
to think this way  
to see things in time  
to understand I'll be gone  
that the future is already  
some where  
I'm in that somewhere  
and what of it  
its ok to see these things  
to be the way they are  
I can be them  
have been them  
will be there, soon  
I know why I came here  
to be back here  
where my parents went  
I know that I'll be there  
to join them soon (15)



I have this and  
it's not morbid  
to think this way  
to see things in time (15)

Gizzi's concern with ageism, or lateness, is palpable in his recognition of his decisive point in life where the gap between his parent's deaths and that of his own is closing, their commonality joined by death. The syntactical shift through the anacoluthon, "I can be them /have been them /will be there, soon," creates a shift in direction from the conditional tense "can be" to express possibility, to the past sense of what has been, with the present perfect "have been them" and forward to the future, to join with his parents in the beyond, as "them" becomes "there," "will be there, soon." There is a shift in the tone of the poem in the last five lines, expressed in the grammatical choices the poet makes, from the above shifting in tenses to the present tense, expressed in first person, the certainty, the "knowing," of what remains and how it plays out: "I know why I came back," "where my parents went," and "... I'll be there to join them soon." The ending of the poem expresses the certainty with which life ends:

I can be them  
have been them  
will be there, soon  
I know why I came here  
to be back here  
where my parents went  
I know that I'll be there  
to join them soon [...] (15)

The late works of these six poets are important in the ways in which each functions as a universalizing characteristic that transcends boundaries of culture, location, and chronology (Hutcheon and Hutcheon, 1–2). Death too transcends each of

these factors in a kind of waiting for *Godot* as each poet considers the *horror vacui* of his or her own circumstances in similar yet distinct choices of poetic creation. And while Neobaroque poets find pleasure in language for language's sake, Language poets take pleasure in the disruption of the reader's pleasure through a process of linguistic destabilization. The synchronization occurring in Latin America and North America strengthens the argument for the creation of a new poetry of mourning within these two language-based aesthetics. As with Kozer, Kamenszain, and Espina, works by US poets Howe, Bernstein, and Gizzi [a generation that spans twenty-two years] demonstrate how death and aging have affected their poetry. Reinforcing these passages is a powerful catalyst for change within a period of poetic production, thereby leading us to a better understanding of the nuances of this synchronization.

As a poet who takes an intellectual approach to poetry, Espina has influenced and been influenced by the artistic as well as personal experiences that have come to define his poetics. As a model of *ne plus ultra*, he is "a poet's poet" who, much as with an "actor's actor," prefers to concentrate on the quality of his work instead of its commercial success. Espina places a maximum value on works that appeal to the intellect of his audience and to the more complex forms and fields of knowledge. Capable of expressing our complex reality and its transcendent splendor, not only for death, but also for life itself, he accomplishes what few have been able to do. In giving a name to the unnamable, Espina reaches the highest level of *poetic areté*, as one who expresses for others a more intensified way of viewing life. It is through his lyrical

excellence that he articulates a poetics of mourning galvanized by the presence of death, which transcends the mundane and touches the awe of the sublime.

### ***Horror Vacui with a Twist***

Espina's focus on the physical properties and the principles of organization of his poems contributes to their overall interpretation and understanding. In this way, the experience of reading one of his poems is enhanced by his attention to what is seen as well as read. Details important to this selection include the blocking of the text, along with attention to the typography of spacing, margins, lowercase or capital letters, bold type or italics, as well as the utilization or absence of punctuation. With Espina's aesthetic of the *Barrococó*, the *horror vacui* as well as other features of the Baroque are synthesized with those of the Rococo, thereby augmenting each of these forms. Espina explains this process:

Dos estrategias estéticas confluyen en el mismo lenguaje. La constante variación formal que hace del texto un espacio de desplazamientos, la desarticulación de la acción y de la unidad, la banalización de toda realidad como un gesto deliberadamente anacrónico y la *cursilería* adaptada del habla diaria, que son elementos propios del rococó. Dialogan con modalidades disonantes propias del barroco, como ser el horror al espacio vacío (que hace desbordar significantes a la página), el renunciamiento a nombrar una concretidad discernible, el apego por lo corporal, y el propósito de reivindicar la fealdad como suprema manifestación estética. (*Medusario*, 426)

Many of the physical features mentioned in this statement are those first recognized by the reader, even before reading one of his longer poems, when the *mise-en-page*, the appearance of the visual dimension of the design of the poem, becomes

apparent. The stanza exists as one long structuring device that places the poem within the limit of a single unit, thus giving the poem a structural tumescence. The spacing and length of lines all cohere, as together they enter into the overall interpretation of the poem.

Lines normally separated by white space become isometric stanzas that reach out to fill all available vacant space of the page. As an example, one might think of Spain's medieval manuscript *Book of Hours*, written for King Alphonso V of Aragon, in which illuminators filled all vacant space with bright colors and gold embellishment as they portrayed entire scenes with text or imagery as a way to mark important passages or to enhance or comment on the meaning of the text.<sup>288</sup> In this way, the visual effects of the lack of white space on the page enhances the reader's interpretation of the poem as the result of its influence, demonstrated in the following fragment from Espina's<sup>289</sup> final, unpublished mourning poem, "Un pasado en construcción / (*Fue más fácil abrir las ventanas que decirlo*)," in which the poet's connection to the previously mentioned Baroque idea of *horror vacui*, literally understood as the "fear of the vacuum" or "empty space", surfaces through his desire to fill gaps, layer meanings, and diminish blank space:

Por algo aprendí a olvidar la visibilidad donde estaba.  
Siempre hay algún ruido cuando las respuestas fallan.  
En el mundo esa vez, nada pudo quedar para después.

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<sup>288</sup> <http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminated-manuscripts/TourIntro5.asp>.

<sup>289</sup> Un pasado en construcción (*Fue más fácil abrir las ventanas que decirlo*) is Espina's unpublished and most recent poem to be written on the subject of mourning.

La firma figuraba debajo del parte médico, manera de  
dar credibilidad en veremos a la última vida de alguien.  
Hay una fuerza que así funciona, sin oponerse al deseo.  
No eran los tiempos recíprocos cuando el pasado cedía  
su voz, y a la salida del teatro Stella había un taxi libre.<sup>290</sup>

Espina's attention to the physical properties of his poems allows us to better understand Alejo Carpentier's description of the Baroque plastic arts with its "imbrications of figures, the constant arabesques, the presence of proliferating foci... foci which extend to infinity" (94). As with Carpentier's "proliferating foci" we become absorbed into a world in which each of these elements converges to become a poetic work of art recognized not only for Espina's attention to the formal properties, but for his attention to the physical qualities as well.

Upon approaching one of Eduardo Espina's poems, the reader is attracted to the surface feature of the title of the poem itself, along with its additional subtitle. The subtitle of the poem is particularly revelatory as it fulfills the function of explaining or contradicting the meaning of the poem. "Monólogo del fin al presentirlo: Que pase el que sigue (*Causas sin un único regreso*)" ("Monólogo") proves to reveal [much as the trailer of a film] the relationship between the first title and its corresponding italicized second title [in parenthesis] within the context of the poem.

Beginning with the title, the reader is introduced to Espina's particular spin on words that juxtapose the reader's visual attention with the mental process of meaning-making through a forward and backward procedure, reminiscent of a film being played

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<sup>290</sup> Provided by Espina to the author of this dissertation, "Un pasado en construcción / (*Fue más fácil abrir las ventanas que decirlo*)" is as of the date of this dissertation unpublished.

before a viewer's eyes: "fin/presentir," "pase/sigue," / "sin/regreso." This movement from left to right, rhythmically forward and backward across time, from present to past and back again, becomes a major theme within the poem, revealing ever so faintly solitude, as found in the first word of the title, "Monólogo," again in the foreboding of "presentirlo," followed by the end of life itself with no return possible as represented by "Que pase el que sigue" and "*Causas sin un único regreso.*"

In "Monólogo," words emerge from the poem that reveal the poet's perceptive use of *syntactic thought* in which language is contextualized within the subject of death, "las definiciones," "decirlo en cualquier idioma," "palabras," and "significado." Slippage in time is expressed through the movement between past-tense indicative and subjunctive verbs, "No lo sabíamos," "Papá desaparecía," "Mamá supo," "iban," "fueran," present tense, "quedarse," "manteniendo," and the questionable future through the use of the conditional, "podría decirlo," and the subjunctive, "el tiempo dispusiera." The reader must absorb in conscious fashion the written expression of the poet's thoughts in order to keep up with his accounting of the meaningful task of working through the end-of-life experience. The poem becomes a work about language itself as the act of filling the vacuum left by absence.

This filling the vacuum left by absence, and the clarification for understanding Espina's sense of *horror vacui* left by extreme absence in "Monólogo" is furthered in this and following discussions using José Antonio Maravall's<sup>291</sup> theory that states that the defining aesthetic impulse of the baroque is not "exuberance" but the pursuit of the

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<sup>291</sup> *Culture of the Baroque: Analysis of a Historical Structure* (1986).

*extreme* (210). Maravall writes, “It was not a question of exuberance or simplicity in itself, but in either case by virtue of its extremeness, its exaggeration” (210). Whether the writer or artist cultivates exuberance or holds to a rigorous simplicity of form, the key is to pursue either route to the extreme.

An empty space would be as emblematically baroque as an inordinately decorated one, as long as it is recognized to be expressionless in the extreme and capable of conveying the shock of “extreme emptiness” (Maravall, 210). At this point, the poem introduces and only suggests the idea of absence, which then becomes more visible in the last few lines, “huían a verse / al espejo de los demás manteniendo en vivo el nombre... / ...cada una mejor que ninguna mientras fueran todas” (256). Days search for themselves, based on the contingency that as long as they were all present,

No lo sabíamos (a esa noción no se llega en puntas de pie).  
Papá desaparecía en las definiciones, Mamá supo enseguida  
que la suerte al terminar de huir podría decirlo en cualquier  
idioma, quedarse inmóvil hasta que el tiempo dispusiera de  
palabras donde quedarse a decir, si es lo primero a tener en  
cuenta cuando los días con sus horas seguidas huían a verse  
al espejo de los demás manteniendo en vivo el nombre ante  
imágenes cada una mejor que ninguna mientras fueran todas. (256)

Through the poet’s exuberant attention to detail in his descriptive poems, the reader witnesses that the “extreme emptiness” continues to escalate up until the final verse of the poem through the thematic context of *horror vacui*, in which the prolific density of word use, as well as the poet’s vigilant attention to the details of the physical properties of his poems, are developed as previously mentioned. Employing each of these strategies to the extreme, Espina brings the issue of death and nothingness to the

forefront in multiple verses throughout the rest of the poem: “El reporte médico dejaba la metafísica para explicar en parte los pensamientos que con el cáncer acercaban la luz al vacío” (256); “también el olvido al venir a la vida recuerda, que el tiempo pasa hasta que al fin se ha ido” (256); and “¿...al baldío donde a las imágenes daban las muecas la bienvenida?” (257); followed by “Sin saber si habíamos ido, volvimos a casa para conocer la nada” (258). Lastly, the poem reaches maximum escalation with “nada sino la misma nada aún de nadie ni por un día, de ninguno” (257). The repetitive sounds “nada / nadie / ninguno” accumulate in order to emphasize this vacuum of nothingness.

The ending to “Monólogo” is resolved through the structure of the *volta* that offsets sentimentality by providing “logic” to counter-balance the sentiment of emptiness and to place the void in a manageable space: “En un papel donde la soledad decía la verdad a medias, escribí: / “es muy raro dejar el cementerio a la velocidad que uno quiere.” This *volta* precedes the use of the reinforced negatives and acts as a metaphorical statement that helps direct the poem toward its conclusion by providing closure and offsetting the sense of the futility of death. And finally, through the heaviness of the subject matter of the poem, while enticing the reader to participate in its progression, there is one final shock, as the poet again makes a turn in which death searches for a way out by asking “¿dónde estará la puerta?”:

En un papel donde la soledad decía la verdad a medias, escribí:  
“es muy raro dejar el cementerio a la velocidad que uno quiere”.  
Sin saber si habíamos ido, volvimos a casa para conocer la nada.  
Estaba, como jamás volvimos a verla, maquillada para la belleza  
hallada bajo la llovizna del rayo interpretado, nada sino la misma  
nada aún de nadie ni por un día, de ninguno. Por no saber abrirle,  
encontramos a la muerte preguntando, “¿dónde estará la puerta?” (258)



“Monólogo” is both inspiration and talent in overdrive, yet never too much for an ardent reader, as the poem stems from clarity of expression and the poet’s talent to describe that which inspires his own destiny. “The point of the game we play,” Gly Maxwell in *On Poetry*<sup>292</sup> writes, “is to remind us that a poem, any poem, however old or venerable or indestructible it seems, arises from the urge of a human creature, once, upon a time – to break silence, fill emptiness, colour nothing with something, anything.” (22). Espina’s poem arises from this need, as it touches on the basic and fundamental subject of death as part of human existence. Taken in by the surprising twist of the image of death, the reader naturally slows the reading process in order to absorb densely written verses and delay moving too quickly through the reading of the poem.

The vivid imagery, alliterated by ingenious poetic rhythm in verses like “Estaba, como jamás volvimos a verla, maquillada para la belleza hallada bajo la llovizna del rayo interpretado...” offer flexibility in multiple ways to enjoy the text through the arrangement of words on the page. Because reading poetry is never just about the reading of poetry, it also offers advancement in the awareness of the circumstances of the world in which we live. Hence, the reader becomes an active participant not only in the poet’s journey but also in the understanding of her own experience. And, in as much as we know that death is just around the corner, the closing lines of “Monólogo” asks us to consider our own progress toward the imminent outcome of death as part of life.

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<sup>292</sup> Maxwell’s *On Poetry* (2013) offers insight into the writing of poetry for both readers and writers.

Jorge Luis Borges<sup>293</sup> writes, “Beyond the rhyme of a line of verse, its typographical arrangement serves to tell the reader that it’s poetic emotion, not information or rationality, that he or she should expect. I once yearned after the long breath line of the Psalms” (711). In understanding the power of the *horror vacui* through the arrangement of words on the page, including its typographical characteristics, Espina leads us toward an emotive yet intellectual understanding of his approach to the expression of death. In refining the aesthetic impulse of the Baroque as one of superabundance, through the inclusion of the *extreme*, Espina’s poetics of *ne plus ultra* expresses the awe of death through the filling of the *horror vacui* with the abundance of poetic fearlessness.

### **Climbing the *Barrococó* Ladder**

Espina’s proposed *Barrococó* ladder is constructed from recent mourning poems written after the death of his parents and is developed through a twofold approach based on questions proposed by Marjorie Perloff in *Wittgenstein’s Ladder* (1996) (WL). The first approach is a response to the fundamental question as to what language-game is the poet, Eduardo Espina, playing in TLQ? The search for this answer leads us directly into the work of Wittgenstein found in *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) (PI). The second approach takes as a subject of investigation Perloff’s relevant statement that “It is the curious collision of the ‘mystical’ with the close and commonsensical study of actual

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<sup>293</sup> From Borges’ *In Praise of Darkness* (1969).  
[http://postthegemony.files.wordpress.com/2013/02/borges\\_collected-fictions.pdf](http://postthegemony.files.wordpress.com/2013/02/borges_collected-fictions.pdf).

language practices that makes Wittgenstein such a natural ally for the poets and artists of our time” (182).

The understanding of Espina’s use of the language game and the exploration of the existent proximity between “mystical” and “actual” language practices is thus explored in two poems<sup>294</sup> from TLQ. The analysis of Espina’s poems demonstrates the “climbing beyond” that Wittgenstein proposes in *Tractatus*: “My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as non-sensical, when he has used them—as steps—to climb beyond them. He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.”<sup>295</sup> Wittgenstein’s metaphor of the ladder is an appropriate analogy for the stepping beyond, which the poet undertakes in TLQ.

For Espina, the *Barrococó* ladder is one with numerous flections, as he explains in a personal interview:<sup>296</sup> “With poetry one must decide to climb up to a higher level of understanding, or return back down to a safer level, it is following the traces of Death—Is it up or down?” The poet’s *areté* as well as the reader’s is illuminated by his final statement, “At the same time, in as much as the poet, the reader must not be afraid to climb it.”<sup>297</sup> In this way, the reader’s *poetic areté* is found in the pursuit of excellence and virtue found in surpassing a sentimental reading in order to reach a new level of

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<sup>294</sup> La música que dejamos entrar hace un rato (*Bienvenidos al país de los factores*) (“La música”) and Cuando incluso el tiempo está de más (*Viaje de ida al deseo de las preguntas*) (“Cuando incluso”).

<sup>295</sup> <http://c2.com/cgi/wiki?WittgensteinsLadder>.

<sup>296</sup> Appendix C.

<sup>297</sup> Appendix C.

understanding in the interpretation of a complex work. The metaphor of the ladder illustrates the poet's steps to climb beyond what has come before as well as the pursuit to preserve his individual identity while undergoing transformation in his current life's path as a result of close family loss and the effect death has had on his previous way of thinking.

Ludwig Wittgenstein's ideas have been influential to contemporary poets worldwide since the latter half of the twentieth century. Majorie Perloff's aforementioned statement from *Wittgenstein's Ladder* regarding the collision of the mystical with the commonsensicality of everyday language bears repeating as two elements that make Wittgenstein "a natural ally for the poets and artists of our time" (182). Espina's poems demonstrate the philosopher's rejection of "straight lines" as compositional and epistemological principles. The poet's perspective of the world is perceived in this investigation as one seen through the kaleidoscopic vision of a *fractured mind*, another of the three strategies proposed as the basis of Espina's *ne plus ultra* mourning poetry. This vision reflects the depth of the conflict in Espina's experiences over the last eight to ten years—fragmented in form and consisting of disjointed and nonlinear expression as opposed to unity and wholeness.

Before the collection of poems found in TLQ, Espina's poetry had shown this tendency toward no "straight lines" to be in part due to the contribution of the postmodern aesthetic found in the Neobaroque along with those attributes of the Baroque and the Rococo found in his *Barrococó*. But, the recent trauma of grief has contributed to a state of mind that is in collision with divine reality in which old ways of

thinking are shattered and new ways of seeing have opened up, particularly as relates to emotion. Absorbing these unexpected ideas and feelings, the poet's mind in mourning creates a fragmentation that reaches deeply into his psyche in where death has splintered all previous ways of thinking.

In "Monólogo," we see the poet's previous ideas of what poetry consists of challenged with "Aquello no era poesía." Enjambment of juxtaposed fragments of thoughts on subjects that cross the boundaries of time lead to a fragmented pattern of thought: "Si Mamá lo hubiese sabido"... / "aunque supo desde el principio" / "aproximarse al rostro de hace mucho" / "por diciembre en la mente era otro mes" / "culminando de menos a esto, o al revés." The breakdown of thought into these compartmentalized fragments are expressive of the poet's *fractured mind* in which he avoids or is unable to write in a direct style of representation. The panegyric acknowledgment of his mother's life and death are representative of the poet's continued attachment to the sonnet form:

Si Mamá lo hubiese sabido, habría muerto antes de quedarse más semanas, aunque supo desde el principio a la perfección cómo respirar despacio, aproximarse al rostro de hace mucho que por diciembre en la mente era otro mes aquel culminando de menos a esto, o al revés porque está bien que el viento vea de vez en cuando, viento al que solo el aire ha podido divisar. (256)

Randolph Pope eloquently summarizes the exceptional characteristics of Espina's creative word play in his Introduction to QEP.<sup>298</sup> The scholar describes Espina's lexical choices as "simplemente asombroso" and claims that many of the words

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<sup>298</sup> Written by R. Pope in the Introduction to *Quiero escribir, pero me sale Espina*. (5–16).

utilized by the poet are sure to send the reader in search of a dictionary [Pope includes himself in this group]. Yet Pope finds there to be great pleasure in Espina's rich use of language that is full of vitality. This need for additional references when reading Espina adds to the idea of *ne plus ultra* by a poet who places unconditional significance on intelligence and complex forms of knowledge. Pope points out this characteristic as well as others:

Quedan por destacar varios otros aspectos importantes de la poesía de Espina: al menos su humor, riqueza léxica y maestría enigmática. Son numerosos los versos en que pareciera que el verso se ha descarrilado por el deseo de jugar con palabras que reclaman incorporarse aunque por derecho no les corresponda. (106)<sup>299</sup>

In such a way, Espina's poetry has traditionally moved beyond the conventional self-contained and self-expressive lyric associated with more conventional poetic forms toward his particular desire for a more cursive poetic construction. Jill Kunheim in *Textual Disruptions* (2004) reinforces this claim by pointing out that these works do not represent the subjective experience of the author or of a poetic speaker. According to Kunheim, Espina "does not offer a fictive representation of speech that we could imagine taking place in a mimetic scene, or we do not find organic form, or an expository pattern, or a symbolic transformation of raw materials" (124). In opposition to Kunheim's proposal, it is the belief held here that this description is no longer applicable to Espina's poems after death.

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<sup>299</sup> "no sé si fue anoche, ni pasmado mañana" ("Enamorados por esparcimiento"), "para colmo de males / y de tamales" ("Ay amor, cuánto líquido me cuestas"), "elogiados al azar / por quien zarpan los barcos del czar" ("Imágenes de Guernica en un cuarto de hotel"), o "Y la posteridad esperando, / y la paz que ahora es pera / pero hará el alma más tranquilo" ("Lorenzo Lotto, vigilia final").

One example of a lack of applicability to Kunheim's claim lies within the understanding of the term "conventional readings", seen here as open to interpretation, as the subjective experience of the poetic "I" becomes increasingly more defined. Throughout this chapter I offer specific examples of Espina's use of subjectivity originating from his background. While his mourning poems may also be read through a universal interpretation that applies to all humankind, there does exist the element of autobiographical memory in TLQ that was also demonstrated in Kozer and Kamenzain. While Espina's poems are still considered to be ambiguous, dense, and challenging, they are seen in this investigation as offering a more stable form and pattern as a result of his experience with death's transformational life experience, which becomes the very source of his creativity.

T.S. Eliot,<sup>300</sup> in his essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent," writes, "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality. But of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things" (in Hirsch 302–303). *Fractured thought* represents this holding on and letting go of the personal and impersonal through poetry and is expressed by Espina through the strategies of *bricolage*,<sup>301</sup> which corresponds with other poetic strategies such as collage, juxtaposition, and mosaic.

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<sup>300</sup> From T.S. Eliot's, *The Sacred Wood*. Bartleby.com. 1996.

<sup>301</sup> From Tony Hoagland's article *Fragment, Juxtaposition, And Completeness: Some Notes and Preferences*. Hoagland defines each of these strategies as follows: Juxtaposition is a form whose surprises and intimacy brings the spectator closer to the abruptness of creative process. The mosaic style includes

Espina's strategy of *fractured thought* is not based on chaos, but rather it fits well within Calabrese's<sup>302</sup> discussion on "Vague, Indefinite, Indistinct" in which he defines these features as "a movement, a vagabond-like wandering that might refer to the object of the discourse, to its subject, or to the discourse itself, and that is manifested in a kind of roving around its own content" (163). This *bricolage*, or creation of poetry from a diverse range of available subject matter and poetic sources, makes Espina, much like Kozer, a *bricoleur*. Both poets express a willingness to create poetry by applying synthesized textual strategies to various forms of discourse, as it is poetry that allows the poet the most open relationship with all modes of language.

### ***Syntactic Thought as Language Game***

The language game in Espina's mourning poetry is rooted within the term *syntactic thought* and is established by the poet's self-reflexive use of language and the referential understanding that follows and leads to the expansion of discourse. As Espina outlines its defined meaning, the *syntactic thought* of a poem occurs when the simplest meaning of a word is multiplied from the moment it is defined.<sup>303</sup> For this lyricist, the language of poetry is the contemplation of memory; yet first and foremost, it is a

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truncated syntax, cancellation of punctuation—all of these devices increase inclusiveness by keeping it open to all combination and interpretations; the primary quality... is ambiguity.  
[http://www.cortlandreview.com/issue/33/hoagland\\_e.html](http://www.cortlandreview.com/issue/33/hoagland_e.html). Online Source.  
<http://markerstetter.blogspot.com/2010/11/bricolage-bricoleur-what-is-it.html>.

<sup>302</sup> From Chapter Nine of *Neo-baroque...* "The Approximate and the Inexpressible" (154–182).

<sup>303</sup> Espina's original statement in Spanish, Poetry "más allá de ser un deslizamiento en la extensión del deseo, [es] una unión de los opuestos y de las premoniciones de la memoria, [la] poesía es una reflexión sobre el lenguaje."



reflection on language. This reflection concerns itself with the ways in which the brain seeks to piece together meaning from the variation of patterns dependent on the stylizations of syntax and diction [even when non-linear or anti-poetic] found in the poetic construction of words. As a result, Espina's use of syntactic and semantic indeterminacy veers from established rules of usage, leaving the reader with the inability to assume that language is a fixed entity.

The structures of Espina's poems test the limits of language by drawing out semantic meaning not normally attempted in non-poetic discourse. Espina's use of *syntactic thought* is a strategy useful to his poetics of mourning poetry that speaks to poetry about poetry and, in so doing, creates an ambiguity that defers emotion, as it places the reader's focus on the expressions and meanings associated with that emotion as well as the syntactical features of the poem itself. In this way, the use of *syntactic thought* is explored as one means by which Espina's *fragmented thoughts* can be said to express that which cannot be expressed.

The strategy for ferreting out the language game found in "Cuando incluso el tiempo está de más (*Viaje de ida al deseo de las preguntas*)" ("Cuando incluso") is based on an image in a family photograph. Formally, the poet expresses his consternation over the lack of information or memory of the identity of one of the figures in the image. Within the use of juxtaposed sentence structures, the poet's language games are embedded. Complex sentences are interspersed with shorter sentence structures, often in question form, that at times lean toward the paratactic, in which the poet challenges the reader to draw her own conclusions. In the accumulation

of shorter sentences or in the case of complex, protracted sentence structures, the reader must rely on the contiguity of accumulated verses to make meaning.

Espina's intellectual focus on *syntactic thought* places an emphasis on the formal aspects of his poems, which along with his desire to include an emotional component, results in poetry that moves the reader on two levels: firstly, as a *cognoscente* of the formal aspects of the poem, and secondly, by the subject matter of the poem. "Incluso" presents a sequence of thoughts through the lyrical "I" on the subjects of death and time through the use of this unnamed image from a family photo, "Por afán, las fotos fueron la forma menos fácil / donde la muerte duerme a merced del tiempo /impío que por aparecer dará pronto respuesta" (259). The relationship between death, memory, and time is thus a major theme that never strays far from the poet's ubiquitous attention.

With a focus on the tormenting image in question, "No todas las fotos, sino una sin uno como fue. / Ahí, al verlo, estaba sentado Papá, y aquellos /otros dos, uno era Mario, más joven, y el otro, / aquel que a cuestras había venido a la realidad / a repetir su historia en fila india" (259), the selective use of syntax and lexicon work together and against each other to create and simultaneously distort meaning. Espina reconfigures normal discourse and straightforward speech through verbal strategies that strive to reach beyond direct communication. The terse and compressed opening sentence creates an enigmatic questioning that begins with the first lines and continues throughout the poem.

From the opening line, "Los ruidos quieren quedarse hasta saber" (259), Espina's language game challenges the reader to make her own inferences as to the direction the

poet is taking. Why do sounds wish to remain until they can, and where? And until they can what? The poetic use of alliterated sounds “quieren quedarse” increases in the next lines with “vinieron / a vivir en vísperas de una vez...” (259) and later “un vida que valió la pena vivir” (259). The poet’s incomparable lyrical creativity awakens the sense in the reader that the poet dwells in the land of the poetic. “Sin que el alma se diera cuenta” is additive to the first line “Los ruidos...”, after which the poem refers back to “los ruidos” with “vinieron a vivir en vísperas de una vez por todas” (259). This lexical density creates a language game in which several strands are developed at once.

Continuing with “el alma se diera cuenta,” “vinieron a vivir en vísperas,” “una vez por todas,” a sense of contingency emerges as each proposition brilliantly extends the meaning of each phrase to the next as the poet’s ideas merge in the reunion of the two. The remarkable imagery resulting from the anthropomorphism found in sounds wanting to live, to know more, lends a human quality, as sounds, like humans, are curious to know more. The poet emphasizes the preponderance of *syntactic thought* through the structure of the poem by pushing the limits of meaning, which places the reader’s focus on the syntactical features of the poem:

Los ruidos quieren quedarse hasta saber.  
Sin que el alma se diera cuenta vinieron  
a vivir en vísperas de una vez por todas. (259)

The language game is extended from the previous verse, “Los ruidos quieren,” to the following, “Con el paso de los meses han cambiado,” in which sounds continue to evince human emotion, “los ruidos”... “desearían ser similares al momento anterior a la hora de hacer algo.” The syntax used in the sentence structure, “hasta las fechas de

anteayer para ser oídos” and “o descubrir algo lo menos similar a una vida que valió la pena vivir”, along with the punctuation separating “Han venido,” from the following thought, heightens not only the poet’s *syntactic thought*, but his *fractured mind* through which the poet’s sense of insufficiency in the final penetrating statement of “una vida que valió la pena vivir” is absorbed by the reader as well.

In the last three lines, “Han venido, hasta las fechas de anteayer / para ser oídos, o descubrir algo lo menos / similar a una vida que valió la pena vivir” (259), meaning is discerned by the reorganization of the contiguous use of verbs “vinieron,” “han cambiado,” “desearían,” “han venido,” and “descubrir,” that reassemble the forward motion of the poem. Contiguity occurs through the changes to the sounds made within, “el paso de los meses;” yet the desire to be “similares al / momento anterior...” is juxtaposed with “a la hora de hacer algo” to create extraordinary meaning in which the reader senses the poet’s search for meaning in what that moment must entail.

Continuing with this *bricolage of fractured thought* in the next lines, the reader is called upon to imagine what desired sounds are hoped to be heard in the discovery of something: “lo menos / similar a una vida que valió la pena vivir” (259). With the passage of time, sounds or words change in meaning, occurring between “al momento anterior” and “hasta las fechas de anteayer.” This change in meaning speaks of the passage of time and the need to examine the many changes as they have occurred throughout the mourning process. The poet sees the past self [or selves] as he was before mourning and the present self [selves] that continues to evolve since mourning began, both with the shared purpose of reacquainting himself with the content of his memories:

Con el paso de los meses han cambiado  
de significado, desearían ser similares al  
momento anterior a la hora de hacer algo.  
Han venido, hasta las fechas de anteayer  
para ser oídos, o descubrir algo lo menos  
similar a una vida que valió la pena vivir. (259)

In the case of Espina's protracted, more complex structures, the contiguity between the verses becomes the means for entering into the poem. In the final seventeen lines of the poem, the first eleven are joined by the use of enjambment. The poem's mosaic style, with its truncated syntax heightened by the punctuated comma, keeps the meaning of the final lines open to all combinations and interpretations, yet the primary quality is still based on indeterminateness. The poet's intellectual language game through *syntactic thought* draws attention to the grammatical usage through the sonnet-like structure of the *linked* rhyme of the alliterated *s* sounds in "La casa, los sauces serían / hace siglos" (259), and the conditional form of the verb "ser" in "serían" express Espina's metaphysical sense of possibility, wonder, and conjecture.

The *bricolage* of descriptive nouns is contiguously preceded by their definite articles "La casa," "los sauces," "el frío," "la guerra," "la entrega," "la fe," "la idea," "del universo," "la mañana," "al año," which lead up to and emphasize "la foto," the focus of the poem, which leads to the heightened state of the *fractured mind*. The effect of this *bricolage* is to render the emotive voice caught within the interior experience. Espina's superb mastery with run-on and enjambment amplifies the fractured effect of a mind in stress due to grief and the uncertainty of what lies ahead.

The next several verses build this angst before resulting in the poem's *volta*, "...el frío que fue su forma de ir," "a la guerra en tregua," "la idea / definitiva del universo sin solución." Then we see that which is the subject of the poem and the cause of the poet's distress, "...la foto familiar." The return to *syntactic thought* is established through the reference to language itself "algún diptongo" before "el espejo / sobre todo el que hay:"/ in which the poetic "I" ("sin rostro a donde / huir ni voz a llamar...") reaches the height of angst with no voice or face to call.

The *volta* allows the poet to make a philosophical statement that puts the ending of the poem within the frame of a metaphysical plea and moves from the perspective of a fragmented, emotive mind toward a rational one: "En cada idea difícil del tiempo, sucede, / lo invisible. Estoy / donde el orden comienza" (263). Yet there is no joy in rationality, as alone he leaves his origins to hear nothing but the sound of silence, from which he pleads for help, "Salgo del origen como soy. / Qué silencio, qué nada / a punto de llegar! / Ayúdame, alma" (263). The singular photograph in his mother's apartment comes to represent the mystery of memory past and present existence, which exists now only through the space of poetry. "Cuando incluso" utilizes unreserved language to elicit the reader's attention in addressing the intensification of emotional suffering in the experience of grief, yet does so without sentimental excess.

Instead, the poet's *syntactic thought* calculates an emotive language that projects the attempt to draw the reader into his experience. The ephemeral nature of these closing lines, "¡Qué silencio, qué nada / a punto de llegar! / Ayúdame, alma" (263) is emphasized by the exclamation mark before "¡Qué" and after "llegar," and then silenced by his plea

for the soul's help, "Ayúdame, alma," through the lack of the exclamatory marks. The poet makes an appeal to "the soul" as a force greater than the self to muster his own courage. The grammatological formation of the poem narrows in Espina's excruciating culminating lines, evoking the reader's attention to "Ayúdame, alma," as the two final and gripping words of the poem:

La casa, los sauces según serían hace  
siglos, el frío que fue su forma de ir  
a la guerra en tregua, la entrega, la  
fe haciendo fila para entrar, la idea  
definitiva del universo sin solución,  
la mañana añadida al año entrando  
a la foto familiar, algún diptongo o  
uno muy anterior, y el espejo, sobre  
todo el que hay: sin rostro a donde  
huir ni voz a llamar, por las dudas.  
En cada idea difícil a perder de  
vista sucede lo invisible. Estoy,  
donde el orden comienza.  
Salgo del origen como soy.  
¡Qué silencio, qué nada  
a punto de llegar!  
Ayúdame, alma. (262–3)

"Cuando incluso" is not confessional due to its avoidance of the expression of a specific private or personal experience. Espina's previously mentioned idea in which he claims his poems "hablen sobre lo que sienten sin confesar demasiado" rings true in "Cuando incluso." We see the entire poem as an extended language game in which two worlds exist, the one in which the poet writes on the reality of the here and now, and the other, concerned with the emotions surrounding death that we all come to understand as humans. This second world is the one locked inside the poet's imagination, the world of language, creativity, intellectuality, and the poetic, where he finds his own *poetic areté*,

his profound sense of being and purpose, in which he shares “...la experiencia del ser que siente y que de pronto, quiere decir lo que siente.” By utilizing *syntactic thought* to express the *fractured mind*, Espina has climbed beyond his own *Barrococó* ladder to create a poetics of mourning that allows him to accomplish great poetry that stands on its own merit and shows no need for sentimentality in his expression of profound sentiment.

### ***Traces of the Past***

The second approach to analyzing Espina’s poetry through the lens of *Wittgenstein’s Ladder* relies on Marjorie Perloff’s previously mentioned statement that “It is the curious collision of the ‘mystical’ with the close and commonsensical study of actual language practices that makes Wittgenstein such a natural ally for the poets and artists of our time” (182). Perloff begins WL with a well-reasoned outline of the various debates, starting with modernist poetics to distinguish the difference between the “practical” language of ordinary communication and the “autonomous language of poetry.”

Fundamentally, the scholar sides with Wittgenstein<sup>304</sup> in establishing the belief that ordinary is best understood as *that which is*, the language we do *actually* use when

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<sup>304</sup>Several of the theories Perloff mentions include Roman Jakobson’s proposal, “poeticity is present when the word is felt as a word and not a mere representation of the object being named or an outburst of emotion, when words and their composition, their meaning, their external and inner form, acquire a weight and value of their own instead of referring indifferently to reality (52–53). What is Poetry?” (1933–34). Moving away from binary oppositions between instrumentality and poeticity, Perloff suggests Stanley Fish’s essay “How Ordinary is Ordinary Language?” (1973), in which Fish solves the problem by moving the locus of *literariness* from the text to the reader. But, as Perloff concludes, “Fish merely replaces one set of binary oppositions with another, the ‘interpretive community’ now becoming the locus of literary interpretation and value judgment as against ‘ordinary’ or random readership that presumably does not confer meaning and value of a given text” (57).



we communicate with one another (WL, 53).<sup>305</sup> In this way, Perloff maintains that the ordinary does not have to be “literal, denotative, propositional, neutral, referential, or any of the other adjectives with which it has been equated in the ordinary/literary debate,” but conversely, one in which “our actual language may well be connotative, metaphoric, fantastic, the issue being quite simply whether and in what context people use it” (57).<sup>306</sup>

Language games are neither a genre nor a particular form of discourse, but rather “... a paradigm, a set of sentences... selected from the language we actually use so as to describe how communication of meaning works in specific circumstances” (Perloff, 60). Espina’s compelling mourning poems act as a set of sentences selected from his individual background, told in his unique linguistic method, in order to remember the lives and mourn the circumstances of the loss of his beloved family members, beginning with the arrival of his great-grandparents from Italy to the present-day loss of his mother and father.

As proposed, one of the most important features of language games is the fact that they are culturally constructed. Wittgenstein states that, “What belongs to a language game is a whole culture” (61), leading us to his often-repeated expression: “the

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<sup>305</sup> In reviewing Perloff’s four interrelated perspectives, she ascertains to be central to Wittgenstein’s *Investigations* and his concept of “language-games, used in the search for an understanding of Espina’s poetics of mourning, and include: (1) The emphasis on the strangeness, or the enigmatic nature of everyday language (2) the struggle found in “bumping one’s head up against the walls” of one’s language limits in the need to understand one’s world, (3) the recognition of the self as a social and cultural construction, and (4) the articulation of an ethics outside the norms of causality or explanation.

<sup>306</sup> Perloff offers multiple examples of sentences that are enigmatic in everyday usage: “Imagine someone saying: ‘But I know how tall I am!’ and laying his hand on top of his head to prove it” (PI #279). Perloff uses this example from PI to show how oddly we use the verb *to know*” (58).

limits of my language are the limits of my world.” Returning to the use of everyday language, Perloff concludes that the “ordinary thus turns out to be seen as the aesthetic which resists definition” and quotes Pierre Bourdieu’s discussion of artworks “as slippery, indeterminate and contradictory, yet inscribed in ordinary language” (62). For this reason, they are “completely resistant to essential definition” (62). The formal parameters of Espina’s language games found in *syntactic thought* make it possible to identify and produce signs and also work through the signification and representation found within the language he uses to establish a relationship between what he says and how he says it.

Within the axis of Wittgenstein’s concept of language games and the use of everyday language [along with formal properties previously discussed], Eduardo Espina adheres to the *ne plus ultra* poetics through language as complex cultural construction whose changeability is expressed through his contact with it. Each of the “moves” in Espina’s language game take on meaning by existing within the communication defined and delimited by his grammatical usage in which “the rules are not random and their value leads us to an understanding of the purpose of the game”.<sup>307</sup>

Espina’s recognition of “self” as a product of his social construct and cultural construction<sup>308</sup> is expressed through language that surfaces in the form of imaginative

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<sup>307</sup> From Xanthos article “Wittgenstein’s Language Games.”

<sup>308</sup> Perloff continues this idea with “The subject does not belong to the world but is a limit of the world” (T#5.632). There is no unique “I” (“The thinking, presenting subject; there is no such thing) [T#5.63] subjectivity always depending upon a language that belongs to a culture long before it belongs to me. Language is thus a set of rule-governed practice, but one that can be adapted in myriad ways.

poetry. Poetry is a mixture of the abstract, the visual, the metaphysical, the ironic, and the mystical and magical side of human existence that we all experience during our lifetimes. The “curious collision of the mystical” is found within the poet’s understanding of the mythological world of the gaucho and the music of the *milonga*.

The *milonga* precedes the tango in history and is a solitary song cultivated during the nineteenth century by the gaucho in the immense pampa of Argentina and Uruguay. According to José Gobello<sup>309</sup> (founder of Academia del lunfardo), the etymology of the word *milonga* originates with the African Language “Quimbunda,” the plural of “Mulonga.” *Mulonga* or *Milonga* means “words.” It is this connection that provides Espina with one aspect of his recognition of “self” as a product of his social and cultural construction.

In reference to the collision of the “mystical” found in the mythology of the *milonga* and the *gauchesco*, the “close and commonsensical study of actual language practices” is located within the poet’s linguistic choices developed throughout the institutionalization process generally associated with religious, political, social, and educational indoctrination.<sup>310</sup> To these experiences, after living as an exile<sup>311</sup> for more than twenty years in the United States, the poet adds the second language of this new culture to that of his native tongue. Each of these influences has affected his sense of self

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<sup>309</sup> <http://www.totango.net/terms.html>.

<sup>310</sup> Further discussion on the relationship to language development and the poet’s religious indoctrination appears in a later discussion on the metaphysical aspects of his poetry.

<sup>311</sup> Further discussion on the relationship to language development and the poet’s experience with exile appears in a later discussion on rationalism and imagination.

and the language choices he continues to make today.

With each of these factors in mind, the exemplification of the social construct through everyday life and the poet's resultant engaging language choices are explored in "La música que dejamos entrar hace un rato (Bienvenidos al país de los factores)" ("La música"), a poem rooted in the poetic form of the *décima* and the poetic lyricism and subject matter of the poetic *gauchesco*, in which the poet's profound thoughts and emotions are expressed in a language that has "always belonged to the poet's culture, society, and nation" (Perloff, 22). The main title depicts the penetrating imagery of a family album and its wearied members as they arrive to the shores of Uruguay and their visionary adaption to their new life.

The word "La música" in the title refers to the *milonga* and the music his grandfather played in the local bordellos, where he wrote songs similar to those written by the gauchos.<sup>312</sup> In the first line, "Por ser mañana luego, el azar se sentía locatario" (272) Espina promptly turns to inventive word play that is commonsensical yet poetically unique. "Por ser mañana luego" naturally regards time, "later on" would include "tomorrow," yet we find this meaning at first difficult to grasp as this simple process cannot be separated from the more complex one to follow. The reader understands that in such a way, the appreciation of the reading experience of Espina's poem also lies in its aesthetic pleasure as well.

"El azar" becomes the subject of the poem, personified by "se sentía locatario."

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<sup>312</sup> This aspect of musicality influences Espina's poetry through the poetic forms of the *gauchesco* and the *décima* as he explains in our interview, "That's why my relationship, as a poet, I derive the most from the family."

Espina's poem progresses to a larger scope of time, becoming "las restantes estaciones" leading the reader toward the larger theme of the poem, which is time in the afterlife. With "vida posterior" the tone of the poem begins to take shape. "Su tono" reinforces the sense of uncertainty, since there is uncertainty in what type of feeling the poet describes, "dejándole a los ojos un sentimiento." However, the sense of "death" as imminent is made clear by the impending questions that for robins "serían cosa seria."

The anthropomorphism in "el azar sentía" and "su tono pasó a los ojos un sentimiento" (272) adds a humanizing element to the ambiguity of the opening verses, allowing that ordinary language can be connotative, metaphoric, or fantastic, depending on the context in which it is used. The poet's everyday words are metaphoric, connoting meaning that can only be discerned through the relationship of one word to another in order to establish the poet's use within this context. Words without a base begin to make meaning as a contiguous unit: "mañana," "el azar se sentía," "vida posterior," "Su tono," "un sentimiento," "preguntas," "cosa seria." In this way, the reader forms her own idea as to the meaning of the poem and is free to focus on its innate poeticity, that is, what the poem stands for as the focus is placed on the sounds and syntax patterns contained within:

Por ser mañana luego, el azar se sentía locatario.  
En las restantes estaciones, imagina los confines  
hasta encontrar una vida posterior, tal cual sigue.  
Su tono pasó dejándole a los ojos un sentimiento,  
preguntas que para los petirrojos serían cosa seria. (272)

The poet explores memory, remembering, and imagination in musically expressive poems that portray the historical and biographical nature of his ancestor's

first steps upon the shores of Uruguay. The euphonic repetition of the alliterated *f* sound overlaps with the internal rhyming of the vocalic *e* to create a musical and rhythmic *monorhyme* that is poetic and pleasing to the ear: “¿Fue el alma fiel a la fe...?” (272) Espina sustains this poetic play on sound, rhythm, and repetition throughout, “cuya orilla,” “recién llegados,” “Siglos, semanas bajando de los barcos” (272) “quimera convertida en querencia” (272). The poem’s form gives meaning to its content through each of the various “moves”<sup>313</sup> used by Espina to lead the reader to an understanding of the purpose of this particular poetry “game.”

Espina’s defined and delimited grammatical choices penetrate the poem through his acquisitive exploration of past events found in the following intricately structured verses. “Fue el alma fiel a la fe” (272) captures the reader’s attention through the consonance of *f* as well as the repetition of *e* and *a* vowels, followed by exemplification of the qualities of “el alma” by faithfulness and faith. The expression “de las yapas [paternas]” (272) is a colloquial phrase that translates as “a little extra” or “a bit more.” This expression adds unity to the poetic voice’s questioning of the faith found in the souls of those who immigrated to the shores of South America. Extending into the following line, clarity is obfuscated by the construction of poetic word placement, “cuya orilla las noches traían a los recién llegados?” (272). The word game becomes clear in the subordinating final line, “a merced de una quimera convertida en querencia,” as an impossible dream becomes a calling that is ultimately realized:

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<sup>313</sup> For an indepth explanation of the components of Wittgenstein’s language games, see Nicholas Xanthos’ article, <http://www.signosemio.com/wittgenstein/language-games.asp>.

¿Fue el alma fiel a la fe al quedar lejos de aquello  
llamado a nacer en el país de las yapas paternas a  
cuya orilla las noches traían a los recién llegados?  
Siglos, semanas bajando de los barcos por quedar  
a merced de una quimera convertida en querencia. (272)

The verses are organized through a polysemic and syllogistic relationship based on two propositions and a final logical conclusion. The first proposition is found within, “Nadie por seguro, sabe cómo habrá sido la primera mirada al pisar la escollera,” (272), followed by the middle term in which the ancestral family arrives to hear a language they desire to learn, “el rumor en tránsito del segundo dialecto al querer entenderlo” (272), after which the poet draws a final conclusion, “todo eso que hace por inseparable a la información de la persona acercándose cansada a tanta invisibilidad disponible” (272). In this way, Espina’s subtle language game becomes a rational attempt to articulate the general truths of his identity through the “invisibilidad disponible” of the bits and pieces of available information.

Language becomes subject matter through the poet’s *syntactic thought*, first, when the passengers hear “el rumor...del segundo dialecto” (272) and are left in the dark as to the meaning of the words of the new language[s] surrounding them. Again, language is the focal point in the final line through the polysemic phrase “tanta invisibilidad disponible.” This final line creates a sense of obscurity in which the reader is left to infer whether the poet is describing the dark and perhaps foggy atmosphere upon arrival to an unknown foreign port or is aided by the use of “tanta invisibilidad.” The poet ingeniously conveys a sense of invisibility and reduced status upon the arrival

to an unknown land, and with this, the feeling of what it must be like to arrive at foreign shores with a lack of words to communicate in an unknown language:

Nadie por seguro, sabe cómo habrá sido la primera mirada al pisar la escollera, el rumor en tránsito del segundo dialecto al querer entenderlo, todo eso que hace por inseparable a la información de la persona acercándose cansada a tanta invisibilidad disponible. (272)

Continuing with “La música,” the next subject Espina broaches is the death of the parents, expressed by a short sentence of three lines: “Con la muerte de Papá, de Mamá, que fue la misma” (272). We search for meaning in this simple structure that utilizes everyday language, yet with the phrase “que fue la misma” we are led to understand that, for the son, the loss of one parent is that of both. Through the intentional use of the caesura, first formally to divide the line into two parts and then as a poetic strategy, the language game that follows “hasta se dieron cuenta” (272) creates an interior poetic structure that focuses on the linguistic aspects of the poem through an alliterated *v* and *p*, in the rhythmically-paced phrase “algunas voces volvieron /al mundo a planear muy pronto el regreso al idioma.” The poet makes a calculated *volta* toward *syntactic thought* in the last line, juxtaposing “la verdad” and “tren” to note not only the variability of truth but that of language as well:

Con la muerte de Papá, de Mamá, que fue la misma  
hasta que se dieron cuenta, algunas voces volvieron  
al mundo a planear muy pronto el regreso al idioma.  
En esa borrosa superficie por no saber ser nativa de  
otra manera, la verdad cambiaba a cada rato de tren. (272)

Figuration in the form of the metonymic “la mano” dominates the next several verses, representing the move in Espina’s language game to create a concrete and



tangible image to convey the abstract and corporeal state of his memory. This metaphor strongly expresses Espina's recognition of "self" as a product of his social and cultural construction and is inseparable from his being as such. As Mikhail Bakhtin<sup>314</sup> writes, "the poet makes use of each form, each word, each expression according to its unmediated power to assign meaning...as a pure and direct expression of his own intention (362)." In this way, Espina uses *his* own all-encompassing language through *syntactic thought* to assign the intended specific meaning he desires in the poem's creation in which he metaphorically expresses his memory through the construction of self.

The next selected stanza begins with a reference to Dutch artist M.C. Escher's lithograph *Drawing Hands* (1948), which depicts a sheet of paper from which two hands rise, facing each other in the paradoxical act of drawing one another into existence. The poem begins "En un cuadro de M.C. Escher, una mano reemplaza / a la otra, dándole un porvenir a las huellas digitales" (173). The words "huellas digitales" are representational of the image of Escher hands, which up close appear as digital black and white dots to visibly create his own form of intellectuality. From a distance the viewer does not see the dots (as with digital forms), but only lines and shading, which appear to be continuous. This imagery of Escher's digitized hand returns as a means of expressing the *fractured mind* of the poet since mourning, before the poem's ekphrastic image comes into focus in order to mediate between the reader and the poet's mind.

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<sup>314</sup> From the *Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (1982).

This form of distancing is used to put memory into focus and to situate time between the past and the future, from the great-great-grandfather's moment to the current, in which the poet now lives. The first line, "Las manos, con las que el mundo golpea a la puerta," (273) refers to those of the great-great-grandfather, whose hands were used "en un sembradío." The following hands are those of the great-grandfather for whom the poet is named, "el que se llamó como yo, Eduardo, hizo brioches en una confitería" until months before his death when he buys "un tambo, chico." Continuing to enumerate, the poet next describes the work done by his grandfather's hands, "y mi abuelo... gran chalán de ticholos, de noche guitarrero" (273). The metonymical hand for Espina artistically represents these multiple generations and jumps from the words of the page, much as the image of Escher's hands in his lithograph.

The poet recognizes his place in this long lineage, not only from whom he received his name, but the language and the culture from which it began, and in the process, the recognition of himself as a product of this construction. The unmediated power of these words allows the poet to give meaning to his mourning, not just of the loss of his parents, but to the lives of his ancestors and their stories, whose struggles become a direct expression of this proposition:

Mi tatarabuelo las usó en un sembradío, uno de mis bisabuelos, el que se llamó como yo, Eduardo, hizo brioches en una confitería en la cual trabajó hasta comprarse, meses antes de morir, un tambo, chico. Un tambo diminuto, donde el eco tuvo voz propia. También allí las manos entre las vacas, y mi abuelo, de día gran chalán de ticholos, de noche guitarrero en algún arrabal del cual lo más seguro es que nadie sabe qué palabra para hablar los esperó en el puerto. (273)

The poem closes with a metaphysical reference to “el juego imprevisto”(273), the unknown forces that would change their destiny forever as musicality through *syntactic thought* is reinforced by the poetically consonance use of *s* and *c*, “...Sur siente un silencio como de cielo / absuelto por el esplendor...” (273) Espina expresses the desire to speak for his deceased ancestors through a reference to “artistic lateness” and the transience of time, “Por ellos llego-a decir y sin dejarlo para luego lo hago” (274). The fluidity of this line is created by the use of the *sinalefa*, in which the final vowel in **llego** and **lo** hago combines with the following preposition **a** to form a single syllable, along with the repetition of the strong *a, e, o*, vowel sounds, as words roll one into the next.

Espina’s emphasis on the importance of memory, “Por ellos llego a decir,” and his evolving concern with aging, “sin dejarlo para luego lo hago,” (274) characterize, as with Kozer and Kamenzain, the poet’s concern with his own death, as there is no longer a barrier between the deaths of his parents and that of his own to come. Espina returns to the question of nothingness and the *horror vacui*: “entrando al desconocimiento que rápido los manda de / regreso a donde la nada y no saberlo, son ya lo mismo” (274), as “desconocimiento”, “la nada”, and “no saberlo” now mean the same.

In Espina’s world, no matter how much doubt and contradiction exist in the subject matter, the poetic function of his discourse provides a sense of certainty through its single purpose of expression in which each word of the composition is felt as a word with a weight and value of its own. “La música” captures the essence of Espina’s

language practices as learned from the culture of family that surrounded him, elevated to lyrical and musical words of the “milonga” that portrays the mythical and metaphorical, the ordinary and the fantastic of his existence:

El juego imprevisto que de pronto tan lejos los trajo a  
la respiración del Sur siente un silencio como de cielo  
absuelto por el esplendor antes de sacarse los zapatos.  
Por ellos llego a decir y sin dejarlo para luego lo hago.  
Devuelvo a los ojos las imágenes de un país en medio,  
imagino el rostro del primero al pisar la patria, la cara  
entrando al desconocimiento que rápido los manda de  
regreso a donde la nada y no saberlo, son ya lo mismo. (273–4)

Eduardo Espina’s eloquent and provoking mourning poems represent the most recent achievement in his unsurpassable search for compelling poetry. This new poetry, filled with abundant determination, has led not only to an appended legacy for the Neobaroque aesthetic, but one that serves by adding an additional element to his individual narrative. Both of these accomplishments are due to his remarkable poetic acumen, which has allowed each to soar far beyond their previous configurations. On entering the poetic world of Eduardo Espina, the reader becomes aware of poems like “Monólogo” and “Cuando incluso” that astound the sensory system on multiple levels. Borges’ *el aleph* provides an excellent analogy for this experience.<sup>315</sup> The *aleph*, as one of the points in space that contains all other points, requires the reader to take in “all that is beheld in all things simultaneously.” Espina’s climb beyond the *barococó* ladder now becomes one in which his abundant references to “all things in an instant” are shown to be both delightful and awful at the same point in time and space.

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<sup>315</sup> *El Aleph* (1997).

### Clarity in the Enigmatic

Throughout his life, Jorge Luis Borges<sup>316</sup> was frequently asked “¿Para qué sirve la poesía?” By way of analogy, the poet once offered as a response to the questioner, “¿Y, para qué sirven los amaneceres?” For Borges, the image of a beautiful sunrise would serve as a means of expressing his sense of poetry’s purpose. On another occasion when asked again, Borges’ responded with “¿Y para qué sirve el olor a café?” While a reader may find it difficult to fully grasp Borges’ answer as to the purpose of poetry, the image of a steaming cup of coffee is capable of producing a sensorial response. For Eduardo Espina, the query as to the purpose of poetry in TLQ becomes “¿Para qué sirve la muerte?” in which poetry serves, as with Borges, “para morir menos en la vida.” To this degree, the imagery found in Espina’s mourning poetry serves to nurture his memory in the difficult times when he is surrounded by death.

The deaths of Washington Espina Franchelli (1924–2005) and Ruth Mabel Villafán de Espina (1928–2008) become an intellectual quest for the poet, palpable throughout the mourning poems found in TLQ. The term “difficult” has a dual meaning; first as it relates to the assumption that Espina’s poems represent a complex poetic aesthetic through their association with the Neobaroque. The second meaning originates in the use of the term “difficult” to describe the subject matter of mourning. As a means of working through the “difficult(y)” in both senses, Espina’s “viaje a la semilla”<sup>317</sup> is

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<sup>316</sup> <http://www.hoy.es/prensa/20100321/opinion/para-sirve-poesia-20100321.html>.

<sup>317</sup> Taken from Alejo Carpentier’s short story “Viaje a la semilla” <http://www.ucm.es/data/cont/docs/119-2014-03-31-CarpentierViajeA%20laSemilla.pdf>.

explored through his use of expansive creative verbal strategies and the use of rich visual imagery as a way to enhance the elucidation of multifarious poems so that their significance becomes more accessible.

José Lezama Lima's statement that "Only the difficult is stimulating"<sup>318</sup> emphasizes his notion that the vague and more obscure seems easier to look upon and is less painful to the eye than what is wholly clear and unambiguous (994). This point adds an additional dimension to the meaning of difficulty in Espina's poetry as the reader gains an understanding of the *raisons d'être* for the poet's current collection of poems. As with Lezama Lima, much of Espina's output contains numerous references to art, philosophy, mythology, popular and classical culture, music of all genres, and film to name a few of the areas from which the poet draws inspiration.<sup>319</sup> During his own time, Lezama Lema declared that the debate over what constitutes clear or obscure poetry to be "outmoded" and "overworked" (123). What does matter, the poet pointed out, was what Pascal called "*pensées de derrière*":

That is, the eternally enigmatic other side of things, both of the obscure or distant, and the clear and immediate...neither are obscure things so obscure as to terrify us, nor are clear things so clear as to let us sleep in peace...The tendency toward obscurity, toward resolving enigmas, toward playing games within games, is as common to human kind as is our image reflected in the clear surface of the water, which can lead us

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<sup>318</sup> From "X y XX," in *Obras completas*, 2:146.

<sup>319</sup> Within the poems from TLQ published in *Quiero escribir, pero me sale Espina*, references made to other artists or works of art include Breughel's painting of Icarus and a citation by Jorge Luis Borges in "Cuando incluso el tiempo está de más;" a citation by Paul Claudel in "October 27, 2010;" a citation by Saint John of the Cross and the reference to the first line of his own poem, "Encontrado entre los apuntes," from *La caza nupcial*. Reference to M.C. Escher's well-know lithograph is found in "La música." The Louve, as well as the Belgium painter, Paul Delvaux are cited in "Vivir en el pronóstico del tiempo"

with egotistical voluptuousness to the final blow, to our death. There is no need to seek obscurities where they don't exist. (123)<sup>320</sup>

Lezama Lima's above quote supports the argument that while "difficult" poetry is a challenge for many readers, it is the overcoming this challenge that brings forth not only the *poetic areté* of the poet but that which is within the reader as well. In this way, the reader becomes part of the poetic experience in which the understanding of "difficulty" is ameliorated by the use of visual applications that increase insight into overcoming these challenges. By targeting many of the recurrent challenges using a visual component in the interpretive process, the reader may then be in a position to make more incisive decisions when reading enigmatic poetry like that of Espina, Kozler, and, to a lesser degree, Kamenszain.

In the creation of Espina's mourning poetry, his highly advanced linguistic structures, as well as his plethora of cultural references, interact with his ingenious application of language, imagery, and rhythm to engage with the reader's senses in becoming a sensual experience. In such a way, the reader's active participation thusly becomes multiplied in the unlimited possibilities of meaning in which death becomes an auditory as well as a visual experience, offering credence to the belief that if seeing is capable of making words speak, not only is the reader's interpretation enhanced, but the aesthetic experience of the reader is enhanced as well.

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<sup>320</sup> In Armando Alvarez Bravo's "Interview With José Lezama Lima" (1964), found in Ernesto Livon-Grosman's *Selections: José Lezama Lima* (2005).

### *U pictura poesis*

William Carlos Williams' (1883–1963) *Pictures from Brueghel and Other Poems* (1962) is his last book and won him the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1963. The book opens with the titular cycle in which each poem is based on a Brueghel painting. Brueghel's "Landscape with the Fall of Icarus" begins with the following verses: "According to Brueghel / when Icarus fell / it was spring." The renowned poet then ends the short poem with "unsignificantly / off the coast / there was / a splash quite unnoticed / this was Icarus drowning." The irony found in the death of Icarus, as a figure of the poet's ascendant flight that ends in catastrophe, is that his death goes unnoticed within the painting's depiction of daily activities.

Paul Christensen<sup>321</sup> writes that at the age of fifty-five Williams felt the need to start over with a new poetics that would satisfy his sense of the changed world around him. This new form would gradually emerge to represent the "dichotomy between the absolute premises of faith and the relativity of one's own consciousness" (155). This higher level of consciousness based on form and continuity would thus come to dominate Williams' poetry. "Asphodel, that Greeny Flower" with its triadic stanza was a form that occupied much of his later years. The poem expresses a more romantic feeling with a dependence on personal, biographical material in which emotions, as with ideas, are stated: "with fear in my heart," "I regret," "I adore," "I am tortured, / and cannot rest." Increasingly, these feelings are tenderer than any previously expressed in his verse.

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<sup>321</sup> From Christensen's article titled "William Carlos Williams in the Forties: Prelude to Postmodernism. Ezra Pound and Williams Carlos Williams." 1983, (143–63).



This higher level of consciousness based on form and continuity with an emphasis on emotion points to current routes taken by both Language and Neobaroque poets.

Espina, Kozer, and Bernstein, each writing mourning poetry after the age of fifty-five, display a quality, as with Williams, of loosening up in their late style. His work received increasing attention in the 1950s and 1960s as younger poets, including Allen Ginsberg and the Beats, became impressed by the accessibility of his language and his openness as a mentor.<sup>322</sup> After a heart attack in 1948 and a series of strokes, Williams's health began to decline, but he continued writing up until his death in New Jersey on March 4, 1963. The accessibility of his language and his openness as a mentor to poets like Williams' poetry characterizes the use of personal as well as biographical material. Edward Said<sup>323</sup> sets the stage for a discussion on late style:

Any style involves first of all the artist's connection to his or her own time, or historical period, society, and antecedents; the aesthetic work, for all its irreducible individuality, is nevertheless a part—or, paradoxically, not a part—of the era in which it was produced and/or appeared. This is not simply a matter of sociological or political synchrony but more interestingly has to do with rhetorical or formal style. (134)

Said continues with a description of Beethoven's<sup>324</sup> late works as exuding "a new sense of private striving and instability that is quite different from his earlier works." For Said, what distinguishes the masterpieces of Beethoven's final works from these earlier

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<sup>322</sup> From <http://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poet/william-carlos-williams>. April 20, 2015.

<sup>323</sup> From *On Late Style* (2006).

<sup>324</sup> Said writes that the composer's later works show a marked difference from his earlier works such as *Eroica* Symphony and the five piano concerti "that address the world with self-confident gregariousness" (135).

works is that they are “beyond their own time, ahead of it in terms of daring and startling newness, later than it in that they describe a return or homecoming to realms forgotten or left behind by the relentless advancement of history” (135). Consequent to Beethoven and William Carlos Williams, as well as his contemporaries José Kozer and Charles Bernstein, Eduardo Espina’s late poems also demonstrate a characteristic interest in time that emphasizes the dissipation of the past, the inconceivable future, and a concentration on time beyond time.

Espina’s illustratory verses in “Cuando incluso el tiempo está de más (*Viaje de ida al deseo de las preguntas*) (“Cuando incluso”) also describe Brueghel’s<sup>325</sup> painting of Icarus, a painting that holds a special meaning for the poet due to its poetic quality.<sup>326</sup> While in contrast to Williams, Espina’s depiction of Icarus takes as its primary focus the trajectory of recent events surrounding his own tragedy, like Williams, I make the claim that Espina’s later poems have become more accessible. In addition, the more obvious aspect of a personal, biographical approach is noted in verses such as “morir por un pensamiento incumplido” and “Algún día ellas despertarán con nosotros...” Consequently, in Espina’s lyric, Icarus’ image is memorialized in order to express the poet’s concern with tragedy and his preoccupation with ongoing life, both inherent within the pages of TLQ.

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<sup>325</sup> Apart from two or three early works, Brueghel’s total output of about forty paintings was produced in 12 years (1557–69), and the last six years in Brussels account for two-thirds of the total output—about 30 masterpieces, not including those that were lost or survive only in reproductions. <http://www.oxfordartonline.com.lib-ezproxy.tamu.edu:2048>.

<sup>326</sup> Appendix C.

The idea of approaching the interpretation of a “difficult” poem is similar to that of approaching the interpretation of a painting and is performed by Espina in transcending the poem in an outward manner. Omar Calabrese’s<sup>327</sup> concept of the detail and fragment provides a useful means of approaching Espina’s poems. The use of the detail and fragment is based on three possibilities for meaningful interpretation, which include the pairings of the system with the element, the *fraction* with the *entirety*, and the global with the local (68). Each of these ideas provides a useful means of connecting the visual with the poetic through the parts of the work as they relate to the whole.

Reading Espina’s poems through this notion involves analyzing verses by “reading” the whole of the poem with a focus on the details, leading to the ability to grasp more of the whole. In this way, the idea of something that is imperceptible at first glance becomes clearer, as does that which at first is deemed irrelevant is now more useful to the description of the work. Espina elaborates on this process by pointing out the connection between writing a poem and the editing process in film, or the idea of “montage”, in which within each picture frame there is another. The same is true with his poetry, as within each of his poems there is another poem. Expanding this idea further, as with studying a painting, Espina’s poems are best read with the eye moving backwards and forwards in a slow fashion, stopping often to consider each idea and its connection to the next, always with an open mind.

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<sup>327</sup> Omar Calabrese names three possibilities for meaningful interpretation of the detail and the fragment: (1) The system/element dialectic, in which the pair becomes relevant through the notion of *consistency*, seen as a simultaneous functioning of both parts. (2) The fraction/entirety adopts the notion of *integrity* which is produced by pressure placed on the entirety. (3) The global/local pair, which is the *collocation* of parts within the whole (68).

Returning to “Cuando incluso el tiempo está de más (*Viaje de ida al deseo de las preguntas*) (“Cuando incluso”) this visual citation begins midway through the poem with the poet’s ephemeral affirmation, “En el cuadro de Brueghel, Ícaro cae...” Beginning with “cae”, the poem makes a pictorial shift to a more diffused passage with interspersed alliteration of the initial *c* sound in the words “cuadro,” “cae,” “con,” “caída,” and the initial *m* in “memoria / a morir,” with the medial accented *á* in “caída” and the accented ending *ía* in “aprendía.” The repetition of these sound bites works to bind the poem’s verses into a single cohesive thought by joining, “En el cuadro de Brueghel, Ícaro cae.Y” Calabrese’s *fraction* “Y” follows the line’s caesura which then allows the *integrity* of the whole poem to come into view with the following words, “con él el la caída aprendía de memoria / a morir por un pensamiento incumplido. / Por esas razones para nacer, el ruiseñor se / arrepiente de pensativo cielo de un saque.”

The ontological meaning of the verse is open to interpretation with, “Y / con él en la caída” due to the kaleidoscopic sentence<sup>328</sup> “...se aprendía de memoria / a morir por un pensamiento incumplido” (260) in which the two lines appear as a syntactic unit yet possess an element of inconsistency. In addition, the visual extension of the multivalent imagery found in the poem’s pictorial “al nacer el ruiseñor / se arrepiente del pensativo cielo de un saque,” (260–1) with its combination of elements making up the metaphor, is open to multiple interpretations due to the ambiguity of the last line as the clear meaning of “del pensativo cielo de un saque.” Espina’s digression into the

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<sup>328</sup> For a review of Bruce Stiehm’s kaleidoscopic sentence and multivalent imagery, see details of his article “Imagen multivalente” y “oración calidoscópica en la poesía de Eduardo Espina”, presented in Chapter III of this dissertation.

image of Brueghel's Icarus marks a temporary shift in the subject matter of the unknown image of the poem as a whole. This rhetorical device returns the reader to the broader subject matter of death, memory and mourning:

En el cuadro de Brueghel, Ícaro cae. Y  
con él en la caída aprendía de memoria  
a morir por un pensamiento incumplido.  
Por esas razones, al nacer el ruiseñor se  
arrepiente del pensativo cielo de un saque. (260–1)

Calabrese's idea of the "fragment" and its relation to the whole [which includes the "fraction" and the "fracture"] expresses the poet's search for the meaning of life and death through the vast imagery of the sky, "Cielo adonde no sé si has ido," "Cielo y en silencio a tener suerte." The sky as the representation of the whole is presented *in absentia*, as the vacuity where "no se si has ido..." Following Calabrese, the fragment represents the idea of being broken off from this whole a fragment in which there is no subject, time, or space involved in its presence. (73). In this way, "el cielo" becomes a form of absence or *horror vacui* expressed through the poet's meticulously chosen words to describe his current state: the fragmented "sin pensarlo," the verse "(tu docilidad imita la sinceridad del adiós)," the vacuity of "Cielo y en silencio," and the stillness of "hace mucho para hacer callar a las cosas" each serving to capture for the reader, the poet's sense of meaninglessness within the universe at large.

Espina engages with sentiment in the form of hope initiated through a *volta*, beginning with "Algún día ellas despertarán con nosotros." However, as the poem proceeds, the poet creates a sense of ambiguity in the fragmentation of the following lines, beginning with the grammatical shift to the plural "ellas despertarán," and

“Tendrán los años,” and the extended sequence, “que fueron de a poco el / tiempo en respuesta al pretérito perpetuo.” Espina then makes a shift toward a philosophical approach to time, “Tendrán los años que fueron de a poco el / tiempo,” (261) in which time is measured in terms of *syntactic thought* found in “en respuesta al pretérito perpetuo.” And in the final line, “En esa edad como sea quisiera quedarme,” (261) Espina places in his lines “en esa edad como sea” the future hope of redemption through the possibility of reunion. The sentiment expressed in the last line, “En esa edad como sea quisiera quedarme” supports the notion that Espina’s mourning poetry is not anti-sentimental, but in fact engages with sentiment brought about by his desire to reunite with his parents and the sense of loss that mourning has left in their place:

Cielo y en silencio a tener suerte, raza de  
hace mucho para hacer callar a las cosas.  
Algún día ellas despertarán con nosotros,  
tendrán los años que fueron de a poco el  
tiempo en respuesta al pretérito perpetuo.  
En esa edad como sea quisiera quedarme. (261)

“Cuando incluso” is rich in the use of visual imagery, yet it is also copious in its grammatical, contextual, and syntactical aspects. As a result, the interaction between the visual references and the auditory properties of language in the hands of an expert wordsmith can in turn stimulate a reader’s understanding, while at the same time enhance the poetic experience. Continuing with “Cuando incluso”, the poet’s expression of concern with the unknown visage in a family photograph becomes the means by which Espina further engages with sentiment through the visual component found in his poetry of mourning.

### *Interpreting the Past*

In “Cuando incluso,” the reader’s understanding is determined by the various options available in the interpretation of Espina’s poem, due to what Bruce Stiehm<sup>329</sup> refers to as “multivalent imagery extended within kaleidoscopic sentences” (121). In keeping with the previous claim that his poetry is ambiguous and may often present the reader with difficulty in grasping meaning on a first reading, the suggestion that freedom in interpreting this poet’s contextual and syntactical choices makes understanding less restrictive and more comprehensible. As previously mentioned at the beginning of this discussion, Espina’s poetry is known for its varied intertextual references, and this particular poem is replete with exegesis on other visual as well as literary works. “Cuando incluso” consists of one hundred and forty isometric lines that span four pages. Interspersed between the many verses are the poet’s thoughts on a range of subjects important to him, which pose challenging questions through descriptive imagery.

The poem recalls the relationship Espina shared with his mother and the resultant vacuum that remains after her death, “Contigo, Mamá, el mundo sentió que alguien / se lo llevaba...” The anthropomorphization of “el mundo” with human feelings metaphorically extends the lexicon, and in so doing, places a sense of gravity on the significance of the mother’s role in her son’s life. In addition, Espina’s concern with the relationship between time and death are important themes: “Por afán, las fotos fueron menos fácil / donde la muerte duerme a merced del tiempo / impío que por aparecer dará

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<sup>329</sup> For more on this subject, see Bruce Stiehm’s article, “Imagen multivalente y oración calidoscópica en la poesía de Eduardo Espina.”

pronta respuesta.” Consistent with Espina’s past works, the role language plays in his understanding of transcendental beliefs is an important means of expressing the poem’s important themes. And as will be shown, the poet’s concern with the *horror vacui* becomes an expressive tool for expressing the poet’s sense of absence and loss.

The subject of a photograph in his mother’s apartment of the image of his father, his uncle Mario, and a third man unknown to the poet becomes the underlying subject matter of “Cuando incluso.” As with Kamenszain, the photograph serves to evoke memories and memorialize the past for Espina, as the unknown face puts image into thought and thought into words. This unknown third person obstructs the poet’s thoughts, and in this way, he also questions the image of death that can never be seen.<sup>330</sup> The phrase “Por afán, las fotos fueron la forma menos fácil / donde duerme a merced del tiempo / impío que por aparecer dará pronto respuesta” (259) opens a wealth of possible interpretations, exemplifying Stiehm’s “index points” by which to mark this reading. Surfacing emotions are circumvented by the enigma surrounding the third person, and the intellectual query that creates a sense of *ostranenie* dissipates this reaction.

The *horror vacui* of the visual content of the semantics, “No todas las fotos,” and the syntactical arrangement created by the language game, “sino una sin uno,” “cada vez más la misma pero menos” (259) support each other in a complementary relationship that allows for interpretive freedom in which the image of the “nameless face” of the

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<sup>330</sup> In our personal interview, Espina speaks of the writing of this poem that takes as its subject a photograph in his mother’s apartment. Explaining that it was the image in the photo that struck him, it was in the need to replace this absent image that he wrote the poem. “To whom does this face belong?” is but one of the many questions found in TLQ. Espina’s mourning poems are the result of a series of important questions the poet poses first to himself and then take the shape of a poem, as a mode by which to share these questions with his readers.



third person is visible yet unknown to the poet. Each of these simultaneous interpretations of a number of possible outcomes potentially expresses death as the last threshold:

No todas las fotos, sino una sin uno como fue.  
Ahí, al verlo, estaba sentado Papá, y aquellos  
otros dos, uno era Mario, más joven, y el otro,  
aquel que auestas había venido a la realidad  
a repetir su historia en fila india. ¿Recuerdas,  
el tiempo, cada vez más la misma pero menos? (259–60)

The next selected stanza describes Stiehm's "imagen mutivalente" through *fractured thought*, what Wittgenstein calls "a labyrinth of paths" (PI #203) and Calabrese refers to as *intelligent complexity* (133). The figure of the labyrinth is fitting as a frame for textual analysis in the poem. Wittgenstein alludes to the possibility that the results of this reading may include one approaching "from one side and know your way about; you approach the same place from another side and no longer know your way about" (PI #203). In the penetrating mind of Espina, this visual extension expresses the angst of mourning and the search for meaning he explores during this period of his life.

The poet poses a series of questions regarding the enigmatic image of the third person through a rhythmic poetic movement that leads the reader through the labyrinthic poem, one that becomes not a search for a solution but a form of transformation:

“¿Quiénes eran esos tres que fueron, Papá, Mario y aquel que ya no cuenta cuya cara /  
debe de haber muerto en el intento? ¿O la / imposibilidad será no poder recordar su /  
nombre, ni qué lúdico alud lo abrevia a /partir del dato entrando a la costumbre?” (260).

In a form of self-dialogue the poet works through the many impossible explanations that

can best give him the resolution for which he searches, only to realize that the impossibility lies within the game of asking the questions.

Textually, the poem is moved through the labyrinth by the poetic use of vocalic rhyme produced by *o*, *a*, and *e* “rostro innombrable, uno al revés” (260) that continues through enjambment to the following line with “cuando incluso los reflejos.” The phrase, ...”cuando incluso...” refers back to the title of the poem, as the poet then makes a turn toward doubt and uncertainty, “las imágenes / amenas que nunca he podido dejar atrás y aquí sigo,” (260) when his key statement as a *volta* leaves the reader equally uncertain, “sin aminorar ni número primo para discar de apuro y yo, a disposición” (260). Subsequently, with the recurring action of uncertainty, we are aware of what Wittgenstein means when he describes the approach to the same place from another side.

Within the poet’s *fractured mind* [in which each single description is juxtaposed with that of another], the reader at first loses sight of the overall meaning: “rostro innombrable,” “al revés de la visibilidad,” “los reflejos,” “ponen en duda a las imágenes” (260). However, through this labyrinth, constructed by the contiguity and unity of the text, through figurative representation the poet opens the sentence to an unending experience. Thus the reader enters into the experience of the text with the poet to come out on the other side with her own understanding. As Calabrese notes, the challenge of the labyrinth is rewarded in the “pleasure of becoming lost and ends with the pleasure of discovering where we are” (133). This idea works as well with that of *fractured thought* as the creative and aesthetic experience is brought to life through the challenge associated with expanding one’s own intellectual capacity:

Un rostro innombrable, uno al revés de  
la visibilidad cuando incluso los reflejos  
llegaron a poner en duda a las imágenes  
a las cuales nunca he podido dejar atrás y  
aquí sigo, sin aminorar ni número primo  
para discar de apuro y yo, a disposición. (260)

Espina again takes up the subject of the image in the photograph in which his use of *syntactic thought* exemplifies Stiehm's notion of "oración caleidoscópica" in poetry with an emphasis on language. "La vida vive de verbos en condicional," (261) is written in a syntactical form that ingeniously draws the reader's attention to the grammatical and poetic aspects of the poem through the consonance found in *v* and the recurrence of the *i*, *e*, and *o* vowels. The impossibility of the return of the mother is expressed by the poet's exemplary choice of the *impossible si-clause*, or the third conditional: "Y si volvieras, ¿a qué tiempo luego de ti sería en algún rasgo tan diferente a este?" (261) This sense of impossibility continues and is reinforced with the continuation of the conditional "Sería, donde aprendiste..." that again points to conjecture.

Espina's following questions and use of specific verb forms express one of the predominate themes of TLQ—that of questioning, in which the majority of life's enigmatic questions have no answers. Time becomes a concern for the poet as expressed by, "¿a qué tiempo luego..." (261), "tiempo sin plan" (261); followed by the use of the subjunctive form of the verb, "volvieras," and the conditional "sabría," "sería," "regresarías" as well. In addition, the adverbial clauses "acaso," "quizá," "en caso de que," suggest the poet's consternation with time and uncertainty: "Y si volvieras, ¿a qué tiempo luego de ti / sería en algún rasgo tan diferente a este?" (261). And lastly, Espina

in point-blank terms, puts one of life's most perplexing questions on the line in the form of a direct question, "Y si volvieras..." leaving the reader to consider the possibility of this unknown on her own terms.

Lastly, the poet returns to *horror vacui* to express the loss of the absent figure of the mother, "¿O eso quiso decir el desánimo cuando / dijo que nada, ni menos tú, regresarías?" "Cuando incluso" requires reading from the perspective of doubt and uncertainty with a questioning attitude. In this way, Espina allows the reader to extend the poem in her own mind regarding the purpose and meaning of life and death. The photograph in the poem is an image that acts as an artifice, one that offers the active reader a philosophical and intellectual opportunity to consider the earthly as well as the transcendental nature of our experience:

En las fotos, Papá seguramente lo sabría.  
La vida vive de verbos en condicional, y  
es de su ley responder, acaso, si, quizá...  
Y si volvieras, ¿a qué tiempo luego de ti  
sería en algún rasgo tan diferente a este?  
Sería, donde aprendiste a vivir en la época  
equivocada, en caso de que algo tal exista.  
¿O eso quiso decir el desánimo cuando  
dijo que nada, ni menos tú, regresarías? (261)

Espina concludes the collection of TLQ with his poem "Objetos sin consecuencias (*Algunos de los años inaccesibles a la duración*)" ("Objetos") in which he again refers to the same photograph: "En algunas fotografías, si las ves, el final / de la historia es la imagen mal entendida, / la extensión del sentido en la certidumbre" (281). The poet reconciles the frustration experienced in "Incluso" through the recognition that this misunderstood life story has reached its conclusion, yet he chooses

to leave open to interpretation the extended phrase “la extensión del sentido en la certidumbre” (281). The inadequately understood image is, for the son, much like Barthes’ Winter Garden Photograph—one that pricks his emotions, a *punctum* that affects him, not by that which is visible, but by that which is not. In Espina’s case, it is not the knowledge of the unknown life the image represents, but the memory that remains concealed that makes it so affecting to him; not the appreciation of the identifiable, but the recognition of differentiation.

As with the forgotten image, the process of mourning is one of unanswered questions and forgotten memories, a fact that must be accepted. Susan Sontag writes that photography “is an “elegiac art, a twilight art” (15)... and this photo is Espina’s *memento mori*. For Espina, the knowledge of what has been gained or lost by the photograph will always be as Sontag writes, “a human reminder of sentimentalism, whether as ‘cynical or humanist’” (1). For Espina, there is no sentimentality nor acrimony expressed in his approach, only the no-nonsense recognition of what this world has to offer: “Es tan simple, que hasta parece fácil: / por creer en la otra vida, esta llega” (283). And in the final lines of the last poem of TLQ, the poet writes, “Si algo queda para ser desconocido, / en el Cielo las cosas podrán decirlo, / las palabras, escribirse unas a otras” (283). All that remains behind of the mother’s memory are the words in the poems with which he describes her remembrance.

The appreciation of Espina’s magnificently written mourning poetry is often seen by some readers as complicated by the presence of syntactic, grammatical, and highly intellectual activity, as well as its elevated linguistic intensity and textual

irregularities.<sup>331</sup> Bruce Stiehm's ideas were implemented in order to show how the reader is able to take a more active role in the triad of poet, text, and reader. As a result, it has been the aim of this discussion to explore the means by which "difficult[y]" can be decreased, as interpretational possibilities are increased within the poetic experience, when aided by visual imagery that allows a point of entry into the sphere of obscure and enigmatic, yet intellectually stimulating poetry.

Subsequently, this challenge has led to an increase not only in the understanding of Espina's poetic *areté*, but that which is within the reader as well. The difficult(y) expressed in the analyzed poems in TLQ reflects the challenges faced not only by the poet but society as a whole as a result of our rapidly changing worldscape due to social fragmentation, political unrest, and advancements in technological innovation. This discussion continues, as next to be determined are the means by which Espina's poems express these challenges through an imaginative yet rational vision of the intertwined connection between poetry and influential metaphysical ideas.

### **Imagining the In-Between**

The architecture of TLQ forms Espina's ideas and beliefs on the fundamental nature of human existence. The poet draws from a wide range of religious, philosophical, and metaphysical thoughts that include, among others, ideas by José Lezama Lima, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and C.S. Lewis. For Espina, as a part of the process of mourning the death of his parents, the creation of the poems in TLQ has been a lyrical

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<sup>331</sup>From Bernstein's description of difficult poetry in *Attack of the Difficult Poem*.

journey that inquires into the origin and destiny of humanity itself. In broad terms, these poems speak neither to life nor death on either side, but to the in-between, where, for the poet, lies the “not knowing” of how life begins or what happens upon its end.

In a personal interview with the author of this dissertation, Espina<sup>332</sup> expanded on his concept of the in-between, which he sees as encompassing those things of which we are unaware or that are unknown to us. When speaking in general terms of life itself, for which the poet claims to have no definitive answers, death and the question of an afterlife become the subject matter of poetry. Espina’s poems express these concerns in an imaginative yet rational approach through the distinct kinship between poetry and his understanding of the metaphysical.

The metaphysical aspects of mortality and the afterlife are represented in TLQ as they express this intellectual poet’s conflict in the belief between the existence and/or nonexistence of an authority beyond his own—one that determines what happens in death and afterwards. To this degree, Espina finds resolution through the poetic process, which allows him to pass from a restlessness that is close to chaos to a state of grateful spiritual stillness in which a former sense of nothingness is replaced by a sense of being at its fullest.<sup>333</sup>

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<sup>332</sup> Appendix C.

<sup>333</sup> See Appendix C for more on the poet’s comments regarding the afterlife.

### *Imagination and Rationalism*

TLQ is the blending of imagination and rationalism through the poetization of memory, time, and death, while at the same time the reflection of doubt in the appearance of a perceived world based on reason. Through his experience with diverse poetic aesthetics reflected in imaginative poems, we understand the words of C.S. Lewis, who wrote that emotion is “as an intimacy that had not passed through the senses of the emotions at all” (73). Lewis describes this intimacy that suddenly occurred after a lengthy period of mourning the death of his wife, writer Joy Davidson:

One didn't need emotion. The intimacy was complete—sharply bracing and restorative too—A society, a communion, of pure intelligences would not be cold, drab, and comfortless. On the other hand it wouldn't be like what people usually mean when they use such words as *spiritual*, or *mystical*, or *holy*. It would be...above all solid. Utterly reliable. Firm. There is no nonsense about the dead. When I say intellect I include will. Attention is an act of will. Intelligence in action is will *par excellence*. What seemed to meet me was full of resolution. (75). Didn't people dispute once whether the final vision of God was more an act of intelligence or of love? (76).<sup>334</sup>

Lewis' description of “intelligence *par excellence*” is analogous to the proposed idea of *areté* as a critical concept used to express the highest potential of intellectuality one may achieve within a lifetime. I assert that a solid foundation based on resolution, will, intelligence, and intimacy is the key to emotional poetry that circumvents

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<sup>334</sup> In *A Grief Observed* (1961), Lewis writes on a dramatic change that occurred when his feelings of grief resulting from the death of his wife, writer Joan Davidson, took a distinct change in direction: “There was no ‘message’ just intelligence and attention. No sense of joy or sorrow. No love even in our ordinary sense. No un-love. Yet there was an extreme and cheerful intimacy. Made a cleaning of the mind. The dead could be like that; sheer intellects. A Greek philosopher wouldn't have been surprised at an experience like mine. He would have expected that if anything of us remained after death it would be just that. Up to now this always seemed to me a most arid and chilling idea. The absence of emotion repelled me. But in this contact (whether real or apparent) it didn't do anything of the sort” (73).



sentimentality in the mourning poetry not only of Espina, but of Kozer and Kamenzain as well. Espina's message is found within a change of direction in which the poems of TLQ, written over a span of eight years, move from a sense of angst and uncertainty toward the intimacy of which Lewis speaks. This progression gives TLQ its most unconventional quality and is accomplished through *poetic areté*, in which sentimentality is set aside for the purpose of creating a more compelling approach to mourning.

In TLQ, the rational and philosophical self converges with the imaginative creativity of the poetic, similarly defined by what Ogden and Richards<sup>335</sup> refer to in *The Meaning of Meaning* (1923) as *symbolic* and *emotive* language. Espina describes his concept of the metaphysical or *symbolic* element in his poetry in a personal interview as “the element of the fantastic within the imagination” in which the experience of finishing a poem is something that is beyond his control. In this experience, the poet declares there to be “no wall, nothing between death and life, it comes and goes and that's the mystery.” This idea emerges within “La muerte no quiere que la vida la deje sola / (*Esto pasa por haber estado vivos*),” (“La muerte”) (275) as one example of the way in which the poet conflates the rational and the imaginative in his poems.

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<sup>335</sup>In the 1989 edition of *The Meaning of Meaning* (1923), Umberto Eco discusses in his introduction the importance of this seminal work's capacity as a prelude to future developments in language studies (vi). Ogden and Richards define the *symbolic* use of words as those of statement: “the recording, the support, the organization and the communication of references” (149), while the *emotive* use of words is to express or excite feelings and attitudes... using words to evoke certain attitudes. Under the emotive function are included both the expression of emotions, attitudes, moods, intentions, etc., in the speaker, and their communication, *i.e.*, their evocation in the listener (149). The authors continue to point out that emotive language is used by the speaker not because he already has an emotion that he desires to express, but solely because he is seeking a word that will evoke an emotion that he desires to have; nor, they point out, “is it necessary for the speaker himself to experience the emotion which he attempts to evoke” (150).

The intelligible element to life and death is expressed in the first line, “El silencio se asoma a” (275), yet still manages to contain a blending of the poetic by the use of consonance found in “silencio,” “se,” and the second letter in “asoma.” The poem opens up further into the creativity of the poetic, as it is the imagination that carries “silence” forward, unable to remain in solitude. Within the juxtaposing of life and death, words and silence, death’s silence seeks the imagination and creativity of words and poetry, no longer content to remain alone, “Llévenme con ustedes” (275). Silence, in communion with words, as Lewis reminds us, is not “comfortless.” And while there is no nonsense in the matter of death, Espina’s emotive poems are solid in their adherence to the imaginative. “La muerte” is a six-line poem, unusually succinct for Espina, and is quoted in full for this reason:

El silencio se asoma a  
imaginar los mensajes  
dejados por el camino.  
Hasta que ya no puede,  
y le dice a las palabras:  
“Llévenme con ustedes.” (275)

Appropriately, Espina’s *ne plus ultra* style is a means of reaching a state of *areté* in his attempt to achieve the ultimate goal of human knowledge and creativity. The rational questions upon which life is based thus form the foundation of the creative force behind his poems as he strives to reach a theology of divinity while questioning what lies beyond.<sup>336</sup> This query continues throughout TLQ and is enhanced by the alternative to rationalism found in the creative component as demonstrated in the next poem, “Objetos

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<sup>336</sup> Appendix C.

sin consecuencias / (*Algunos de los años inaccesibles a la duración*)” (“Objetos”) (279–283).

The first line of “Objetos” leads into the next, in natural order, in which the poetic “I” addresses the deceased mother, “El problema Mamá” (279), as though she were present and within hearing distance. From this point the poem winds through the enjambment of five lines followed by a *volta*, then a question, and then an exclamatory proposition. In each of these stages, the poet maintains a focus on the syntactic structure of the poem itself. In the second line, “el vestigio de las voces convertidas,” repeated sounds are connected by the alliteration of the consonantal *v* sound.

This pattern of unity is expanded in the following two lines with the enjambment and the assonance of vowel sounds, “mal intento de ateísmo / a cambio.” Then there is a reinforcement of the alliterative “primera piedra hallada,” followed through to the caesura with combined consonantal and alliterative sounds, “yo moribundo pidiendo ayuda vivo” (282). The repetition of the present perfect “moribundo pidiendo” aurally complements the two words, creating, as with the rest of the stanza, a poetic effect in which the verses resonate with a unique quality of their own. The poet’s *syntactic thought* creates unexpected associations that word sounds then relate back to semantic connections.

The rhetorical shift comes in the sixth line as the lyrical voice becomes more subdued, “Aun sin decirlo, la vida vino a perdurar” (282). The poet juxtaposes metaphysical ideas with those of the creative imagination, “las maneras de imaginar algún más allá?” The poem focuses on individual components, self-reflexively referring

to a lack of language, “sin decirlo,” “la vida vino a perdurar,” rather than the composition in general. The *symbolic* appears to be in conflict with the *emotive*, yet it is the quality of the two combined that serves as a means for the poet to express something [the subject matter of his conflict] that he finds to be of importance to the rational function of language. In this way, he is able to utilize the emotive function as a means of expressing himself.

Espina’s *brococo* lexicon opens the next two lines to the emotive side of his imagination in the replication of the problematic abstraction he speaks of as “el vestigio de las voces convertidas en religión / en un mal intento de ateísmo” (282). Through multivalent imagery within kaleidoscopic lines, the poet produces a progressive extension of the syntax. The reader begins an interpretive quest triggered by an anacoluthon, causing a syntactic shift to occur that draws attention to the mechanics of meaning in “a cambio de la primera piedra hallada, / del yo moribundo pidiendo ayuda vivo.” Espina then turns the poem back to a rational moment in the final line in which he summarizes the previous thoughts with the exclamatory statement “¡Son tantas las preguntas del país tardío!” (282). Through linguistic strategies, the emotive elements hover around the rational expressions found in the poet’s preferred word order and word choice:

El problema, Mamá, es la abstracción,  
el vestigio de las voces convertidas en  
religión, en un mal intento de ateísmo  
a cambio de la primera piedra hallada,  
del yo moribundo pidiendo ayuda vivo.  
Aun sin decirlo, la vida vino a perdurar.  
¿Le daremos el mundo si no hay menos,

las maneras de imaginar algún más allá?  
¡Son tantas las preguntas del país tardío! (282)

“Objectos” is replete with poetic devices that advance the poem’s structural form. Word play personifies death as a vivid corporal image through the precisely chosen words “la muerte,” “acepción,” “confirmada,” and “a tu lado.” The poet’s concern with the possibility or not of an afterlife, “¿si habría Cielo” (282), is extended by the imaginative substitution of “death” in which the reader is left again to create her own image of how “o algo a donde escapar luego de no ser / tú” might be. The multiple caesuras in this selection, with breaks following “lado,” “Cielo,” “persuasión,” and periods following “diferente” and “decir” highlight the polymorphic significance of each line.

The creative arrangement of each poetic line is structured so that various elements can be transposed and reversed as with that found in “...de que la muerte / fuera la acepción confirmada a tu lado” (282). The poet utilizes a paratactic structure with “Ni el pensamiento en su persuasión, ni la voz al volver herida supieron decir” that highlights the emotion of uncertainty through the use of additive language that becomes kaleidoscopic in nature, “preguntaste porque podías,” “o algo lejos de los ocelos.” Each of these devices directs the poem toward the bigger proposition the poet posits in the last two lines: “¿Hay, tal rito de ademán desordenado, / de hora débil contra la vil parsimonia?” (282). With the final idea of the opposition between “hora débil” and “vil parsimonia,” the reader must rely on the contiguity of the verses to interpret for herself the significance of this question; however, there is no nonsense in the emotive

questioning about death. While uncertain as to the rational or emotive quality of finality, there is little doubt that these words are spoken with a sense of resolution:

Pocas semanas antes de que la muerte  
fuera la acepción confirmada a tu lado,  
preguntaste junto a mí si habría Cielo,  
o algo lejos de los ocelos a donde llegar  
luego de no haber ido para durar diferente.  
Ni el pensamiento en su persuasión, ni  
la voz al volver herida pudieron decir.  
¿Hay, tal rito de ademán desordenado,  
de hora débil contra la vil parsimonia? (282)

Further in the poem, the poet makes a swerve with a *volta* that demonstrates his attempt to pass from restlessness to a form of stillness when thought finds order within absence: “Piensa, pues al pensar empiezas: si algo / habrá luego del tiempo, será según sea, / un acto a solas, una inocencia cansada, una que en ella alcanza a ceder su sino” (282). The reference to time places the poem in the rational here and now, after which the poet returns to the imaginative qualities of poetry to express that which is beyond, “será según sea,” and the idea of “what will be, will be” (282). This *symbolic* form of thought, based on rationality, is connected through the phonetic relationship found in the beginning sounds of each word, along with the stressed second syllable in “será según.”

In the last eleven lines of the poem, time continues to be important, not only as a trope, but as a fundamental part of the closing ideas of the poem. In the first two lines, “Al final, el año de la eternidad termina...” (283) and “las horas son tan sabias que lo saben” (283), the importance of time is highlighted by its anthropomorphic characteristics as a deity capable of wisdom. The poet’s confessed belief system is expressed by the juxtaposing of the next life, or “la otra vida,” with the present one, “Es

tan simple, que hasta parece fácil:/ por creer en la otra vida, esta llega” (283). The parenthetical statement, “(Poco necesita la resurrección / para responder al organismo en persona)” (283), draws attention away from the poet’s exposition on eternity to focus on the corporeal aspect of resurrection in which time acts as the arbiter between rationality and emotivity.

As the poem juxtaposes radiance with nothingness and faith is offered through force, if there is anything that remains unknown, *syntactic thought* as poetic, emotive expression through a singular rationality demonstrates the poet’s compelling belief in the power of words to communicate beyond the here and now. *Ne plus ultra* is a means of reaching a state of *areté* in his attempt to achieve the ultimate goal of human knowledge and creativity. The rational questions upon which life is based are the foundation of his ingenious creativity. “Objetos” as the last poem of the volume, expansive in its reach, encompass the poet’s metaphysical concerns with time, faith, tranquility, and the afterlife:

Al final, el año de la eternidad termina,  
las horas son tan sabias que lo saben.  
Es tan simple, que hasta parece fácil:  
por creer en la otra vida, esta llega.  
(Poco necesita la resurrección para  
responder al organismo en persona.)  
Alrededor del resplandor nada sigue,  
la fe a la fuerza tiene plazo hasta hoy.  
Si algo queda para ser desconocido,  
en el Cielo las cosas podrán decirlo,  
las palabras, escribirse unas a otras. (283)

Through the blending of imagination and rationalism we have uncovered the means by which Espina addresses the doubt that surrounds his understanding as to the

meaning of death. The poet's attempt to achieve the ultimate goal of human creativity is not hindered by his concerns with metaphysical ideas; instead, Espina finds the "in-between" space that allows his creativity to reflect philosophical concerns that go beyond simple descriptive prosody. In this poetic process, we see the culmination of a poet's progression from restlessness and angst to a state of spiritual stillness as the former sense of *horror vacui* is replaced by a sense of being at its fullest; as in Heaven, words continue to proliferate. This moment is achieved for Espina when comprehension and understanding come together based on a rational belief system within a creative mind as the forces that construct and hold in place his metaphysical world.

### ***The Present Responds to the Past***

Life's most important questions, found in Lezama Lima's statement "The greatest things are understood incomprehensibly," are also a concern in Wittgenstein's proposition that "We feel that even if *all possible* scientific questions be answered, the problems of life have still not been touched at all" (*T* #6.52). The paradoxical nature of both ideas is explored through Eduardo Espina's mourning poetry in which questions as to what occurs after death are reshaped by his reaching beyond normal parameters of communication in his quest to "incomprehensibly understand" the issues surrounding death.

As previously discussed, Kamenzain and Kozer work to elevate ways of thinking about what it means to communicate with the deceased through poetry that strives to reach those who now dwell in another realm. Espina also sees his poems as a



form of communication with the deceased, leading to the understanding that through them, he not only speaks to his readers about life and death, but communicates with the departed on these matters as well. Espina creates observable communication utilizing *syntactic thought*, in which syntactic and semantic indeterminacy create a deviation from established rules to become the link that fills the lacuna by connecting with those who are no longer able to do so in traditional forms.

Enrique Mallén asserts that Espina is one language poet who places the greatest demands on the *syntactic thought* of the poem.<sup>337</sup> He bases this proposal on the proposition that the most straightforward meaning of a word is multiplied from the moment an attempt is made to define it (25). Following Saussure, Mallén<sup>338</sup> points out that the verbal or written sign is a part of physical reality, while meaning has no other reality apart from that which the word signifies (25). These ideas point the way for the argument that Espina's utilization of *syntactic thought* goes beyond normal discourse to reach past the meaning of what we know to be the traditional ways of looking at death.

Espina utilizes *syntactic thought* and the linguistic practices of his vocation to express [as did Kamenszain with *espiritismo*<sup>339</sup>] the poetic link between his voice and

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<sup>337</sup> From *Poesía del Lenguaje* "uno de los poetas de idioma que mayores exigencias deposita en el pensamiento sintáctico del poema." p. 25.

<sup>338</sup> My translation.

<sup>339</sup> In our personal interview Kamenszain describes *espiritismo* as "La poesía empuja la lengua hacia el 'espiritismo,' tratando de empujar para ver si se puede decir lo que no se puede decir. Eso, yo creo que es una pulsión de vida que tiene la poesía de avanzar más y de decir más aunque no se encuentren las palabras. Me parece que esa es una pulsión de vida, y la única manera que tenemos de hablar de la muerte es desde esta pulsión. Eso es también una elección de vida que a su vez sale de la muerte, digamos. No se puede pensar muerte sin vida, no es pensable."

the voices of the dead. Understanding the use of *syntactic thought* as an agent of change allows the poet to transform it into an object of communication between the living and the dead and permits the reader to explore language in these terms as well. Divergent from many of Espina's previous poems, and revelatory as a discerning aspect of *syntactic thought* in TLQ, the poet's thoughts and ideas on language as well as the subject matter of mourning are framed within brief verses that act as fragmental thoughts combined with longer extended phrases that act as longer considerations.

The title of Espina's "Octubre 27, 2010"<sup>340</sup> (*Hace dos años, la vida tenía dos años menos*) ("Octubre 27") has great significance for the poet, not only historically as the date the former Argentine President Néstor Kirchner, a mythical figure, died, but as the date the poet returned to Uruguay for his mother's funeral. The poet relies on the use of citation<sup>341</sup> to refer to the French poet Paul Claudel, as well as the Bible, in order to transmit or shift meaning to the present. This simulacrum, Calabrese points out, "gives the appearance of a *modernity* conceived from all epochs and coexistence of the probable with the real" (182). Through this textual effect Espina creates ambiguity and distorts time as he rewrites his own personal history.

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<sup>340</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/oct/28/nelson-mandela-obituary>.

<sup>341</sup> From Calabrese's *Neobaroque*, in which he points out the process of citation, which can work in two ways—by authorizing a past interpretation or valorizing the present in its reformulation of the past—both producing very different results. (179–182).

Known for his lyrical inspiration and a prophetic quality to his poetry originating from his faith in God, Paul Claudel (1868–1955),<sup>342</sup> French poet and essayist, like Espina, is Catholic. And so begins “Octubre 27” with its descriptive yet reflexive construction, identifying Claudel first, then his vocation as poet and Catholic, followed with a quotation: “Dijo en otra parte Paul Claudel, poeta muy católico: ‘Escucho. No siempre comprendo, pero igual respondo’” (269). Claudel’s words echo the metaphysical as well as the more temporal conflict the speaker deals with as part of human existence.

The poet turns to the Bible in order to seek answers to this conflict, “Tal como en la Biblia, donde no todo el olvido está perdido” (269). It falls to the wind to respond, “porque la fe no sabe cómo...” While the poem is written in a straightforward manner with commonly used words, without background [on the works by Claudel] or a good handle on the Bible, the citation creates ambiguity, the difficulty of which Steiner refers to as ontological. However, this difficulty can become comprehensible through interpretation of the grammatical, contextual, and syntactical choices of the poet.

Returning to the first line, the main clause, “Dijo en otra parte Paul Claudel,” is followed by the coordinate clause in which the poet describes an aspect of Claudel, “poeta muy católico...” (269). The verses are written in short phrases and are joined through serial commas and conjunctions after “Biblia,” “perdido,” “como,” “vivir,” and “dicen,” as well frequent end stops. This quality creates an additive nature to the poem to

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<sup>342</sup> Claudel’s predecessors, including the *poetes maudits* Baudelaire, Verlaine, and Rimbaud, were known for their interest in sin and occultism, yet all completed their lives as Catholics. Rimbaud in particular helped bring Claudel to belief. <http://www.thecatholicthing.org/columns/2012/in-praise-of-paul-claudel.html>.

give the effect of spontaneity and change. As one phrase extends into the next, the longer phrases are constructed by parataxis, which connects the main clause with a coordinate clause in each case, carrying the experience forward. Each of the subjects mentioned is seemingly unconnected at first, due to the poet's organization of the experiences, but we see in the final line, "pues la vida son las propias palabras," that through *syntactic thought*, the subject of the poem itself is unified by the filtered experience of the relationship of life to language:

Dijo en otra parte Paul Claudel, poeta muy católico: "Escucho. No siempre comprendo, pero igual respondo". Tal como en la Biblia, donde no todo el olvido está perdido, cabe al albedrío del abrego responder, porque la fe no sabe cómo, ni menos quedarse a vivir, a contar los recuerdos que ayudan a resucitar según dicen, pues la vida son las propias palabras y su sentido los años añadidos a uno. (269)

The poet's attention is drawn away from the emotions and toward the function of words in order to address the difficult subject of death. This link with death is written in more direct poetic discourse than was found in Espina's past aesthetics, "Voy despacio, como haciéndole caso al silencio al seguir de largo" (269). This carefully selected syntax communicates directly to the reader the poet's advancement in learning how to communicate with those abiding in the hereafter. A new vernacular is first necessary in order to open the lines of communication in which words hold a different weight than previously understood or utilized, "Palabras que nunca antes había escrito: velatorio, exequias, mortaja, crematorio," all associated with death become part of the poet's new world, one previously unknown to the poet, in which the means of communication (much as with new technology in current times) must be established.

The reader is told in unequivocal terms that the motivation for this new language is the speaker's desire to communicate with the interred, "el valor del número para los enterrados," and is reinforced by "la importancia de tener palmeras por si el alma al subir las necesita" (269). Espina reaches the pinnacle of intimacy that marks a level of communion in which intelligence allows the poet to find a sense of resolution. There is no lack or inadequacy of words in this moment, as abstraction becomes a concrete form of reality through language the dead can understand. Espina now speaks with and for those who can no longer communicate with the living:

Voy despacio, como haciéndole caso al silencio al seguir de largo.  
De un tiempo a esta parte pude aprender el sentido de camposanto,  
la ubicación de las tumbas, el valor del número para los enterrados,  
la importancia de tener palmeras por si el alma al subir las necesita.  
Palabras que nunca antes había escrito: velatorio, exequias, mortaja,  
crematorio, aproximan la lengua a la prosodia donde se siente sorda.  
(269).

The sense of death becomes a presence, and without being said, it is intimated that Espina is describing the surroundings found within a cemetery. The poet makes a turn in his thinking process, "Salvo que la memoria disponga lo contrario" (269), meaning that life goes on as he leaves, "ilesos del resultado." This *volta* is written in narrative form and is the link in communication that connects the poet and the dead as he speaks from the space beyond the grave to self-consciously reflect a perspective on death: "... a los muertos no les importa qué opinión puedan tener los días" (269). In contrast to the earlier verse, beginning with "Voy despacio," the poet now flees, "huyo del clavel del aire," from the cemetery and the dead, "con el que otros han hecho un aroma mejor." Memory steps aside as the atmospheric flowering plant evokes the imagery of this flight:

Salvo que la memoria disponga lo contrario, salgo ileso del resultado.  
Aquí a los muertos no les importa qué opinión puedan tener los días,  
huyo del clavel del aire con el que otros han hecho un aroma mejor. (269)

The final emotive verses of the poem begin with a syntactic shift that reflects the poet's state of mind, "Si el mundo es como ahora, entonces dejar al mundo como si fuera" (269), as one in which the desire for a return to how things were before offers little consolation. Language, and poetry in particular, replace religion as an answer to the possibility of another life after this, and time is a key element to which explanations serve no purpose in the infinite beyond. The expression of the inexpressible is accomplished, and the inadequacy of language to express grief ("para la tristeza, se animan,") is overturned through the syntactical contact among "pensamiento," "tiempo," and "explicaciones." Espina blends intellectual reality and the metaphysical world, in which the language of poetry operates on a different level, not only for those living in the world beyond this one, but for the poet and reader left behind who seek answers to these questions.

Yet in the end, while death surrounds us all, there is still life to be had, and the religious imagery of the many resurrected souls awaken, "las almas, un montón para la tristeza, se animan." The formal logic of "Octubre 27, 2010" (*Hace dos años, la vida tenía dos años menos*) concerns time and longing for both a physical as well as a metaphysical return of lost souls. In the search for consolation, the poet seeks communication with the dead in the midst of this scarcity in the existing world:

Si el mundo es como ahora, entonces dejar al mundo como si fuera.  
Empeñado en ser parte del pensamiento, el tiempo prefiere la falta  
de explicaciones: las almas, un montón para la tristeza, se animan. (269)

*Syntactic thought* for Eduardo Espina is a way of thinking that goes beyond space and time. With a focus on language, his mourning poems express the emotive as well as the realistic and rational feelings we all experience in dealing with what it means to live and to die. While the “greatest things” remain incomprehensible and all the mysteries of life remain unsolved and are most likely to remain that way, we can, like Espina, find solace in metaphysical ideas that take us outside the easily accepted yet unfulfilling excess of sentimentality and toward a better understanding of the value the act of writing plays in the expression of life’s experiences through our connection with words.

### ***Time is the Essence***

In the previously discussed poem “Monólogo del fin al presentarlo: “Que pase el que sigue” (*Causas sin un único regreso*),” Espina writes these words: “Tarde vine a comprender la importancia de vivir para decirlo” (256). The subject of “lateness” in the poetic works of Kozler and Kamenszain, as with Espina’s, acts as the marker of a caesura from their previous style of Neobaroque writing. Espina locates his own “*poésie de la entre-deux*” within the comparison of poetry written during the beginning years of his career and the more recent poems found in TLQ. The poet had previously stipulated in a personal interview with the author of this dissertation the belief that he would absolutely never touch the topic of death in his poetry. The inherent reason for this belief, the poet claims is due primarily to the belief that poetry should not be written as an elegy, but a

form that one elects as a part of life, to be written absolutely in the moment, in the present; not as a part of death, but of life lived in plentitude.<sup>343</sup>

This perspective is a dominant trait of Espina's work and the substance of *areté's* magnitude, found not only in poetry, but in a specific attitude of life lived in the moment, in which valor as well as an understanding of emotion is essential. The poet's recent experience has taught him that what separates life from death can easily be severed, and writing about death is all encircled by its presence. In this way, life and death infuse his poetry with the metaphysical understanding that in order to speak of death, one must have an understanding of life's significance.

This shift lifts Espina's [as well as Kozer's and Kamenszain's] previously barred decision to include sentiment in poetry as a result of a close proximity to death, and the subsequent recognition of life's impermanence. Espina remarks that while writing TLQ, at a certain moment he was overcome by the feeling of death's nearness,<sup>344</sup> which form verses in TLQ like those from "Cuando includo"— "En cada idea difícil del tiempo, /sucede lo invisible. Estoy,/donde el orden comienza. / Salgo del origen como soy./ ¡Qué silencio, qué nada a punto de llegar! /Ayúdame, alma" (263). With the recognition of his own transience, mourning poetry becomes the demonstration of life lived, and TLQ stands as a form of twilight song for the poet. In this way, the mystery surrounding life and death is linked to the subject of "lateness" as well as themes of time, memory, nostalgia and exile.

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<sup>343</sup> Appendix C. Translated from our personal interview.

<sup>344</sup> Appendix C.



Jeremy Lewison<sup>345</sup> in *Turner Monet and Twombly: Later Paintings* (2012) writes that art is a means to “assuage the devastating blow to the narcissistic ego that feels injured by the relentless creep of age” (38) and repeats psychoanalyst Elliot Jacques<sup>346</sup> claim that the presentiment of death often occurs most frequently from middle age onward, engendered by the death of a parent, or perhaps a close friend (38). Although the arguments for and against late-style continue, the issue of biography does play a part in determining how and when an artist presents a certain style or change to his work. Whether this change is attributed to nostalgia, or a metaphysical longing, or other features, the deaths of each of these poets’ parents, and their age at the time, does appear to have an influence on these works as put forth throughout this dissertation, substantiating the claim that there is an apparent swerve in their poetic practice.

Svetlana Boym reminds us that the aesthetic lure of nostalgia demonstrates both an intellectual sense and its emotional tug as she defines contemporary nostalgia as a “mourning for the impossibility of mythical return” or for the “loss of an enchanted world” (8). With no clear borders or values to define it, nostalgia, she continues, “can be

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<sup>345</sup> From *Turner Monet and Twombly: Later Paintings* Tate Publishing, 2012. Author Lewison points out beginning with the twentieth century, there has been a considerable increase in the interest in what is known as “late style.” This is partly attributed, he writes, to the fact that more people live to a mature age, and the portion of the population over sixty is constantly growing. In addition, he points out that the boundaries between mid-life and old age have slipped since the period of the artists in this exhibition. The author determines that nowadays, old age seems to begin somewhere between seventy and eighty, and therefore unsurprising there are so many practicing artists of mature years (60–61). Although the arguments for and against late-style continue, the issue of biography does play a part in determining what an artist produces, and the deaths of each of these poet’s parents, and their age at the time, does appear to have an influence on these works and the suggested appearance of a swerve in these works.

<sup>346</sup> From *Death and the Mid-Life Crisis* (1965): 502–14. Jacques writes that this is the moment when one’s youthful feeling of immortality is transmuted to a strong sense of mortality.

seen as a secular expression of a spiritual longing, a nostalgia for an absolute, a home that is both physical and spiritual, the edenic unity of time and space before entry into history” (8). As a result, the nostalgic poet attempts to express the relationship among the past, present, and future in the search for what Boym calls “a spiritual addressee” (8).

In building upon Boym’s mention of nostalgia [as the secular expression of a spiritual longing, as nostalgia for an absolute, and as the search for both a physical and spiritual home], C.S. Lewis further develops this phenomenon of intense longing in *The Pilgrim’s Regress* (1958).<sup>347</sup> Lewis’ allegory represents the author’s search for meaning and spiritual satisfaction, a search that eventually leads him to Christianity. This alternative perspective sheds additional light on this discussion as it specifically relates to metaphysical questions of life and death. Lewis explains that Romanticism was called “nostalgia” based on moments remembered:

“If only I were there,” “If I could only go back to those days” or one thinks he is wishing that such a place existed and that he could reach them. In a context with erotic suggestions he believes he is desiring the perfect beloved or he may think that he is hankering for real magic and occultism, or he may confuse it with the intellectual craving for knowledge... But every one of these impressions he knows from experience to be wrong. (8)

Lewis suggests that man must come to the clear knowledge that the human soul was made to enjoy some object that is never fully given...“in our present mode of subjective and spatio-temporal experience...and that these people seem to be condemning what they did not understand” (11). Supported by Boym’s and Lewis’s

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<sup>347</sup> *The Pilgrim’s Regress* is the allegorical tale of the everyman character, John, and his odyssey to an enchanting isle that has created in him an intense longing that Lewis describes as “a mysterious sweet desire.”

claim, the following discussion holds that TLQ expresses the poet's thoughts on the relationship between the feeling of nostalgia for lost time and memories and the spiritual longing for an absolute understanding of life's mystery. This desire for both a physical and spiritual home that offers a profound sense of belonging is for the poet, as with most humans, common to our humanity and resonates in Espina's mourning poems through the connection between time and memory.

Boym writes that it is the effect of time on memory that hinders memory's presence and blurs its details, and in so doing, renders the familiar strange and causes the estranged to appear more familiar (50). This claim is exemplified as Espina alludes to the fact that the works in TLQ began with a feeling of sadness generated by the loss of his parents but that over time his feelings have become one of nostalgia for many things. This estrangement from the familiar is solidified by the poet's accounting of the fact that while exiled from Uruguay, he was not close to his parents and was unable to visit with them often. This alienation from his homeland and parental home leads to the subject of exile in Espina's poetics of mourning.

When speaking on the subject of exile, Espina uses the example of the experience of Gustav Mahler, who he himself considered to be a stateless individual, "as a bohemian in Austria, as an Austrian among Germans, and as a Jew in the rest of the world." Espina considers himself stateless as well, "as an foreigner in Uruguay, as a Uruguayan among Americans and as a poet in a world with no room for poets."<sup>348</sup> The

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<sup>348</sup> In an interview with Mónica Colominas Aparicio, translated by Elisa Gallego Rooseboom.

poet explains the paradoxical nature of exile found in writing poetry: “When I write poetry, most often I feel that I don’t belong to any country; in one mode, I belong to the country of the mind, and this country is full of languages, voices and syntax, whose origin is one and many at the same time.”<sup>349</sup> Voices, syntax, and language all blend together to express the poet’s experience of absence and his search for the return of the familiar. In “El olvido, deshabitado (*El pasado, con ellos, en pretérito*)” (“El olvido”), *horror vacui* represents the absence found within exile.

“El olvido” is one of Espina’s most lyrical, yet shortest poems, as well as one composed of extremely concise verses. The title of the poem personifies memory as something forgotten and presence as something now absent, both now a part of the past. The poem begins with the self-conscious act of referencing language [*syntactic thought*] to introduce *horror vacui* through the negatives “Nada” and “no” in “Nada que no sepamos / su nombre” (265). The alliterated *s* in “sepamos,” “su,” and “se” connects the first three lines, creating a rhythmic chain within the verses (265).

The poem’s aesthetic word play is composed of the use of these negatives and juxtaposed with “deja ver en el habla,” which can be read in succession, much like a cinematic frame in which each word is revealed in its own moment. This play on words continues with parallelism in “Cada letra / trae algo, cada forma / es una idea por adivinar” (265), in which words become about ideas. The emphasis on the lines underscores their unity. The enjambment carries the thought to verses, which end with the lyrical “una herida de las únicas.” Both implicitly and explicitly, the relationship

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<sup>349</sup> Appendix C.

between absence and the importance of language as a means to break the silence are found in the opening lines of “El olvido.” Both of these essential features are elements that the poet strives to present within his collection of poems in TLQ:

Nada que no sepamos  
su nombre se deja ver  
en el habla. Cada letra  
traerá otras, cada forma  
es una idea por adivinar,  
una herida de las únicas. (265)

The association between the use of “words” needed to describe the “events” in the following verses is accomplished through fragmentary association: “los labios...lo toleran,” “los hechos...tal cual,” and “la luz habla.” The lineation breaks up the text through a mix of parsing and end-stopped lines. In this way, the associative juxtaposition of meaning must be inferred by the reader as well, when the *fractured mind* speaks of events unknown to the reader (“Con los hechos,” “la luz,”). This aesthetic formal element creates a collage effect at the conclusion, “hasta que la entienden.” The relative linearity of the verses makes the relationship between the verses implicit as opposed to explicit, yet content and meaning are partially suppressed and left open to the reader’s interpretation:

Los labios igual lo toleran:  
Su deber ha sido aprendido.  
Con los hechos tal cual  
dan cuenta –en ese orden–,  
la luz habla por ambos,  
hasta que la entienden. (265)

The formal properties Espina ingeniously employs in the following selection include multiple repetitions of various consonantal and alliterative combinations that

contribute to the poem's elegiac lyricism. The poet creates a balanced vocalic rhyme, achieving a melodic sonority by the repeated phonemes *am* and *im* in "también" and "clima." The close repetition of identical consonant sounds before and after the *ie* in "viene" and the *e* in "verse" is fundamental to the internal pattern of rhyme. The formal properties of the first three lines are produced by their enjambment, "Entienden también al / clima mientras viene / a verse en el espejo" (265), while the anthropomorphization of "Los labios" visually captures the reader imagination as these verses advance the poem toward the coming ideas.

The fluidity of Espina's verses is constructed by the alliteration of *n* and *m* in "menos amanecer" along with the vocalic rhyme of their vowels. This pattern continues in the third line with the run-on of the diphthong created by the ending *e* of "muerte" and the beginning *o* of "obliga". In the final verse, the internal phonetic repetition of "cur" in "blancura," and "oscuridad" completes the unity of lyricism on this thought in the poem. The inversion of vocalic and consonantal sounds throughout found in "la," "al," "lo," and "la" completes this perfect example of poetry in motion from the perspectives of both content as well as form.

The poem introduces the subject of death in a *volta* with the lyrical "la muerte obliga a descubrir / el plan de lo invisible, a la /blancura en la oscuridad." The analogy is written with everyday descriptive language applied to a metaphysical statement obscured by imaginative and lyrical verse. Lezama Lima's previously quoted phrase, "the eternally enigmatic other side of things, both of the obscure or distant, and the clear and immediate....," expresses Espina's juxtaposing of "a la blancura en la oscuridad." In

these lines, the poet begins to touch upon the metaphysical that will run through the rest of the poem:

Entienden también al  
clima mientras viene  
a verse en el espejo.  
¿Mira por él la noche?  
Según el cielo lo hace saber  
los días que al menos amanece,  
la muerte obliga a descubrir  
el plan de lo invisible, a la  
blancura en la oscuridad. (265)

Time and its symbolic meaning is an important subject in the poem: “Como si de eso se tratara / a su debido momento la / mente entrará a la casa a / quedarse quieta en casi todo, / a quitar objetos y adjetivos.” “Objetos” is polysemic in meaning since it may refer to objects in the home or as a link to *syntactic thought* throughout as a linguistic reference associated with “Adjetivos.” The symbolism of “la casa” is juxtaposed with “la mente” to represent a space of memory and nostalgia for the time that has been lost. Additionally, the longing for “la casa” represents exile from Espina’s native home of Uruguay as well as both his earthly and spiritual homes. The home is the space of *syntactic thought* where the poetic world of words dwells.

Espina questions the events surrounding this awakening to the challenges facing him in the following query: “¿Qué detalle debería / agregarse al mundo / para que las palabras sepan quién las dijo?” (265). This question is fundamental to the poet’s *syntactical thought* in which poeticity itself is placed at the center. The referential significance of Espina’s poetic proposition becomes a part of physical reality in which poetry, as more than a sum of its parts, is transformed into the only known factor in the

poet's inquiry and serves as a means to adequately fulfill the connection among poetry, man, and God. Consequently, it is *syntactic thought* that links Espina to the word and ultimately to the universe as his *poetic areté* pushes beyond normal discourse to reach further toward a poetic expression of what he understands death to be.

The line "A menos que ellas digan lo contrario" refers back to "words" as the subject at hand, linking the end of the poem to previous thoughts. The end-stopped line following the comma after "contrario" opens the rest of the poem to Espina's intellectual concern with the transience of time. Continuing in representative language, the final verses give the poem profound weight, "el pensamiento que / costó tanto planear." The repetition of "que" in the first and fourth verses lends a fragmented parallelism to the enjambed verses "el pensamiento que" with "ejemplo de lo que." The significance of time as synchronic ("cuando el pasado") is juxtaposed with "sigue de largo" as diachronic time:

el pensamiento que  
costó tanto planear  
se transforma en  
ejemplo de lo que  
podemos llegar a ser  
cuando el pasado en  
su sitio aprenda a  
seguir de largo. (266)

In "El olvido" we see the metaphysical weight of time expressed in two particular moments. The first moment concerns a synchronic approach to time and demonstrates Espina's temporal state of mind and the effects current events have on the present moment of his life, expressed by "se transforma en / ejemplo de lo que /



podemos llegar a ser” along with verses ”Con los hechos tal cual dan cuenta...” and “— en ese orden—” (265), followed by “Entienden también al clima cuando viene...” (265), and lastly “A su debido momento / la mente entrará” (265). The effects of synchronic time on the poetization of Espina’s autobiographical memory is fundamental to symbolically and formally convey the imaginative construction and emotional approach found in his work.

The second moment is expressed through the poet’s approach to diachronic time, in which the evolution of his questioning of metaphysical concerns spans over time and has no answers: “¿Qué detalle deberá / agregarse al mundo / para que las palabras / adivinen quién las dijo?” (265). Other references to this approach include “cada forma / es una idea por fuera, / una herida de las únicas,” or “la muerte obliga a conocer / el plan de lo invisible, la / blancura en la oscuridad,” and “la mente entrará a la / casa a estar en casi todo...” (265). With diachronic time, Espina seeks an identifiable source— something or someone (“un detalle”), that can offer historical and verifiable understanding of an unexplainable world. To this extent, we see the poet’s concern with the loss of the past and a future without certainty as he looks for meaning through a focus on time that goes beyond time as an earthly understanding.

*Horror vacui* creates a metaphysical longing for an absolute through a desire to restore the original sense of home on two levels: the physical home created by the mother and father that no longer exists, and a spiritual home to replace the absence of spiritual uncertainty and death. For Espina, the subject of time does matter as it impacts many facets of his past life experiences as well as the future interpretation of these

events. Seen from both a synchronic as well as a diachronic perspective, the concern with time provides the poet with a creative space to generate anti-sentimental yet emotional poems on the subject of mourning as a means to go beyond the everyday and to achieve poetic *areté* as the ultimate goal of his own knowledge and creativity in his search for life's ultimate meaning.

### **All That Was...and Will Ever Be**

*Ne plus ultra* is the proposed axiom for Eduardo Espina's mourning poetry due to the conspicuous level of ingenuity and the poet's absolute certainty in language that goes beyond conventional communication. This distinction is revealed through his synthesis of various genealogical lines endowed with the absorptive proficiency he has acquired over time and from a wide range of traditions.

These traditions range from Spain's Golden Age with Góngora's *culteranismo* to England's Metaphysical poetry that returns us to the poetry of John Donne. From the Modernist period, the influence of the French Symbolists Mallarmé, Baudelaire, and Rimbaud is comparable to that found later in works by North American poets William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens, and T.S. Eliot. This trajectory culminates within the domain of Latin America's Neobaroque and its relationship to US Language poetry during a particularly critical moment in Eduardo Espina's corpus of poetic works. These far-reaching influences have revealed the fact that his *neobarrocó* spirit is one that spans space and time.

Originating with the Greek idea of *areté*, a term used in all disciplines to mean “excellence,” *poetic areté* describes the originality of Espina’s contemplation as excellence at the highest level of the intellect’s capacity. *Poetic areté* intellectualizes and thereby neutralizes sentimentality as it addresses mourning and loss as part of the fundamental condition of life. Consequently, the designation of *ne plus ultra* is titled as such due to the consideration of Espina as a poet’s poet: one who gives everything to his art, who internalizes and responds to the pulse of the moment, and to whom not only his contemporaries but a whole new generation of poets look up to with great respect.

In *ne plus ultra* we see the poet’s consistent use of *horror vacui*, *syntactic thought*, and *fractured thought* [or *mind*] as strategies in the creation of his exceptional poems. Espina’s connection to the Baroque idea of *horror vacui* surfaces through his desire to fill gaps, layer meanings, and fill blank space. Within this idea, through the prolific density of word use and a focus on the details of physical properties, Espina’s verses escalate in tempo until the final word through the thematic context of *horror vacui*. Employing each of these strategies to the extreme, he brings the issue of death and nothingness to the forefront throughout TLQ.

As part of Espina’s *ne plus ultra* attitude toward mourning, *syntactic thought* demonstrates his self-reflexive use of language and the referential understanding that follows and leads to the expansion of his poetic discourse. *Syntactic thought* appears in poems when the simplest meaning of a word is multiplied into new meanings. Subsequently, the use of syntactic and semantic indeterminacy veers from established rules of usage, leaving the reader with the inability to understand language as a fixed

entity. The structures of Espina's poems test the limits of language by drawing out semantic meaning not normally prescribed to in non-poetic discourse.

Espina turns to *syntactic thought* to speak to the poeticity of language as poetry about poetry, and, in so doing, creates an ambiguity that defers emotion through the syntactical features of the poem itself. In this way, the formal parameters of Espina's language games found in *syntactic thought* make it possible to establish a relationship between what he writes and how he writes it. Espina used *his* own all-encompassing language to assign the specific meaning he intends in the poem's creation in which he metaphorically expresses memory through the construction of the self.

The poet's perspective of the world is perceived as one seen through the kaleidoscopic vision of a *fractured mind* or as *fractured thought*. Trauma, resulting from the death of his mother [that subsequently suffused into grief for his father],<sup>350</sup> triggers a state of mind in collision with reality in which old ways of thinking have been shattered but new ways of seeing are opened up. The poet's mind in mourning has absorbed unexpected ideas and feelings to create a fragmentation that goes beyond the everyday, extending deeply into his psyche, in which death has splintered all previous modes of thought.

*Fractured thought* exists within the strategies of bricolage that correspond with other poetic strategies including collage, juxtaposition, and mosaic. The connection between Espina's strategy of *fractured thought* and Calabrese's idea of the vague,

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<sup>350</sup> In our personal interview, Espina explains that it was with the death of his mother that he became truly cognizant of the earlier loss of his father, the result being a simultaneous awareness of the loss of both parents.

indefinite, and indistinct is conceptualized as a movement that can be applied to a particular object or subject of discourse, or to the discourse itself, and manifests into a form of roving around in its own content. To this extent, the breakdown of thought into compartmentalized arrangements becomes expressive of the fragmentation of the poet's thought process, and is used as a means of creating an indirect style of representation.

The effect of Espina's *fractured mind* creates a sense of uncertainty with respect to future experiences. Through *syntactic thought* the poet uses *fragmented thoughts* to express the inexpressible. Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* and Marjorie Perloff's *Wittgenstein's Ladder* are traced through *syntactic thought* and the *fractured mind* in proposing Espina's language game to be one through which he has discovered the means to develop an aesthetic that now supports an emotional component to his poetry.

The ekphrastic element of Espina's poetry makes possible an approach to reading his poems that allows the reader to work through the obstacles of density, fragmentation, and obscurity. The use of Bruce Stiehm's "imagen multivalente" and "oración calidoscópica" further enhance this reading by providing a new way to see the relationship among author, text, and reader. Stiehm's notion has been added to in this investigation by the suggestion that the reader's engagement with Espina's mourning poetry becomes part of the poetic process in which death became a conscious experience. This experience allows the reader to not only take part in the choices among multiple interpretations, but additionally, to visualize on an individual level the meaning of the images, rhythms, sounds, dictions, and historical context of the poems.

Time and its relation to the metaphysical are interpreted in synchronic and diachronic moments through the connection with nostalgia, exile, lateness, and memory. Espina's approach to synchronic time expresses not only his concern, but ours as well, as we share his temporal state of mind and the effects of life events on the present moment of our corporeal existence. The present becomes the only time there is, as death has voided any other possibility than the way things exist for us at a particular moment. Time is at the root of what makes us human, part of which is found in our efforts to change what is immediately occurring in our lives, and ultimately to transcend death. Espina's temporal state of mind is symbolically conveyed through metaphysical poetry, and we are drawn in due to the nature of our involvement with these moments.

Diachronic time goes beyond the circumstantial span of time in the poet's search for an identifiable source that offers historical and verifiable meaning to our imperfect world. The allure of Espina's poetry endures as a result of the tension between the past, the present, and the future giving his poetry its characteristic vitality. As so, time is embedded within the poet's consciousness as the essence of his cosmovision of the world. A worldview in which the multitude of what can be known is portrayed for all time in poetry that voices consciousness through the sensations of emotional and rational thoughts, and the abstractions of life and death.

Espina's mourning poetry attains transcendence in verses that awaken the mind to a new intensity through the contemplation of what poetic imagination signifies when it is capable of penetrating the very soul. *Todo lo que ha sido para siempre una sola vez* (*Poemas a partir de la muerte del padre y de la madre*) reflects the poet's connection

with the Neobaroque through its self-conscious reflexivity, along with its attention to fragmentation and focus on the discontinuity of life. Yet it also resonates with an experimental originality that voices the emotional remembrance of others who have ceased living. This dual aspect is echoed in “An Answer in Search of Three Questions (*The first words that silence found*).”<sup>351</sup> Fragmentation and discontinuity are visually and aurally emphasized within the impact of the sudden and brief staccato lines, “Blindly,” “Like crazy,” “Knowing,” “At point blank,” intensified by repetition and accumulation in, “Blindly and madly,” along with the imagery of “clenched teeth” before this incisive fragmentation is halted with the unanticipated discontinuity of “Willy-nilly”. The poem’s play of line against word grabs our attention through the endowment of language with significant purpose and meaning.

In the verses, “Before which of these intrusive expressions / can the words *love* /and *death* be placed—not always in that order—” Espina addresses the emotional impact death has had on him through ingenious word play; and the uncertainty in all that remains unknown, “and to say something about life, when it is such?” In the words of Gaston Bachelard, “we are able to experience resonances, sentimental repercussions, [and] reminders of our past” (xxiii) in the unequalled potency of his poetry. Espina creates common ground between the poet and the reader, the poetic and the personal,

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<sup>351</sup> “An Answer in Search of Three Questions (*The first words that silence found*)” is Carl Goode’s translation of the Spanish version of Espina’s poem “Una respuesta en busca de tres preguntas (Las primeras palabras que el silencio encontró” found in *Quiero escribir, pero me sale Espina* (267).

through striking imagery and meticulous word choice as a reminder of the complexity of life and death, and the remembrance of all that is lost:

Blindly.  
Like crazy.

Often.  
Knowing.  
At point blank.  
In all directions.  
In cold blood.  
Against the grain.  
Blindly and madly.  
Through clenched teeth.  
Willy-nilly.

Before which of these intrusive expressions can the words *love* and *death* be placed—not always in that order—and to say something about life, when it is such?

(The answer, as with the crossed words in newspapers, is on the following page. But not yet)

The reader's captivation with Espina's poetry derives from an appreciation for how his poetic genius functions. A poetic genius built on his insuppressible curiosity and conspicuous intelligence, which have taken his poetry to a level few poets have been able to reach. His heightened sensitivity and artfulness augment his original perspective on life and the creative process, making him the consummate image of the true poet. Espina's originality is impacted by his *poetic areté* in which he chooses not to opt for sentimentality as part of the narration of his response to tragic circumstances. Instead,



*Todo lo que ha sido para siempre una sola vez (Poemas a partir de la muerte del padre y de la madre)* is an exemplary work that stands on its own excellence.

The subject of mourning has absorbed much of the last ten years of Eduardo Espina's creative life—beginning on January 19, 2005, the date of the death of his father, and concluding on January 19, 2015. After a decade of interrogating lyrical and philosophical language and the boundaries between life and death through the scrutiny of metaphysical existence, the act of writing mourning poetry has forever transformed Eduardo Espina's perception of the creative process due to his engagement with sentiment. The indestructible force that responds to our own sense of being arises for all time through this consummate lyricist who makes emphatic the moments we all share as part of life's journey.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

The innovative research carried out in this investigation offers an original perspective into recent<sup>352</sup> transformations occurring in Latin American Neobaroque poetry as a result of thought-provoking mourning poetry written by José Kozer, Tamara Kamenszain, and Eduardo Espina. Drawn in by the eloquence of each poet's aesthetic form, along with the moving portrayal of the subject matter of mourning, I was compelled to critically investigate the questions that arose through reading this poetry, which has resulted in a tremendous body of work that promises to add critical new dimensions to the corpus on Latin American mourning poetry as well as new avenues of research within the Neobaroque aesthetic. The significance of this investigation is supported by the evidence that these three Latin American lyricists are among the preeminent Neobaroque poets in Latin America today and is validated by the many awards and accolades each has received not only in Latin America but around the world as well.

Poetry that is ingenious yet disconcerting; the aspect of mourning, until now, has yet to be fully explored within the Neobaroque aesthetic and is done so here with elucidative results. Prior to this new dimension to the Neobaroque, twentieth-century Latin American mourning poetry that eulogized the Mother was found in poetic works

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<sup>352</sup> This dissertation concluded that research has failed to provide evidence of such a determinative shift in the Neobaroque since the inception of its boom period in the mid-1980s when it became a dominant poetic force in Latin America.

by César Vallejo, José Lezama Lima, and Juan Gelman. Gelman's *Carta a mi madre*<sup>353</sup> reflects on the loss of the mother from the perspective of exile, "recibí tu carta 20 días después de tu muerte y cinco minutos después de saber que / habías muerto..." Gelman's words, as we see with Kozler, Kamenszain, and Espina, reflect in detail the experience of grief that speaks to the complexity of the death experience.

This prodigious first line of inquiry is situated within the engaging premise that astutely conceptualizes how these three Latin American Neobaroque poets engage with sentiment in poetry written on the deaths of their parents in a poetic style known for its prominence as a form focused on language. The results of this exploration demonstrate not only the fact that language poetry is more than just a style of playing around with words, but with the inclusion of sentiment, it becomes a bold and unforeseen shift in the Neobaroque itself, one that opens the door to pronounced changes within this aesthetic.

American poet and critic Robert Hirsch<sup>354</sup> writes that: "The work of mourning becomes the work of art" (52). Kozler's art of mourning, *ACTA* expresses the poet's preoccupation with death as reflected through fragmentary reflections. For Kamenszain, the art of mourning focuses on memory in *El eco de mi madre* in which the poet searches for the remembrance of her mother through the echo of her fading voice. And for Espina, the movement of time from the past to the present and beyond becomes the art of mourning in *Todo lo que ha sido para siempre una sola vez (Poemas a partir de la muerte del padre y de la madre)*. These mourning poems are characterized by the

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<sup>353</sup> From *Libros de tierra firme* (1989). "I received your letter 20 days after your death and 5 minutes after learning you had died." (My translation).

<sup>354</sup> From an interview with Kevin Nance in *Poets and Writers*, Sept/Oct 2014. (p.52).

passing of loved ones while at the same time reflect on each poet's recognition that they are closer to death themselves. For the reader of mourning poetry, this experience becomes one of interpreting the personal moments lived by those who write on it as they understand it, but it also becomes a way of experiencing an aesthetic work of art that reflects these changes within the lines of the poetic form itself.

One of the originating ideas at the onset of this investigation was based on the belief that as a style, the Neobaroque showed no formalized understanding of the role emotion plays in its aesthetics. What was discovered in its place suggests that the Neobaroque after mourning is now a poetic space that indeed engages with sentiment. As a result of the sweeping research employed, it became imperative to determine the nature and level of the effect this development had on each poet's individual and unique creative style of writing poetry.

José Kozer's *ACTA* expresses autobiographical memory and subjectivity through the inhabited spaces of remembrance, and particularly in poems that herald the house and the significance of home to his life. Through the integration of the intellectual with the aesthetic, the poet disallows the "rhetorical fall" of sentimentality to overpower the message of his mourning poems. In "Diez días lleva mi madre", the poet's words "Músicas inciertas. /Aves a medias. Dios mismo en mi / madre complementándose" (31) reveal a poignant moment veiled within the awe of the sublime in his evocative comparison of his mother to God. Kozer's knowledge that comes from survival in the contemporary world has developed his intellectual and spiritual outlook on life.

Kozer's new approach is one of *sensibility* and shows two distinguishing features

that reinforced my claim that his mourning poems do engage with sentiment and that this characteristic enhances rather than obstructs the intellectuality of his poems. The first strategy, referred to as *hyper-rational art*, shows a quality of precision, characterized as a calculated rationality in the construction of a poem. The poet reinforces this claim with his assertion that it is the “poet’s inability to geometrically solve a poem” that leads to sentimentality.<sup>355</sup> I see this calculated approach to language as a break from previous claims found with *Carece de causa* that describe the linguistic aspects of his Neobaroque poetry as difficult, fragmented, and ambiguous. Instead, I claim that the poetic resolution in his poems is contextualized through a high level of mathematical precision.

The second strategy, based on the concept of *nothingness*, holds that while his poems are considered complex (due to the difficult nature of death), his belief in Zen Buddhist spirituality allows his poems to exhibit a delayed response to these new emotions. The result is imaginative and passionate yet critical and realistic poetry that speaks of emotion as well as rage, sadness, and loss on the one hand and the joy of life on the other, all expressed through poetic language that leaves the reader with a sense of the profundity of their own life circumstances.

In the case of Tamara Kamenszain, the loss of her mother creates a crisis that results in a process of poetic renovation and renewal that takes her to a new level since the poetization of the father’s death in *El Ghetto*. Different from this previous volume, the poet’s philosophical inquiry into the subject of death in *El eco de mi madre* is found

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<sup>355</sup> From my personal interview Kozer in January, 2010.

to contain profuse examples of sentiment as a result of bereavement. In “Mamá mamá mamá” the poet uses the autobiographical “I” to emphasize this heightened state of agitation “y sin embargo mamá mamá mamá / repito y viajo desde el sonido hasta la furia /no me alcanza lo que digo para no tropezarme” (39). In *El eco de mi madre*, Kamenzain implicitly demonstrates a caesura in the Neobaroque, “ahora podemos pasar a otra cosa como una vuelta de página.”<sup>356</sup> For this poet, emotion is developed within her *neoborroso* approach [derived from the Spanish verb “borrar” to erase], seen as a more direct approach to poetry, which breaks with the tendency toward indeterminacy characteristically found within the Neobaroque.

The poet’s *neoborroso* approach consists of three strategies, the first being her concept of *experiencia*, which she claims allows her to navigate beyond the limited understanding of the role of sentimentality and to redefine emotion as less personal by taking the focus off the poetic “I” to become more universal in meaning. In this way, mourning is an experience more likely to be shared by others. Next, the poet’s use of *espiritismo* allows her a means of communicating with the deceased through the poetic word. And lastly, *presentification* is the process Kamenzain turns to in order to renew and renovate past creative practices with the purpose of taking on new poetic forms. Together these practices form Kamenzain’s approach to mourning, imparting a new poetic space that affords her a more direct style than the previous Neobaroque. The result is poetry that can now be said to engage with feeling, yet still maintains an

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<sup>356</sup> From our personal interview in August of 2012.

intellectual approach directed toward a higher level than the simple value of an unmitigated focus on emotion.

Mourning has given Eduardo Espina a new found freedom to express his emotions never seen before in any of his previous poetic works. This change is accomplished through an intellectual aesthetic, which after mourning has become a poetic space that indeed engages with sentiment. In “Cuando incluso el tiempo está de más (*Viaje de ida al deseo de las preguntas*)” (31), the poet expresses this emotional freedom in the final verses of the poem, “...Estoy, / donde el orden comienza. / Salgo del origen como soy. / ¡Qué silencio, qué nada / a punto de llegar! / Ayúdame, alma.” For Espina, this shift in his use of the Neobaroque is quite dramatic. While his poems continue to confer the reflexivity and self-conscious fragmentation and discontinuity of life in our times, they now resonate with sentiment that expresses the memorable life experiences of those who have passed on.

The poet’s *ne plus ultra* attitude is reinforced by three poetic strategies that allow him to now consider emotion as part of his poetic practice. The first, *syntactic thought*, places the poet’s focus on the self-referentiality of language itself, making the poem about poetry itself. As with Kozer and Kamenzain, Espina is attracted to *horror vacui* as a means of giving physicality to death. And lastly, *fragmented thought* originates within the poet’s state of mind as a result of death’s close proximity. Combined, these artifices point to a caesura through Espina’s own acknowledgment. Considering himself as one who now feels and wants to express what it is he feels, “El lenguaje ahora es la

experiencia del ser que, siente y que de pronto, quiere decir lo que siente.”<sup>357</sup> (Language is now the experience of the self that feels, and that suddenly wants to say what it is that it feels.) Espina creatively challenges the reader to assume meaning for herself, resulting in a more vibrant aesthetic appreciation of the poetic word.

The resolution to the question as to why sentiment in verse must be filtered through the intellect to be engaging is resolved through the concept developed in this dissertation and referred to as *poetic areté*. First recognized in the analysis of Kozer’s poem “Me lleno los bolsillos,” the poet writes, “la gente en casa seamos aedas / vámonos de Cuba.” The word “aedas” or “aidos” captures the Greek idea of the capacity to become a human being of high regard endowed with a strong personal belief system. Through the recognition of its value as an interpretive tool, this concept is extended to become *poetic areté* first in the case of Kamenzain and subsequently is fully developed with Espina to become a fundamental conception upon which this investigation is based.

Each poet has shown his or her *poetic areté* to express a compelling philosophical belief system that provides the catalyst for taking mourning poetry beyond otherwise banal and often overused sentimentality in within aesthetic works. The unfeigned sense of *poetic areté* along with a capacity for aesthetic creativity harmoniously unite in each poet’s work to voice the experience of loss, affording the reader an unmistakable sensibility of the experience caused by grief.

*Syntactic thought*, defined as the self-referential way in which poetry reflects

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<sup>357</sup> From an email between the poet and Randolph Pope in June of 2013.



upon itself and the articulation necessary to make a great poem, is the primary focus of each poet's poetic production. *Syntactic thought*, like *poetic areté*, is shown to take the focus off emotion and to alternatively channel it toward an intellectual discourse on poetry, life, and death. This self-referential feature of each poet's work is expressed through the use of syntactic and semantic indeterminacy, found in techniques based on complex sentence structures with a high level of importance placed on intellectual subject matter. In addition, each poet practices a form of linguistic defamiliarization or *ostranenie* to emphasize the strangeness of language in order to create a new vision for themselves and their readers. By stretching and re-forming meaning from ordinary, everyday language, each poet finds new and extraordinary ways to create poetry.

Additional contributions supporting the claims made here were located within the subjects of lateness and exile, both found to be consistently present and expressed in many of the poems by Kozer, Kamenszain, and Espina. The feelings of impotence and irreversible loss and aging, expressed in each poet's *poésie de la entre-deux*, mimics the conditions of bereavement, in which they express the recognition of not only the passing of others, but of their own sense of the passing of time and their ultimate demise.

Exile has forever altered the maternal tongue, the country of birth, and the family connection, becoming a factor of transformation to each individual's life circumstances. Each poet, as a descendant of exiled immigrants, witnessed first the effects of exile with their parents or grandparents and then as they too became exiled. These circumstances surfaced in the mourning process and the resultant artistic works of these poets through

the expression of themes related to nostalgia in which the loss of a sense of place and/or the lack of a physical or spiritual home were observed.

Kozer's concern with exile surfaces in the choice of syntax found in his mourning poems that address absence, emptiness, and loss. This *horror vacui* was shown through the poet's effort to recreate the memories of home and family. For Kamenszain, exile is concomitant with the experiences of memory loss and bereavement. The loss of home and the "lengua materna" of her mother parallels the dynamics of exile found in time spent away from her homeland of Argentina, resulting in a sense of dissolution of the subject in first-person. And for Espina, exile means a sense of statelessness as a foreigner "in his home country of Uruguay, as an Uruguayan in the United States, and as a poet in a world not made for poets." This statelessness resulted in the sense that for him, poetry is to be the country of the mind, one full of language, voices, and syntax.

This investigation has defined the variations among the terms *sentimental*, *sentimentality*, *emotion*, and *emotive*, but going back to Romanticism to understand sentimentality in the Neobaroque is conceivably outdated as Kamenszain points out in our interview. Perhaps another way of thinking about *sentimentality* is to consider the word *sentiment*, which comes from the Latin verb *to feel*, and combines the *sen* of sensuous with the *mental* of mind. As such, the mourning poems of Kozer, Kamenszain, and Espina express the word's two-fold nature, one as thought and the other as feeling. And while poetry does not have to be sentimental to express sentiment, its unfolding impacts new possibilities for expanding the aesthetic appreciation of poetry to a larger audience who can appreciate all that sentiment has to offer.

The late style poetry of Kozer, Kamenzain, and Espina represents the crowning experience of each poet's aesthetic engagement with the complexity of life's experiences. For each, their mourning poems are interpreted as an attempt to reach an abstraction beyond the human ability to comprehend the world in which we live and the search for a means of converting this abstraction of death into the notion of permanent absence. The pleasure of reading Kozer, Kamenzain, and Espina derives from their use of original language in extraordinary ways to create ingenious poetry that addresses the issues of our time through an intellectual approach. This outstanding quality has resulted in intellectual and philosophical poems that show the future of the Neobaroque and its renovated configurations to be an emotive form expressed through the originality of *poetic areté*. In this way, each poet has given a genuine voice to the human experience, showing us that poetry is more than just a record of our passing.

This accomplished dissertation has exhaustively explored the signification of poetry as a means of expressing loss. Mourning is not an isolated event, and the need to express the emotions associated with grief is essential to broadening the understanding of the meaning and purpose of our lives and what lies ahead for us beyond it. Within the process of mourning, the habitus of memory and memory loss along with the conditions of displacement such as exile, nostalgia, and melancholia and certainly the passing of time and the possibility of one's own death become realer than real. Along the way, we come to understand the importance of giving meaning to the lives of those with whom we were once connected. The world is a place of conflict and difficulty, and the awareness of its transitory nature leads poets like José Kozer, Tamara Kamenzain, and

Eduardo Espina to strive through the art of poetry to find significant meaning even in death. In this way, *poetic areté* comes to symbolize the aesthetic essence of these three poets in which sentimentality does not betray the excellence of their poetic design.

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## APPENDIX A

### “ES PARA ECHARSE A REÍR”

#### INTERVIEW WITH JOSÉ KOZER

Interview with José Kozer: Mourning Poems and Anti-sentimentality

Final Version

March 15, 2012

*DR: You have spoken in other interviews about your parent's background, but I was hoping that you could speak to me first hand about the circumstances surrounding each of your parent's deaths? (Ages, illnesses, where they at home, in hospital, were their deaths prolonged or sudden, the years of their deaths, and any other comments you feel you would like to share.)*

J.K.: Maybe I can start with my grandfather, because it was a death that really changed my life. I had a great devotion for my grandfather on my maternal side, a nervous man, a very good human being, rabbinical in many ways who smoked a lot. He had a very hard life, with many daughters, raising them in Havana as any other immigrant. Difficult life, he owned a grocery store where he worked very hard all his life. And his life was just the family, the work, raising his children, then later on his devotion for his grandchildren, and God, God, God, God. What touched me deeply was when we realized he was very ill, he had cancer, I thought he had stomach cancer, but in this case he ended up, my mother explained to me, with lung cancer from smoking. When we realized he was dying what struck me tremendously was the fact, the contradiction, which he was such a deeply religious believer and yet at the same time, he was scared of death. Now fear of death has run in my family. I saw it in my father as an extreme case.

I saw it in my uncles also, as extreme cases, but not in the women. The women were not afraid of death, which always struck me as also being very peculiar because for my grandfather this became a living contradiction, a huge imprint in my life. Why is it that he believes in God, believes in the afterlife, and he's scared? He was scared day in and day out, obviously about the fact that he was going to die. Also his death was very painful. At the time (this was 1956) I was sixteen years old, he was to me a very old man, and yet he was only about sixty seven years old, and here I am seventy two years old (almost) and I don't see myself in the mirror as an old person, yet everyone perceived him as being ancient, times have changed for the better in this sense. So, at the time there was no cure for cancer, nothing like in terms of medical technology what we have today and he had to be given morphine every day, the dosages were increased and increased and his pain was excruciating. One of the memorable days in my life occurred when I was sixteen and it must have happened before he died, maybe two or three months before he died: it was a winter day in Havana, it must have been the month

of January or so, he loved me dearly, he loved me I think more than anyone else in his life: we sat together at a terrace in Havana at his house and we were there just in a state of absolute silence, he had a beige sweater on and his pants, his baggy pants. He was just sitting there very peacefully, there must have been a moment where the pain of his illness was not so acute, I then possibly asked him several questions or I simply expressed my love to him, as simple as that, and then he said to me, "Can you come with me, I want to take a walk around the neighborhood?" And I'll never forget that walk, we just walked around the corner together in silence, and it was a memorable moment because I felt his religiousness as something complete, as a feeling that permeated me totally. After that he died, I did not witness the moment when he died.

But, then I witnessed the whole ritual, its highlights, highlights that again I think left an imprint in my life. One of them was when they placed him, at the cemetery, in a room where they place the dead and they undressed him totally, he was absolutely naked, and they placed him on a huge table, a wooden table, and the ritual involves cleaning him with alcohol, they clean his body so that he goes to heaven, possibly he already is in heaven, totally clean. And after that they put a sheet upon his naked body and the women come in to wail. This scene I saw from the outside because my mother didn't want me to witness this, but I was very curious, so through a window (and this is a form of Peeping Tom) so through a window, I am on top of one of those wooden boxes they had, Coca Cola boxes, I took that box because I was not tall enough or the window must have been very high, and I peeked through the window and I saw the entire ritual. And to this day I see it so vividly; the women coming in with their handkerchiefs; their head handkerchiefs, wailing and beating their chests, screaming and crying and all that. And then after that I also remember prior to this scene going to the Jewish cemetery in Havana, it was on the outskirts of the city, it was like an hour ride from the funeral house to the cemetery. And this ride, I remember at one point we had to stop in front of a stoplight and some black kids were crossing the avenue. In the highway I heard one of them say to the other one; "Oh, those are Jews" those are those people, those Jews. And he said it in such a derogatory way, it was such a painful thing for me, because I've never been a racist or a sexist, none of that, I've always had a very liberal background, a very liberal type of vision of life, and society, and it bothered me tremendously, I felt so angry. I said, "Here I am a white man middle class, who respects you, and this is your attitude toward the man I love the most, my grandfather, "Fuck you" and I was very, very angry. I remember that. So those two issues, one is social the other is deeply visual and poetical, plus the issue of his religiousness and this contradiction that I expressed marked my life tremendously. It was a first contact with death in a very emotional, almost primitive way; I don't know if this is the word in English, it was a primogenital experience, a way that must have done something to my poetry, must have been the beginning of poetry for me. It triggered a tremendous amount of emotions.

The second death is of course my father, which is totally different. Dad was terrified of death, I've never seen someone as terrified of death as he, and this has sifted into my

life: if you read profusely my profuse poetry, you will see that there is hardly a poem in which death is not mentioned one way or another. It is what you might call an obsession: through Zen Buddhism I am more tranquil and more relaxed about this issue and at times I think it is purely a poetical device rather than a visceral vision, but since I cannot separate the visceral from the visual, I am not sure this is the case. He was an atheist and a true atheist, he had no belief in the afterlife, he had no belief in a God, he hated religion, any form of religion, institutionalized religion, because he suffered a lot as a child being a Jew in Poland, because he was a Jew he suffered from the Catholics, and he felt persecuted, and he felt extremely angry until the day he died about any form of religion and especially the clergy. He hated those church clergymen (*los curas*) unbelievably. And this I got from him, the fear of death, the anger at the phoniness and the hypocrisy of institutionalized religion.

When he died, I was in Spain and I didn't realize he was dying because he was always a very healthy man. I can still see him age sixty let's say, doing gymnastics in his room, almost naked. He was a strong man, he used to kid around with me and say, "Let me show you what strength is," and he would grab my arm and just press it, and he'd give me a black and blue mark on my arm, I would say, "Dad you're hurting me" he would say, "Yes, I can hurt you" and, we would kid around like this. Physically he had a very small, tight body, a strong man, healthy as hell. He was always very proud of his health; he knew his health came from taking very good care of himself, and being extremely selfish. That is to say, he came first, because he was a very weak man physically. So he protected his body all his life at the expense of say my mother, the children, everyone else. He was a very nervous man, so he couldn't tolerate any form of noise. We had to live in a house where silence was it. When we sat down to eat, his standard phrase was, "*Cuando se come, no se habla*" the minute you start eating, there had to be silence. That came from his psyche; I think his anger required a tremendous deal of restructuring and a tremendous amount of silence. I am very ritualistic, I also need a tremendous deal of silence, I am almost like Proust in that sense. Any noise disturbs me tremendously. And I think I inherited this whole thing from him. He became ill, he was very angry about being ill. I remember him with a cane and walking with me saying to me, "Why do I need this cane, I have legs?" "I don't need a cane." "Why are my legs so weak?" He always said to me, "*Protege tus piernas, las piernas son la fortaleza del cuerpo.*" Those were standard statements coming from him. And I see him in the last few months of his life, in Florida, always angry with the health issue. He could not conceive being ill, he never went to a doctor. This was the typical, old Slavic, Polish, Russian, Hungarian type of mentality. Yet he had a very weak stomach and he developed a heart condition, which again made him furious because he could understand having a weak stomach, he always lived with a weak stomach, all Jews do, but not a heart condition, he had a strong heart and one day he developed an aneurism and he just went. I was in Spain and I got a phone call: "You'd better rush because Dad won't last" and we picked up all our things, I said to my wife Guadalupe, "you stay with the children" and Guadalupe said, "No were all going to go." So, we bought plane tickets and we came to Florida, but



when I arrived, he had already died. And my mother tells me that while he was in his end stage, in his delirium, all he said is, “Where’s Josi, Where’s Josi, why isn’t Josi here?” He became obsessed with me, because I was the *primogénito*, the firstborn, and that is very heavy in the Jewish tradition. So this *primogenitura* was very heavy on me, with my grandfather to begin with, because I was the favorite, which was very painful in terms of the others in the family, and also with my father, that was an issue with my sister that became also very painful in my life because my relationship with my sister was harmed because of this.

Because I was really privileged by being the first born and I was also the intellectual, the poet, the strange one, the different one, the one that didn’t go into business, the one that was rebellious, blah, blah, blah. And mother told me afterward that he became obsessed with me at the end, constantly calling for me and when he died, I wrote poems about this, which are devastating poems. In one of them his hands went into his sex, just the minute he died, his two hands almost like he crossed the palms of his hands on top of his sex and he died. I call it the crucifixion of his sex and the crucifixion of his sexual life because he had a very complex sexual life, which I think I also inherited from him to the degree that at one point in psychoanalysis I felt like he had transferred onto me, his sexual deficiencies. He asked me, not literally of course but subconsciously to perform for him. And I became, at a stage in my life when I was extremely immature, a sexual performer, that is, I had to perform sexuality as a gift to my father, because he couldn’t perform, he couldn’t do it, healthily or naturally, and this also became an issue in my life, and a very K-N-O-T-T-Y issue that I had to deal with in psychoanalysis and through growth and maturity. I can say all this now because I am very peaceful about it. Look, at age seventy-two, none of this is really of great importance. But at the time it was very painful, it was very difficult. Just to understand it was an issue. I remember the first few sessions of psychoanalysis when I was twenty-eight was difficult. I did two years of very intense psychoanalysis from twenty-eight to thirty. At one point my analyst laughed and they don’t usually laugh. And he said what you are questioning can be read about in *Seventeen Magazine*, you know, that magazine for young girls? And I said, “Am I that naïve about my sexual life?” and he said, “Well, yes you are, your knowledge of sex is funny,” he said. I said, “OK, we’ll keep dwelling on this and see what it leads to.” I think all this came from my father’s mythical way of handling things, sex included. He had a tremendously mythified sense of reality. He must have been a very imaginative human being who could not imagine verbally because he had no language. He lost his language, Spanish he never learned very well, English he couldn’t handle very well. Yiddish was his language, but he couldn’t talk Yiddish to anyone even in the family. He could talk to me in Yiddish, and I could understand seventy percent or whatever, but there was no communication through Yiddish with his children. So, he must have been very uptight and very bottled up, and this was all transmitted to me and became a source of poetry. His fantasies, the stories he told me. I remember Mother saying, “Look, you’ve told this story a hundred times, leave him alone, he heard it already.” And I’d say to myself, “I want to hear it again, I don’t mind hearing it again,” because they were half

true, half invented, half imagined, and then you know how imagination becomes real and you begin believing what didn't happen as something that happened. All of that came together when I was told that he had died.

Now I must confess something since we are having this interview: I can feel free to say certain things now: you know, his death was to me a relief, a true relief, and that is a contradiction, because I cannot deny that I loved my father very much. But at the same time, I was so afraid of him. I was always so afraid of him that the physical presence of the man made me nervous, made me uptight. And his appearance in the house was an interruption to paradise. I lived in paradise, surrounded by women; my sister, my mother, the aunts, the maid, you know and I was the *gallito de pelea*, I was the rooster in the chicken coop. And when he arrived from Havana at 6:00 PM sharp every day during working days it was an interruption to my life, and a true interruption to paradise. And I remember feeling relieved that he's gone, he's not going to be there anymore, with his anger. I've used in my poetry when I write about him, I use the Spanish word *refunfuñar*, he was a *refunfuñón*. He was always *refunfuñando*. And he's not going to do that anymore, because now he's dead. Now he's gone. So that his death was to me, absence, a form of absence, whereas, the death of my grandfather was a form of presence. When my grandfather died, his presence becomes an absence, and a true emptiness in my life. When my father died, I could forget him. And I remember a year or so after his death, maybe a few years after his death, I was talking to my mother and I said to my mother, "Mother you never talk about Father, you never talk about him, you never mention him, this is very strange." And she looked at me, kind of pleading, not to continue with this questioning, these statements. And I left it at that, because it must have created some pain or some hurt in her. But you know, I also forgot him. Outside of poetry, I hardly ever think of him. Whereas, I still think a lot about my grandfather, my grandmother too, less, but also. And my mother, which is the big surprise in my life, that her death became an emptiness that I did not expect. I expected that emptiness to happen with my father, but not with my mother.

With her it was different because she died at age ninety, and the last seven, eight years she was with us, lived in a building next to ours, and we saw her every day, especially Guadalupe saw her every day, helped her tremendously. The last two or three years of her life she was almost deaf, she was blind, almost blind. I couldn't be five minutes with my father because I was afraid of him, and I couldn't be five minutes with my mother because we had nothing in common. I was not interested in her. She was interested in me, but didn't understand anything that I did. And I was afraid all the time of hurting her, because she'd make me so angry, so angry that I'd blow up at any issue, at anything she said: which I never did because I'm a very polite person, but I almost felt like saying to her, "Mother, how can you be so dumb? How can you be so stupid?" You know I never used that terminology with her out of respect, and because I am not that type of a person. But I felt like saying it so many times, so I was always biting my tongue and avoiding her because the gap that existed between the two of us was so

tremendous that there was no communication. We had nothing in common, whereas I had a lot of things in common with my father and my grandfather. This sense of absence and presence becomes very acute with my Mother because she's a presence that I avoid, thus I turn her presence into absence. But when she dies (this is the first time I really saw physically a person die in front of my eyes, I was already in my sixties, well into my sixties) here I am dealing with my mother, we were in this very room in which we are doing this interview and she was at a hospice in Hallandale, maybe fifteen minutes away from here, where she was treated very well and the nurse had said to us she wasn't going to live more than three or four days: she cannot eat anymore so even the lack of food is going to kill her. She was brain damaged; she'd had an *embolia*, a stroke, several strokes actually. Otherwise she was OK, otherwise she was healthy. And for four days she was in that bed, she was a tiny woman in that bed, kind of small. Kind of pretty, she wasn't a beautiful woman but there was a prettiness about her that I always sensed. She was a very tender woman, very sweet, very giving and generous, thoughtful of others, very thoughtful of not hurting anyone. Almost like a Buddhist nun. She was four days totally, physically motionless in that bed. We visited her every day for hours. We stayed there, the nurse said talk to her and we talked to her. We don't know, the ears are the last thing to go, we don't know if she's aware of anything, but we talked to her. I would come close to her and say Mom I love you, this kind of thing, kind of formal, rhetorical stuff, nothing special. But she was totally motionless. We were called, we rushed into the hospice and the nurse said she is gonna die in the next 10-15 minutes. I said to the nurse, "How can you know this?" She said, "I have so much experience with this, that I assure you, she is not going to last more than 10-15 minutes." And there was a rabbi in the place and the nurse said, "Do you want the rabbi to come in?" and I said, "Yes," because well my mother, my mother was very peculiar too with religion. She said to me many times, 'I don't believe in God, I don't believe in the afterlife, that's bull shit.' And she'd say it like this and I would say, "Mother, this coming from you, I don't understand." I'd say, "You puzzle me," and she'd always say, "Well that's how I feel you know."

But she was very Jewish. My father was also very Jewish but in different ways, him and her. So there she is at the verge of death, the rabbi said certain prayers for the dying, she had not moved in four days, and all of a sudden she turned her head towards the rabbi, slightly, moved towards the rabbi, opened her mouth a little bit, and exhaled. I saw the exhalation; I've never seen a thing like that. You know they say *el soplo de Dios*. God's breath, you know I saw it coming out of her body, and it surprised me to such a degree, it was so touching to see her simply go this way. And of course I was in tears, Lupe was very touched, my oldest daughter who had a strong relationship with her was there too and she was in tears. They had a very special relationship because I raised my oldest daughter by myself and my mother helped me a lot raising my daughter, so they had a bond, a very strong bond among them. The bonds in my family are very peculiar, very weird. I had it with my father, not with my mother, my oldest daughter had it with my mother; not really with my father, even though she had it also with my father it was stronger with my mother. I had it with my grandfather, but no one else in my family, not

even my cousins remember my grandfather. I was the only one who had a bond with my grandfather. I had a strong bond with my grandmother, but only in terms of her in the kitchen, well, here comes the kitchen.

My grandmother's was the first kitchen in all Havana that I smelled, and touched and loved. I always wanted to be in the kitchen with her. I always wanted to be in the kitchen smelling and watching her hands do things – making bread, or making puddings or making *compotas* or making pastry. She was the kitchen. She smelled like kitchen things, she smelt like sugar, like cinnamon, like boiling oil, things like that. So mother died, we had the funeral. I, the poet, had to say the final words and I said to myself, "I'm going to read the poem where she is the main character of the poem," which is what I did, I couldn't do anything else. And I said a few words about her tenderness and her generosity. It was all very kind of formal, and the minute we left, I saw that it was a small affair because she died so old, and all her friends were gone already. So nobody came to the funeral whereas with my father, it was a throng. It was a mob of people that came, with her, no. We must have been maybe fifteen people, the close family and a few friends of mine, but not too many. We were coming back from the funeral and I remember how clearly I said to myself, "Why am I missing her?" and I began missing her at that very moment and I miss her to this day. Which I cannot explain. You know I cannot explain one bit about my parents or my family: my parents at one point lived in Mexico for about five, six years. And I was visiting them and a cousin who is an absolute beast, he's never read a book in his life, he is mediocre, he's one of those business people with no brains and no finesse, well he came to me and said, "I don't know your poetry, but I've read here and there a few things and I always see that you are writing about your father." "How come you never write about your mother?" You know it struck me that this was true. And I looked at him, his name is Armando, and I said, "Armando you are right." "Well good-bye" I said to him and I started writing about my mother. And you know that is how in a sense the poet functions. The poet is such a sponge that little things change the trajectory of his work and change what you do and how you behave as a poet.

The same thing happened to me with the Jewish stuff, I don't know if I've said this in any interview, perhaps I have. But again I was young, I must have been thirty, I was writing again, because I wrote in Cuba, and then there was a lapse of about eight years when I couldn't write a word, and then I was writing constantly and at the time I became very friendly with Nicanor Parra. And one day we were walking through the Village in New York and he said to me, "José, how come you being Jewish, you never write about Jewish stuff?" And I looked at him and I said, "Nicanor, you are so right," "I don't know." and I began to write Jewish poems, just as I am writing about my mother because my dumb cousin in Mexico said it. And it is almost like a command that comes not from the individual but from someplace else. I mean, I don't want to sound mystic, but it comes from way up and it is a command that says, "do this," and you obey because the poet's function is servility. The poet's function is obedience. You know, we

represent anger, and rebellion, and the language that is going to change the world, language that is going to change language, and going to change poetry and society, however, I believe the poet is humility, humbleness, servility, that which is received from someplace, call it the Muses, call it God, call it whatever you want, it forces him to be very humble. I tend to think this command comes from the underground rather than from up there, but what the poet is constantly doing is accepting voices and accepting the fact that he has to transmit those voices, and I have received those commands. Write Jewish stuff is the command I receive at one point in my life, or write about your mother because you haven't.

Maybe to complete the question, Diana, I should add the death of my grandfather happened when he must have been (I'm not being accurate) sixty-seven, sixty-eight years of age, he died in Havana. My father must have been eighty-one perhaps eighty-two. The problem with my Dad is that he himself didn't know his age. The paperwork, the documents on his birth certificate were lost in Poland and when he arrived in Havana, he kind of assumed he was twenty years old and from there on he accounted for his age. He knew his day and month of birth but wasn't exact about the year, thus he always claimed to be either or a year more, a year less, so at his death, which was in **1988**, he must have been either eighty-one or eighty-two years of age, give or take, and in my mother's case, she was exactly ninety years old and a few months when she died here in Florida, both of them Father and Mother died in Miami, Florida.

*D.R.: What do you believe to be the contract that exists between the living and the deceased proposed by your poems?*

J.K.: The word contract puzzles me: is it a contract? If there's a contract there are clauses, the clauses are the poems that I have written on that issue perhaps, you are making me think, and I hate to think early in the morning. Since death is such a preoccupation, a universal preoccupation, since no poet or writer has escaped and faced in his work the issue of death, I find it impossible not to deal with this. It is natural in me to express death in poetry because without death, there's little possibility for poetry. It is said that Thanatos and Eros are the only two big issues or real issues when it comes to expression, to a profound expression which poetry in particular conveys, so that Thanatos is always there, Eros is supposed to soften the blow, to cure while you are alive, the wound that death produces in a human being. I cannot conceive of a poet not writing of death. Now you can deal poetically with death in a highly intellectual fashion, you can deal with it in a highly emotional fashion. It seems to me that what a good poet does is to combine the two of them, and he lets the emotion of the intellect operate, and the emotion of the feeling blend naturally while expressing it.

I've become philosophical in many poems, and as time goes by I become more and more philosophical and that philosophical being comes from my father, from his way of saying things. The emotional poet in me comes from my mother, from her tender way of saying things. And the mourning, the sense of *duelo* that permeates the issue of death is

a blend of the two. The intellect protects the heart, but the heart which is feeble and more fragile and more vulnerable, depends on the intellect to express itself, so that the two of them, in a state of harmony, can move a poet's vision towards a more universal and precise, accurate way of dealing with mourning, of dealing with death. It seems to me, because I never analyze my poetry, I just write it, write it and forget it, but it seems to me that, when the heart takes over, in terms of the specific issue we are talking about, what the poem does is it begins to deal with the minutia of daily life, the "dailyness" of happenings, so that if I am singing my Mother's death - that kitchen, those smells, the house, the way people dress, the way people talk, colloquially and normally, comes into the picture. If I sing my Father's death, it's the heavy biblical, Jewish pronunciation that gets into the poem, the poem then becomes as he was, categorical, arbitrary, philosophical, harsh, direct, doesn't beat about the bushes, so these two things, one maternal, the other paternal, are my yin and yang, are my way of handling, naturally (because I am not aware of doing this while I am doing it) the poem, and the necessity at one point to deal with their death, which by the way is my death (the ego is always present) the ego is always there. But I'm learning now, I'm seeing now perhaps for the first time that there's a separation within the very poem in terms of the materials. Materials always interest me when I'm involved with the poem, with the poetry, what materials am I recurring to in order to produce a poem? Be it cloth, be it food; be it the daily implements used in a home, or being things, immediate things in the outside world: a tree, a flower, a cloud that's passing by. Or being instruments that appear in imagination, which tend to be, in my case, utopian: those instruments that I feel should be part of utopia, utopia which is paradise, in terms of life and death, and utopia on earth, which is social and political. When I think of utopia, I imagine that I want to be surrounded by certain instruments, it could be a plow, it could be something to dig the earth with, let's just say things that are capable of helping produce life.

Poetry is always trying to produce life and it deals with death in order to produce life, which is the poem, the poem is always alive, the poem is always life, so those things, those materials are always the ones that are interspersed as a net, as an *encrucijada*, as crossroad in the poems I do. And the mother and the father figures are basically symbolical, they are not my real father, my real mother, you know, none of that, it is not that episodic, not that biographical or autobiographical. It has to do, I think, with this idea of the maternal bringing forth emotion, the heart, and the most immediate items that you deal with in daily life, in your own experience and in your own house. Whereas the Father is the street, the store, the world of business, society, dealing with earning a living, the harshness of the world, and you deal with that in a more masculine way. You deal with that as a horse and not as a sheep or a lamb. You deal with that not as a religious person but exclusively as a practical person. And there the intellect is foremost. There is a blending here. There is a blending in my poetry that has to do with being so prolific; everybody says, "How can you be so prolific?"

This morning I got a letter from my Australian translator and he said, “You know, it amazes me that you write a poem everyday, and when you send me something it feels so new, it feels so fresh.” And he was saying to me, “How can you do this”, and I said, “I don’t know how I can do this.” To me it has become so natural, and to me it is still a mystery, I don’t know why this is happening to me, to this day I don’t know why I am poet, I never think of myself as a poet. And yet, if my poetry is of any value and thus my life is of a given value, what I have done at least in terms of the Spanish language, at least in terms of this historical moment in which I live as a Cuban, a Jew, a Zen Buddhist, as a Latin American living in the United States, living now in Florida in two separate languages, what I have done for poetry, for the poetry in Spanish today, is that I have blended many traditions into the poem, that I have been able to weave into the poem a synthesis of many, many things that have occurred traditionally throughout the ages, perhaps throughout the centuries, within the Spanish language. This sense of the synthesis has to do with the Jew that I am, the Jew is voracious in terms of reading, the Jew is voracious in terms of learning, his life is devoted to the idea of books, the idea of The Book, so that you are always dealing with the entire universe of books, the entire universe of thought, the entire universe of emotions, you are Kabalistic, you are Talmudic, Talmudic meaning A, but not only A, also B, but not only B, but going back to A. You’re constantly being dialectical, you are constantly moving from a sphere, to the opposite sphere, to the penumbra, to the middle of the road, so that my voraciousness is total. The other day Guadalupe said to me, and it wasn’t a criticism, she didn’t say it as a negative, she said, “You know you are insatiable, it is impossible to satiate you,” and I said to her, “But look how skinny I am,” and she said, “Well you know what I’m saying,” and she meant - I publish a book, or I’m asked for a book and I’m already saying to her, “I wonder whose going to ask me for another book.” I am insatiable and it has to do with this need to synthesize all learning, all culture, I am interested in everything. I remember myself as a child, I was interested in languages, and I was interested in reading. I was interested in the world. I’m still a child in that sense I’m still fascinated by the world. When I look out of the window I am like Vermeer, I’ve spent lots of time like in a Vermeer painting in front of a window looking outside. My eyes are the eyes of a child, looking at a world that I do not a) understand, and b) love, love deeply. And my relationship with a tree or my relationship with a statue of Buddha, or touching a book, or with cloth or eating, is always syncretical. I will say no to very few things because I want to try it, because I want to get inside the thing, I want to be in there. I can say that, not for me (I feel I’ve become more and more less important as the years go by) but for my poetry (which has become more and more important at least for me as the years go by and poetry is the center where I can synthesize all sorts of emotions, all sorts of experiences and where I can exalt rather than diminish). And my poetry tends to exalt and not to diminish. It is not a poetry of destruction; it is a poetry of construction. Pound has a beautiful line on this; that we are constructors, we are not destructors, and he says something of this sort in one his last poems and it moves me tremendously that he says that because this is how I feel. The death of my parents is a form of destruction, but my poems have reconstructed them, reinvented them and re-

brought them back to life, they are alive because of the poems. And this capacity to synthesize I think happens (and forgive me for saying it this way, I perhaps shouldn't, but the hell with it) it happens to the better writers, the better writers have that vision, that capacity for synthesis.

I started a new series of poems which I call VIDENTE EN CASA, using *vidente* as Rimbaud used the term, but I am a *vidente en casa*, not in the fields as Rimbaud, not in the streets of Paris as Rimbaud, or not in Africa as Rimbaud, but in Hallandale Beach, in a regular apartment, in a regular building of the city of Hallandale, Florida, as a regular person. But in the house I have my monastery; I have a synthesis of many cultures. I have the books, I have my wife, I have my children when they visit. My needs are covered because the poem protects me. The poem is so protective, the poem protects me more than my mother, because she is gone, or my father because he is gone. I am an orphan, I don't have their protection anymore, but I am protected by the poem, or I protect them because I bring them back to life in the poems. And you see, this capacity to bring together, to do it constructively is a joy. I can think of certain composers like Bach or Beethoven going through this experience, that what they are doing, and while they are doing it, they are protecting the universe, protecting life, protecting origin and protecting death: so that, for instance - I was always afraid of death, and now I still suffer from panic attacks which I have had since early childhood, (I had one the other day) but I'm so sedate about it right now, death has changed for me completely, thanks to poetry, a poetry that protects me from Death. There is a very nice line by García Márquez of which very few people know because this was told to me by Alvaro Mutis, who went one day to Márquez and said, "You were always afraid of airplanes, now you have to fly almost every other day, what happened?" "You are not afraid of airplanes anymore?" and Márquez replied, said to Mutis, "No, I am still afraid of airplanes, the thing is that my relationship with death has changed." And I agree with Márquez in the sense that at one point, one's relationship with death changes for the better, and you know, I've come to a point where here I am sitting in front of you, almost seventy two years of age, my health is okay, I can live another twenty years, or another twenty minutes, it doesn't concern me anymore. My concern is my family, that the world becomes a better world for everyone, I am still some silly utopian, and my concern basically is that I can keep on writing, that I have the strength, the "brio" the capacity to grow because I believe one can grow until the day one dies, so that I can continue writing poetry.

I figured out the other day that I had written one poem a day since that day when I went back to Cuba, the seventh of February, the year 2002. If I add that some days I wrote not one but two and perhaps even three poems, I have for ten years, for a total decade up to this day (today is the fourth of January 2012) I have written one poem a day. And I cannot conceive of many poets having done this, maybe only I have done this, to this degree: I am not saying this is good or this is bad, I am not saying this makes me a better or a worse poet (I don't believe in that): I believe in the work itself, you look at the work



and you decide; I am not the one to decide. Here lies the issue of writing; it is there to safe keep life, to safe keep memory. I write because I need to, because I don't understand, because I don't understand why I write. Yes, I write from the point of view of death, I write from the sickness of Death's silence, from the abyss, (all writers do). We are basically consciously unconscious of what we do. This is a mystery; this is a true mystery that happens to very few people. But beyond that mystery there's a consciousness, meaning that I write to safeguard things. My children are my writing because they are continuity as my writing is continuity. My mother which is the past is my past and is the past of my poems, I have gone through poems using her as a character in order to continue constructing the life that she was, or that my father was, and that gets re-transformed particularly in the poems.

*D.R.: Do you believe the linguistic and stylistic embellishments of the Neo-baroque serve to avoid the universal subject of death and the loss that accompanies it? How do you use language to go beyond the specificity of a particular death and of a particular loss?*

J.K.: Well, first of all the word embellishment, I refuse to accept that word embellishment for the neo-baroque, that's standard manual crap, we don't embellish anything in the neo-baroque.

We are aesthetically of a given nature. The baroque is that which delves deeply into language, not only in terms of rhetoric but also in terms of redoing the structure of language so that it enriches language itself, and so that that enrichment then infuses the poetry that you are doing from that particular perspective. In jest, I wrote a poem years ago in which I simply say; "Me, neo-baroque," I'm not neo-baroque per se, I'm not anything specific, but you know, man needs to catalogue. Aristotle spent his whole life cataloging, and I need to de-catalogue. The deconstruction of things is very modern, but I think it is about time we de-categorize and de-construct, because it is a better way of perceiving reality, and language does that when language is ready to take the chance of being what language is, meaning heavy, difficult, complex: look at the dictionary, look how words don't mean only one thing, and in the dictionary you will notice that the definition of the word leaves the word very undefined, and we don't know exactly what any given word means. I don't know what an apple is, I really don't know what an apple is. To begin with, there are so many varieties. I don't know if the apple I ate last night has anything to do with the apple that I saw in a painting by Cezanne in 1977 while I was in France visiting in the south. Uh, no, the neo-baroque is not ornamental, this type of poetry is not ornamental, but it is a way through language of dealing with reality and the reality of death. Nothing more real than death, it's the end, finished, it is done, kaput. There is nothing beyond that, you go, uh, when they say well you rest in peace, you don't rest, there's no peace in death, there is nothing, there's absolutely nothing, this is a conviction. But language allows me, for instance when my mother died, in ACTA, in this book that you read, you must have noticed the way in which the poem dwells upon the body, what it does with the body, with the deterioration and the decomposition of the body. The poetry is not afraid of the decomposition of the body. How the elements of the

body are perforated, are filled with matter that does not pertain to the body, be it ants or larvae or worms, but beyond that, beyond that perforation, it brings forth matter that allows for a flower to appear, for a bird to spring from the dead body, so that there is always life being produced. There is no consolation, I am not looking for consolation in the poem, I am looking for poems, I am looking for poetry, I am looking for language that allows me to produce a poem. And I can open up this book at any point and find things like this; *caimito* is a Cuban fruit, so that *una Nada caimito* the line in this poem is turning a nothing (*Nada*) into a something *caimito*, which is a small delicious sweet fruit: the two of them put together are very paradoxical, very strange, but it is the only way that I can deal with the paradox and the strangeness of death. “The scandal of death” as Elias Canetti said, it is scandalous that we have to die. Now *una Nada caimito* is not an embellished form, it is a straight, natural verse, perhaps paradoxical (a rhetorical device called a *quiasmo*.) It is *quiasmatic* but it is not embellishment, it is a way of trying to understand this mystery of death, especially if you are not a believer, and I am not a believer unfortunately, so that my only belief is in the poem. Which conveys my sense of sacredness, wherein the poem is my Monastery, my Zen Buddhism, my Jewishness, my Christianity, my capacity to synthesize all the things that I love, and live with every day. I was saying the other day to Guadalupe, I was kind of joking, but it struck me that I said to her, “Guadalupe, I bet you don’t know what is the word I’ve used most in my poetry,” and we are talking close to nine thousand poems at this point, OK? So she says “no,” “what is the word that appears most in your poetry?” and I said “Guadalupe,” and we started laughing. And I said this as a fact, if you take a computer, you will find most likely that besides *de, que, sí* and all those little words, you will find that the word that appears most in my poetry is the word Guadalupe, and it’s never Lupe, I never call her Guada which is the word I use for her all the time, it’s always the entire name, which she doesn’t like, and I adore. So that is what language does: for instance after that line *una Nada caimito*, it says *una Nada zapote*, which is another fruit, *en un cuenco vacío*. So you know, *vacío* for the *cuenco*, the *Nada* which appears with a capital N to indicate the absolute nothingness, and again the little fruit, the little sweet Cuban or Mexican fruit called *zapote*, is in there as a link between the mystery of nothingness, the disappearance, the perforation and the *oquedad*: it is a support link to life, a way to chant religiously, philosophically, poetically, “life, life, life, always life. So that people will say to me, oh but you’re so morbid because I will write something like “*Raja si puedes, Rajada: la riñó otro Inmortal Rebañando de la Nada, su nuevo contorno incorpóreo.*” that can sound morbid, and this book gets very, very morbid, but it isn’t morbid, it is simply facing reality, looking at reality, which is the healthiest thing a human being can do to him or herself. Say, and I can say this because I can sense that you are happily married, say you were unhappily married, and you had problems with your husband. You cannot turn away from this: you have two choices, if you are going to be a healthy human being: Either you face this, and maybe the marriage will go to pieces, but you yourself as an individual, as a woman will be healthier, because by facing reality you are healthier, or you don’t face this and you will be forever unhealthy. And part of my health has to do with the fact that I am facing everything, everything in a

poem. To begin with I am facing the following: Here I am, seventy-two (almost), have written nine thousand poems (almost), and I am still writing poetry. Is this guy crazy? Is this guy nuts? Why do you write another poem? Because another poem is the only poem that I have written, I don't write any other poem but the one I am writing. The others have gone; the others have disappeared, the others have gone into the void; I don't know where they are. I don't know how important or unimportant they are. When people talk about my poetry it doesn't faze me, it doesn't mean anything to me, the only thing that means to me is the writing of the poem, which is my health.

This morning I wrote a poem. I took this black book that you see here and I sat down at one point as it has always happened in the past few years, and I wrote *ama a las vacas y su mujer*. "*Ama a las vacas y su mujer*" and the first person who is puzzled by this is myself. I remember clearly because this morning when this line came into my head, I said, "What is this?" and I wrote it immediately and I kind of laughed inwardly feeling that this could even be offensive to my wife, because *mujer* in here has the Spanish connotation of wife, not *esposa* but *mujer* as a Spaniard would use that word. Now, am I comparing her to a cow, am I calling her a cow? Is this offensive, well to begin with, I love cows and there is nothing offensive about cows ever. I don't equate cow with fatness in a woman. No, no, I equate that with many other things that are of a tender nature. But the sense of puzzlement that I felt when I wrote *ama las vacas y su mujer* comes from (in spite of all the experience, in spite of all the *oficio* some friends call me *il miglior fabbro*. I have a lot of friends who call me as Eliot called Pound *il miglior fabbro*) (they use that line with me because I have such *oficio* when it comes to writing) and yet, here I am with all this *oficio* in front of this line saying to myself, clearly, "now what the hell do I do with this, why did I receive this line, why did I write it down, what for?" It's inevitable, inevitable; it's happening again, it's been happening for years and years. And you know something? I can live in many other ways, I don't need poetry; I can live without poetry, I don't need this. It is not a must in my life; I can go fishing the next morning and forget about poetry, as Rimbaud did, he forgot about poetry. This is good, this is very good to forget. He wrote in three years what has taken me sixty years. But we don't need poetry, that's a myth. We need to live as Confucius would say, constantly rectifying our life and constantly re-guiding thought and emotion so that you are a good human being, so that you lead a healthy life, and in that sense, the sense of wonderment, and the sense of amazement, is what to this day I think keeps on triggering poetry. Keeps me moving: my poetry moves very slowly. In this book, (Acta) I get into the composition of the body as a *danza macabra*, *danse macabre*, as it used to be done in the Middle Ages. The Spanish Baroque does it, but we refuse to look at death, and not refusing to look at death in this baroque sense, through language of course, what else do we have? It is a good thing. I am grateful for this. I have received this from someplace, but I have also obeyed the command, I have also cared and carefully catered to that command out of a great sense of respect for other's poetry and for my own poetry. And I respect many, many poems, and many, many poets, in many, many different cultures.

Because they are respectable, because they are possibly among the better things that human beings have produced throughout the centuries.

*D.R.: As the basis of my research regards the establishment of a framework for sentimentality in the Neo-baroque, it is important to explain the use of the emotions of grief and loss in these particular poems - you have stated that you are vehemently against the use of sentimentality in your poems, that when used it is through irony, parody, as kitsch - un ejemplo – “ expresión libérrima, más al mismo tiempo conjunción de armonizada, con base a dos fundamentos: ni un ápice de sensiblería de melodrama culebrón, ni una palabra que privilegie el sentimentalismo barato (eso sólo se pone de manifiesto de manera irónica) y a la vez nada que pueda considerarse gratuito”. Could you elaborate on your definition of sentimentality and emotion and how irony, parody and kitsch are used to reach – that is -emphasize, deflect, support your feelings regarding loss?*

J.K.: You know, the issue has brought me so much pain and there's so much misunderstanding, to what I say, and keep on saying, it's closed so many doors for me, it's done so much harm to me in terms of reality. One wants to receive, one would have liked for example to receive the Nobel Prize, and it will never come. And it has to do with this issue. I was in Ecuador recently and a friend of mine, her name is Minerva Villarreal, she's a wonderful woman, she said to me; you are one of the harshest poets that I know. You are so harsh. And I said, but you know, I am a very tender human being, I am not a harsh person, and she said, "No, no I know you very well, I know you are very tender, you are a good person. But when it comes to poetry you are the toughest." And I said, "Is it because I don't fall for any rhetorical stuff," I call it *caída retórica*. She said, "Yes, yes it is that." You don't allow for the slightest foul, for a *mácula*, a little blemish. And, I remember when I started writing poetry, I was seventeen, eighteen, and I had the same exact feeling. And I read other poets and I said, this is garbage, what is this poet telling me? Are you telling me that he loves his mommy, why is he or why is she saying this? I take Emily Dickinson, I've read Emily Dickinson with great respect, and there are so many bad poems in there, and I cannot understand why such a genius, and I use genius with great caution, such an incredible poetical mind, can at times write such crap. I mean not only is it mushy, sentimental, but it's badly constructed, I don't get it. And to me it became, at one point, a sign of separation from other poets. It separates what I term a good poem, a not such a good poem, and a lousy poem. And these categories are fair, are fair in the sense that I'm not going to allow for the world to tell me that if I write, "Silence is sacred" this is a good line? "Silence is sacred" is a line that anyone can write. Say that in a different way, in a new way, in a more complex way, so that the sense of silence and the sense of sacred and bringing them together, means something forever and ever. Now there are masters that are never sentimental. Give you an example, Mr. Ezra Pound or Mr. José Lezama Lima. Go find me in Lezama, or go find me in Pound cheap sentimentality. Stevens, Wallace Stevens, a poet I respect extremely, but when he becomes philosophical he's so trite and he's so out of whack, I get furious, I get so angry at such a great poet. I find this happening less and

less in a poet like William Carlos Williams, who I respect very much. Elliot is not sentimental. Now the Spanish tradition for whatever reasons tends to be very mushy and very sentimental. I'm not going to use names because I'm tired of using names and then getting burned. Because one day you will publish this and enough is enough, I don't need more trouble in my life, but I could give you names and names and names of people who ought to be better poets than they are and they are not. And they're not, simply because they're cheap, because they take the easy way out. I see so many poems that more or less function well but the end is bad, is so bad because they don't know how to solve a poem. A poem has to be solved geometrically, has to be solved as Mallarme taught. You know, it's a geometrical issue, and you don't lower your standards because you don't know how to solve the poem, destroy it then, but you have to learn how to solve the poem. I solve my poems. I know at one point I have to take that pen and let go. At one point I have to give it a twist and let it go. But this issue is very complex and maybe I am very unfair, maybe I am totally wrong, and out of whack, maybe I am the one who has to be taught a nice lesson, and spanked, posterity will take care of that if need there be. But I am convinced of this issue, particularly in the Spanish tradition this is an issue, the burning issue, the burning bush that is separating many of us, one from the other. And the ego of the poets is tremendous, they are not willing to learn, they're not willing to grow, and I am fed up with this, fed up with this to such a degree that you have no idea. And, what I do now is, I don't say, Mr. or Ms. or So and So, I don't mention them. I say look how good Gerardo Deniz the Mexican poet is, look there is no sentimentality in there. And when I say sentimentality, I am saying *sensiblería*, in Spanish, this word is much better. I am not saying sentiment, I am not saying passion— I am a passionate person; I am a sentimental person. Lupe is always saying to me as we watch everyday a film, and when we are watching it I am always in tears. She says, "You are always crying," and I say, "I can't help it." And I look at her and I say, "You are such a cold woman, how can you not cry at this scene?" then we laugh. But it's true, anything touches me, anything hurts me, anything bothers me, and I end up in tears. I am a crybaby, but in poetry, I have never shed a tear: I don't even think I have used the word *lágrima* seriously as sentiment in a poem of mine. I sung in tears the death of my Mother but I never used those words that deal with that mourning, that sentiment, that sense of *duelo*. Never. I am so cautious, so careful. I see myself as everyday I write a poem (normally in the morning) next I go to my working room, I go to the computer, and I begin to type the poem that I wrote the day before, and as I am typing that poem I can see blemishes, and I will not allow for them, from my point of view, I may be wrong, for one single blemish to remain in the poem. And here I am, having written for decades, I've become an established poet (no complaints about that) I am glad, everybody calls me *maestro*; *maestro* here, *maestro* there. I'm glad I'm not going to deny that this is good for me, and yet I will spend ten minutes struggling with something that I feel is not proper, my instinct tells me that this is not proper, and it is not going to stay in my poem until I am satisfied. And you know, I can trick you, I can fool anyone, because I know so much about at least my poetry and my *métier* (method) my way of doing things, but the only person I cannot fool is José Kozer, and I refuse to fool José

Kozer, and thus I become extremely harsh: now I control myself, my wife keeps advising me by saying, “shut up, people don’t say these things and your getting burned all the time.” And I’ve controlled myself in the past few years, I don’t say these things about other poets anymore, at least in writing (only in my diaries), or in public, but what I have inside of me, if I let it out, they’ll shoot me, they’ll shoot me, maybe they should shoot me.

*D.R.: What other literary and theological works (poetry or prose) have been useful to you, as you have had to go through the process, that is “the work of mourning”?*

J.K: It seems to me that none, it seems to me that the mourning has been dealt with through the poems: through the poems that sprung, either the very minute the death occurred in the family, or as memory as I went back, imagined or re-imagined those deaths. It springs from that, but it also springs, from what at one point I am reading. At one stage in my life when my father, or when my grandfather came back as memory, I was heavily involved with the Bible, and I read the Bible constantly, there wasn’t a single day during those year that I didn’t start the day by reading a chapter of the Bible in Spanish, and that triggered poetry, and it triggered a very specific type of poetry that allowed through language, and in this case biblical language, to deal with the death of my dear ones and thus with mourning.

Since I’ve gotten away from the Bible, since I’ve gotten more into Oriental literature and into reading Buddhist philosophy, Japanese and Chinese poetry and novels, that has gotten into the poems when my Mother’s death occurred, so that the Oriental literature, not Jewish literature, has helped me to deal with her death: whereas the Jewish, the Biblical and Kabalistic masters helped me deal with my Grandfather and Father’s death, so that the Bible is in poetry, my masculinity and masculine source for poetry, and the Oriental world with its delicacy, especially the Japanese world which is much more delicate than the Chinese, has helped me deal with my mother’s death which is my femininity. And this separation is like when Moses goes through the Red Sea and the waters separate: there is a masculine, biblical, Jewish, harsh and definite, almost arbitrary Judeo-Christian world that allows me to mourn Grandfather or Father, and there is an Oriental, haiku delicacy or softness, a vision that is miniscule, minute, that dwells with the flower and the ambience surrounding any issue, any material, any architectural form, and any geometry, making it easier for me to channel this into dealing with Mother, her death and myself mourning her absence. This I think does it. At this minute as we are talking I can look at a shelf I have in front of me and see that I am reading a biography written by a fellow named Bald on John Donne, and reading the English metaphysical poets, I am reading Richard Crawshaw. And I’m reading the letters of Pushkin, but also the *Heike Monogatari*, which is one of the most wonderful books I have read in my entire life, in an excellent translation into English of this masterpiece of the Heian period in Japanese literature. As you can see some books tend to the masculine (occidental) others to be feminine (oriental): this reading separates the death poems I have written into the masculine and the feminine members of my family,

the occidental tradition helping me deal with the death of say my father, and the oriental, with the death of my mother.

Now, you do see other there a Japanese 12<sup>th</sup> Century after Christ book, Pushkin's letters, the metaphysical poets, the biography on Donne and how as the day progresses, after I work in the morning, and after I see a film and Lupe and I have lunch, I spend the rest of the day sitting in this room where you are interviewing me, sitting in this chair, with my feet on top of that bed, just reading, and reading. So I can read, say an hour of that biography, put it aside, and read maybe five letters of Pushkin, and put it aside, and read Herbert, George Herbert, and put it aside, and then end the day reading the *Heike Monogatari*. What happens is that in the morning, all of that reading is in my head, and it is a head that is full of ideas and materials, and it is of such a diverse nature, but yet capable of a synthesis, that is going to sift into the poetry, it is going to infuse my poetry. I had an experience years ago that is very, very important to me. I had been invited to Chile, and the friend who picked me up at the airport, is a good poet and an excellent translator. His name is Armando Roa, and his wife who is not a poet, she teaches art and is an art connoisseur, they are a very solid couple, a very lovely pair, very good human beings, and they picked me up at the airport. Guadalupe was with me, and they picked both of us up, both of us made that trip, and we were going to Santiago, I think maybe it was the second time I was in Chile, a country I've gotten to love very much by the way. And Chile as you know is a very straight line, its narrow and very straight, and the road from the airport to where we were going in Santiago is very straight, and there we were, going through almost like a desert, very straight and on and on and we got to talking about many things and Armando whose always been very curious about my way of writing said, "How do you write your poems, tell me, let's use this time while we are being driven," we were being driven by a chauffer, "tell me, how you write your poems." I said, "Oh Armando leave me alone, I'm tired from the trip don't do this to me," and Sandra, his wife said, I know how José writes his poems." And I became very curious, and I said, "You tell me about it," and Sandra said, "Oh, it's very simple, José can keep on writing and will keep on writing because he takes anything and everything that at one given point is in front of his eyes, and he brings it all together into the poem, and that's all he does." Its what I call *acarreo*, *acarrear*, I bring into the poem anything, this microphone, the way you are dressed, the color of your hair, those earrings you are wearing, your smile right now, a half empty bottle of water that you brought, the Pushkin letters, anything, anything. Somehow it's a mystery but somehow all that material gets *acarreado* into the poem. And Sandra was very illuminating, because she confirmed what I sensed and she verbalized it very well; she expressed very consciously what I sensed and works for me, it clarified a lot of things. I am a very superstitious person and I remember that at that point I said, "I don't want to think about this because I won't be able to write." No, it wasn't so, as I thought of this I said, "This has to grow further." 'This has to be moved further and further,' meaning the more materials I can bring into the poem, the better. And people will say there is something reasonable about this, but you load your poems with so much stuff, is there a need for that? And my only

answer is, “I have the need for that.” Language is so alive within me. Spanish is such a need in me, because I don’t live in Spanish, and without Spanish I cannot write poetry. That loading the poem, many times with synonyms and synonyms, with variations upon variations, is fine with me, I’ll take that chance, I’ll take that risk. A line that I wrote maybe 35 years ago that has become very symptomatic of what we’re saying but also has become one of those lines that people quote, this line more or less says; *mi noción, agotar el diccionario*; I want to use every single word that exists in the Spanish language in my poems before I die. Which of course is an impossibility; it’s part of a utopia. But as many as I can, I will use. I’m like a little mouse nibbling constantly, constantly, from reality, from all forms of reality. When people say to me, “What’s your favorite book?” I say, “The dictionary.” It is my favorite book, I love dictionaries, you know? And I know writers throughout history that read dictionaries with great devotion, because it’s a lot of fun to read dictionaries. I remember years and years ago, I said to myself, “If I learn a new word a day, just one new word a day, that’s great, that’s a good thing to do,” and I made it a point, for years, everyday I found a new word and made sure I understood what it meant. So, I’d find a new word and I’d go to the dictionary and read what it meant. To this day, Lupe and I, we read a lot, and as we read, there are many things we don’t know of course. So as I’m reading, there’s something I don’t know, I put the book down, I get up, I have this discipline, I go to the dictionary, and I find out what it means. And if I’m reading in English, the task is twofold. I have to find out what it means, and then I have to find the translation into Spanish. Lupe doesn’t do this. She’s lazy in that sense. I am not. I cannot afford being lazy in this. Because my poetry is nurtured, is nourished, through vocabulary.

*D.R.: Do you feel a shift is occurring within your poetics as a result of your parent’s deaths that reflects as well a change in Neo-baroque stylistics and aesthetics that could be said to be leading into a “High Neo-baroque” phase, one that goes beyond the linguistic and if so, how do the mourning poems affect this change?*

J.K.: My poetry I have noticed changes within un-changeability – by un-changeability I mean I have a voice. Many people have said if Kozer doesn’t sign one of his poems, we recognize that it is a Kozer poem, thus I have a voice. Having said that, that voice, which is restless, needs change, needs variation. And as the days go by, I do see that I discover, through writing, through the very act of writing, new things, not structures, because my structures are very structured by now. I have seven, eight, ten, twelve structures, which are enough. I don’t foresee many changes in that sense. Vocabulary grows and diminishes, right now it is diminishing. But it’s always there. What changes is the material itself and the way of dealing with the material, so that the death of my mother very specifically meant me getting into the decomposition of the body, as I have never done before. It became a *dance macabre*, around her coffin. I’d been dancing around her coffin all these years when I write of her and about her. Eduardo Espina just went through a very traumatic experience in his country. For legal reasons they had to dig up the corpse of his mother, he had to and wanted to be present, and then they destroy the bones and they do something to the body forced by some law in there that I don’t



understand very well, that I don't think Eduardo understands very well. That type of experience is dancing around the coffin of a mother. How he handles that in terms of poetry we'll see. That's his bag; my bag has been dealing through a kind of cleansing through language of that body, seeing it decompose and I experiencing inside me its decomposition through the poems until there's nothing left of her body. Only the poem stands. And in order to go through that mourning experience I've used all forms of devices. The very first poem in ACTA talks about a *Euménide*, which appears in the singular and not in the usual form, the plural - *Euménides*. The *Euménide*, the very first word in this book is *La Euménide y yo, araña contra oruga*; the *araña* is the one constantly building the net, the *oruga* is the thread that you will need to build the net. So that the word is the *oruga*, the net and the *araña* are the poem. Any device, anything, anything that I can find next to me to produce the poem, to mourn my mother's death through a poem, I will use. I can open this book at any poem and if I read, as on page 88, *Retemordisqueados*, that's a very intense word, it is not *morder*, it is not *mordiscos*, *mordisquear*; you know it's like eating in a certain way, like you do with bread, but this is even worse, it's *re-temordisquear*, but the word that I use, the verb is *re-temordisquear*, it is *re-re*, it is double. I'm a muncher; I'm taking reality and constantly fragmenting it the more and more I can, until if it becomes atomical, it has to go beyond the atom. You know, I am insatiable. The *retemordisqueados* is linked to bread and sweets. My mother was a sweet eater and the *capuchinos* that appear in here are a type of sweet that I love (not her, she didn't eat *capuchinos* but that's beside the point). But the *hogaza* was bread; and we Jews; we eat a lot of bread. To this day I cannot eat without eating bread. So there was always bread when eating in my house since early childhood. And the bread as indicated in Vallejo, is a very ritualistic almost mystical Christian-Jewish element, you know we have *el Pan de las Proposiciones*, the Christians have this Bread of Christ. I'm constantly substantiating reality into that decomposing body that was my mother. And in that sense, at that point, dealing with all the devices, with all the things that I bring into the poem, dealing with the issue of her death, dealing with the issue of me mourning her death, there was a fulcrum, there was a point in the poetry when the poems began to move in a different direction. Rather than moving in circular manners, or in a linear manner, or as when an ant zigzags a bit since after all she is looking for her anthill, it began to move in a totally vertical manner, towards the subsoil, towards underneath, towards Hades, towards inferno, towards what's geological, and all this through the body. And language helps me always to deal with this complex issue. It is a complex issue, thus you need a complex language. This is an unsentimental issue; death happens to everyone, how can you become sentimental about this? So you need a complex and unsentimental language to deal with it. Montaigne says something in one of his essays, very funny, he says; "I don't know why people worry so much about death and they think it's so important, when it happens to everyone, its been happening forever and ever." It's a fact of life, a fact of nature. Big deal, you know. And yet. Well, one can deal with Death in an unsentimental way, in terms of vision and art and language.

*D.R.: What is the worldview in general of Jews on Death? Does it change or differ from an early age as one grows older?*

J.K.: Obviously every religion has a worldview and Jews indeed have it. I find that Judaism is so extreme and so harsh and so demanding. I felt at first that harshness coming from my grandfather who demanded a rectitude and an ethical way of being that it's commendable but at the same time a very hard act to follow, especially when you're very young, because I was given all this as an adolescent, it was puzzling and perhaps much too challenging, and perhaps damaging in terms of one's psyche. I remember once talking to my grandfather, he said to me, "What are you going to be when you grow up," a typical question. I said, "Oh I'm going to be a lawyer," and my grandfather said, "What kind of a lawyer," and I said, "I want to be a lawyer that helps the poor," and my grandfather, I clearly recollect this, said, "That's very commendable, that's very good, I like it," and I said, "well good then, I'll be a lawyer, and I'm going to study criminal law and defend the poor who are defenseless." And he said, "I don't want you to be a lawyer. I asked, "but why not?" and he said, "Because a lawyer whether he likes it or not, has to lie, and one should never under any circumstances lie, not once." Now I must have been maybe fifteen years of age when he told me this and I had great respect and great love for him. How damaging this was I don't even want to think, but it was very harsh, it came from Judaism, from the God of Israel that gives no respite, even though he's forgiving, but he gives you no respite. It's only Ten Commandments; not eleven, but each of them has to be obeyed, and you cannot be a good Jew if you disobey for once any one of those commandments. Well, you have the day of repentance, but there's another 364 days where you're guilty, this is very strong; and that harshness I got from my father at the level of politics, and in terms of social life, the harshness came theologically from my grandfather (in terms of belief): and from myself when I began to grow intellectually and discovered issues such as love and death. And it lasted with me, and it stayed with me until I was about forty years of age, forty-five maybe, at a point when I began to get into reading Oriental literature. That moved me in a totally different direction. To the degree that at this point in my life it puzzles me to see that I hardly ever think of Judaism anymore, or of Occidental religions that fascinated me and perhaps unconsciously still fascinate me to this day. We saw a film the other day on Hildegard Von Bingen, a woman that I admire endlessly, and about whom I read, and also heard her music endlessly, and the film moved me tremendously, it brought out in me the desire to live in a monastery, to be a nun, to be in a convent, to be a monk, to be in a monastery, and I mean a Christian monastery. Or maybe to be in Safed in Israel where you have a Kabbalistic community (moving there used to be one of my fantasies.) It still is for me, but much less, as the years have gone by. I am more taken now by Oriental mythology, Oriental myths, and the needs that spring from that culture, to the degree that readers, I have a few who are detecting that my poetry has moved more and more into an oriental type poetry, even though I am not oriental, and I don't understand them. But I am emotionally involved with a more Oriental type of work, which is basically very aesthetic. It's the aesthetics that I love. It's the elegance I love, it's that elegance that I

respect so much among the Zen practitioners or the Zen Roshi, and the wise men of Zen Buddhism. There's a shift in there, there's a change in there: a cleavage from the Occidental Christian Jew (being Cuban I was involved with Catholicism in a negative and a positive way). At that point in my life, I repeat, around the age of forty-five or so, I started moving into Oriental literature. My first experience happened when I was twenty and came to New York and discovered Kenneth Rexroth and his books on poetry and translations of Japanese and Chinese poetry. Those were very popular books published by New Directions, which at the time were very successful, and Rexroth did a wonderful job in spreading this type of material. I remember reading a hundred poems from the Chinese, a hundred poems from the Japanese, how it changed my life, but then I couldn't pursue that, my life was very complicated, too many things happening in my life, and I didn't pursue it. But after I married Guadalupe and my life kind of settled, became more sedate, I had more time on my hands because of my profession, teaching as you know, is the only profession that gives you time and a little bit of money. I was able to pursue that first experience and I got into reading people like Alan Watts or Suzuki, and then the great translators like Seidensticker or Donald Keene (who is wonderful) or Burton Watson, and David Hinton which I've been reading as a translator, endlessly, lately: a man I admire tremendously, he lives in Vermont, I'm going to make a point to go visit him one day, or Bill Porter whom I met recently in the state of Washington, who has done marvelous things on the Heart Sutra, (also known as Red Pine) or translating the Chinese masters poets into English. What a wonderful labor of love these people have done. And all that has changed my life. There isn't a single day, (I translated the Heart Sutra into Spanish from English, and I learned it by heart) there isn't a single day, it's been now for at least ten years, perhaps even more, that I do not say to myself the Heart Sutra in Spanish at one point during the day. It cleanses me, it clears my head and it's a good exercise for the memory, for an aging memory. Last night as I was falling asleep, I was a little bit restless and I said to myself the Sutra. You can say it in many different ways, I said it in Spanish, kind of almost feeling every word of the translation and I fell asleep. It's a good thing, and my poetry reflects this, because my life is constantly being reflected in the poems I write, this cleavage, this real change from the Occidental to the Oriental and the blending of the two is a good thing. I mean, I was reading something that John Donne says the other day, and it raised my curiosity, he says more or less (I'm paraphrasing him) he says; "There will always be misunderstanding and conflict between North and South, they will never get together, and he meant it as north being Protestant, which he became from being Catholic, and the south being Catholic, the two will never get together. Spain and England will not embrace emotionally each other. These are two highly divorced cultures. This was what John Donne was saying, "Yet east will meet west." And it struck me because Kipling says the same thing in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. But here is Donne saying that in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. And he had the vision of east and west meeting which is what's happening nowadays – economically, politically, emotionally so on and so forth. And that experience happened to me; east met west when I was a very young man and left Cuba, when I came to New York, at age twenty. As I said, I kind of got lost in the middle of the turmoil of living,

and later on I recovered it; it became very systematic, very intensive from there on to this day. I wrote in my diaries the other day, in this Volume 45 that you see there in front of you, I wrote the other day I am going to spend one year reading only Oriental literature, nothing but Oriental literature, as soon as I finish this project I am involved with right now, to complete reading the books that I just mentioned before, I plan to spend one year only reading the Japanese, the Chinese and the Koreans: these are something new in this house, because Guadalupe discovered the Koreans: these about two years ago, that is all she reads now, Korean literature, Korean history, she's going to learn Korean (she says). This has become very real in our lives, because Lupe and I we laugh a lot and we joke a lot, and I've said several times to her, because she discovered the Oriental world two years ago, I said several times to her, "I told you thirty years ago, you didn't listen to me, you never listen to me," and we laugh. But she kind of gets serious and she says, "I should have listened to you." It's such a good thing to integrate in one's life. It's the other part of the world and we've been totally divorced from them, and despising them: in Cuba, during my times they despised the Chinese people, and now I say to myself, what a loss that was for me, if I would have really gotten to know them, their suffering, their tremendous suffering. We saw a film on the *The Destruction of Nankim* that the Japanese did in 1937. They went in there destroying, I mean their cruelty was so unbelievable. This holocaust was such an unbelievable thing. And in that film they interviewed the director of the film, there are several films that the Chinese have done on the destruction of Nankim and at one point they said to him something like, "How do you feel about the Occidental World," and he said, "Can you imagine how I feel?" 'You brought opium into China, you destroyed our culture; the British destroyed our culture.' 'I mean, we're at fault, but you abused us in such a way.' We in Cuba always despised them; we always made fun of them." There's a saying in Cuba, *todos son chinos*. I mean, when I began to distinguish physically a Chinese from a Vietnamese, from a Thai, from a Japanese, from a Korean, my eyes opened up, I said, "What an idiot I have been, what an idiot." It's as if you didn't distinguish a white person, a Caucasian person, from an African American. Are you that dumb, can't you see the difference, but we couldn't see the difference between a Chinese and a Japanese, they're like day and night, totally different. And that was a moment of tremendous expansion in my life. And this has become very real, very serious. You know, there is one thing, Diana, that I don't resent but feel sad about dying, and it is that I don't have the time to know more, I wish I could live another 200 years to really re-read a number of things, to really learn Chinese, Japanese, to be fluent in those languages, and to keep on writing poetry that uses those materials.

*D.R.: Regarding love poetry and mourning poetry, does one or the other leave you feeling necessarily more or less vulnerable?*

J.K.: Death poetry deals with the vulnerable. The vulnerability finds its expression in the death poetry. Love poetry is to me monogamous, because I am monogamous, and I sing domestic love. I'm talking biographically in the sense that I have a good marriage. There's great understanding between my wife and myself, it's the greatest understanding

that exists in my life, because I don't have that understanding neither with the world nor with my friends, not with my children, but I have it with my wife. We hardly ever fight, although we disagree constantly, Lupe's a very tough woman. But whenever we fight, which is seldom, it rarely happens, it happened the other day at Costco, she said something that rubbed me the wrong way and I reacted. The fight, the hurt, the problem doesn't last beyond five minutes. Because we always look at each other and the love is so complex and wide that it is a waste of time and of energy to be fighting, so we say, "*Vamos a amigarnos de nuevo.*" We are good friends among many other things, and my poetry is filled with that kind of domestic 'dailyness' in terms of love, and in there lies the fragility, which is your issue, as far as what you are researching: it comes from the fact that by necessity we will have to separate at one point because either she or I will die. Logically, because of the age difference, I am sixteen years older than Guadalupe, I should die first, and I want to die first. As she always says it's because I am so selfish, because if you really loved me you'd want to live and go through the hurt I will go through when you die. And she's right about that, I cannot conceive my life without her, or to be honest, I can conceive my life without her, but always missing her, constantly missing her. And I think I said in this interview before, that the only thing that bothers me about dying is that I won't be able to read a number of books, specifically more Oriental literature. The other thing that bothers me is that I won't be with her, and that's very hard to conceive. And that is not a sentimental issue; that is not a cheap issue. That is a gut, complex theological issue; I don't want to be without her. I refuse to be without her. As I always joke with her when I say, "Who the hell is gonna cook for me?" And it's a joke, and we laugh, and we know why we are saying this. I can cook, that's not the point; I can cook fairly well, I can make a point of going back to cooking. You know, the fact is that I was fortunate, and I think she was fortunate to meet me and live with someone who has a good sense of communion, a passionate communion, that goes beyond the sexual, even though that has been there. Also, it goes beyond parenthood, even though that also has been there; its almost part of the mystery, its almost part of the poetry, and I think that is why she appears so much in the poetry, so that the love poems are difficult to write, but I get so immersed in them, that when they happen, they are usually joyful, tremendously joyful. Sometimes she dies in my poems and she says, "What, you killed me again?" It's a death as a form of mourning, it's the anticipation of her death, a death I cannot conceive and can only conceive it if I write it. I need to write in order to conceive it. Someone said to me recently, I have a poem, *Encuentro en chofusan*, it's a poem that I must have written about fifteen, twenty years ago, a very complex poem. It's a poem where I take a poem by the Chinese poet Li Po. A beautiful poem in which the Emperor sends this young man to the north, and that has a lot of meaning in Chinese culture, when the emperor sends you to the north to fight the barbarians. And he has to go to war and fight the barbarians in the north after he has been married to this young girl. They have known each other since early childhood. And in that poem Li Po describes him coming back, and she kind of sees him coming back and waiting for him to arrive, a beautiful poem by Li Po, which Pound translated into English. But his translation is a *rifacimento*, he redoes the poem, he reconstructs the

poem completely. And it's also a sort of translation, it's a poem by Ezra Pounds based on Li Po. And then Kozer comes into the picture and he does the Li Po poem done by or translated by Pound, now retaken by Kozer in of course a different period of history. And someone who has read this poem once said to me; "José if you only wrote this poem, only this one, you are already among the immortals." And I owe that to her, I owe that to Guadalupe. She's been such a source of poetry, such a source of good cleansing in my life, and such a sedate force, because I am such a restless human being, I am such an unfair being, my struggle is trying to be a more just person, but I'm so emotional, I'm so intense, that I make blunders all the time. She's more sedate, even though she's a nervous person. And the combination has been very good for our relationship; it has also been very good for my poetry. And those poems are a joy, whereas the poems to the death of my parents or my grandparents, including my grandmother have been not joyful but painful. At one point I sang my grandmother's death. She died in Israel, not of old age but she died because she climbed a ladder and fell, broke her hip and then she died. She died far away - in Israel. I just learned about this after it happened, learned of it through a phone call. I was already in the United States and my parents were in Cuba, they stayed there for another year. So that death didn't impact me so much, because it was like an abstraction. But those poems are definitely much more difficult to write, much more: I think they are more complex, the love poems are basically joyful; the others are much more complex. I would need to use a number of adjectives to deal with this issue. I am for instance a believer of reading contextually; I am a believer of talking about something with the text in front of you and seeing things in that text that you can convey to another. Deep reading is a great exercise; I think the greatest exercise that exists; is what the readers of the Bible always did. This was our first book, the Bible, and we intensely read it; to this day we intensely read this book. And this is what poetry demands, and this is why poetry is never read extensively, because it demands such intense reading. You have to unweave what was weaved in there mysteriously by the poet. And poetry is so synthetical, poetry organizes so many things into an apparently simple line. So that to undo what's in there and understand it, let's use that word, you need time and patience, and a great learning, so that these two avenues, which are the only large avenues that exist in mankind, love and death, (they're so intertwined) have produced in my life as a poet two basic tonalities: the tonality of joy and the tonality of language in its complexity trying to unravel that which cannot be unraveled and which is called death. I can unravel love psychoanalytically, emotionally, consciously, but I cannot unravel death. Nothing helps me when it comes to death, and the poems reflect that all the time, nothing helps me there. Whereas with love and a love relationship, and a good relationship, a lot can be understood, but there's a limit, there's a limit even there. With love something ends and something begins, which is called death. And of that we don't know anything. It's, as when Wittgenstein says, "I cannot talk about that of which one cannot know anything." That's why we call God the unnamable. *El innombrable*. That's why we think of God as that which cannot be unraveled. He is behind the dark cloud, and the cloud cannot be trespassed.

*D.R.: Regarding linguistics and translation – You most often use English in everyday speech and Spanish for your poetry. Speaking to the metaphysics of words and language - How does the translation of ideas of ideas work between languages for you? Is the idea of death different for you in different languages, that is, how does Death translate?*

J.K.: Let me tell you an experience, I think it's the way to start answering your question. I come to the states in 1960, in the month of August, hot as hell in New York. The second time I leave Cuba, because I had lived in New York for a year before, then went back to Cuba, and then I came sort of into an exile that has lasted fifty-one years. And a couple of months after I'm living in New York, a great experience for a twenty year old guy, in the 60s you can imagine what it meant, it was wonderful, wonderful. I was very poor but I was very rich. I learned so much, I lived so intensely, it was a great period in my life. It starts to snow, here's winter. I come from the tropics. I have never experienced cold weather, winter, snow, those winds, those New York winds. And I always write, and I start writing about winter but I don't have the vocabulary, I don't have the language to write about winter, because it has never been an experience in my life. So what happens is very curious and it is the situation of someone who lives in two languages, and who lives outside his own native culture, his own native language. I want to write about the snowfall, and the snowstorms, but I don't know how to say snowstorm in Spanish. I learned it in English, so I have to go now to the dictionary and translate the English word I just learned with a heavy Cuban accent, into Spanish. And as I learn it in Spanish and I use it in a poem it feels so artificial, and I hate artificiality. That's why I reacted to ornamentation when you spoke about the baroque, the neo-baroque. And I say to myself, this is no good. At that point, I believed that a poet could never go to a dictionary, that if you went to a dictionary the poem is going to be spoiled. To that degree I was naïve, and something very curious, and very magical began to happen. I would start developing my Spanish from the English (I think I must have been one of the first people writing in the Spanish language using winter stuff) (because after all I come from winter, I come from winter because my parents are Slavs from Poland and Czechoslovakia). My father always spoke to me about winter in Poland, which is harsh. But he never used a vocabulary, because his Spanish was very limited. So here I am in New York, living the winter experience for the first few years in English, translating all this into Spanish, and learning a new vocabulary; *polainas – leggings*, that's an example. So here I am learning *leggings* first, and then saying, "How do I use this in my poetry which is always in Spanish?" "I never wrote in English." So I have to go to the dictionary and look up "leggings" and I find *polainas*. So I integrate *polainas* into the poem, what is beautiful is that three four five six ten years after using *polainas* the word becomes a true word in my life, because now the winter experience of living in New York I can experience it in Spanish, because I convert everything into Spanish immediately. So there lies an example of how the operation of translation in poetry where the poet always depends on his native language occurs. And it occurs in my case in two stages: the first is indeed artificial, because you have to recur to the dictionary, and you have to translate. But the second one is through usage and mental habitation and habit, and it becomes

natural. And to me, all the winter issues (from *botas* to *polainas*, to *ventisca* to whatever word that is related to winter) happen now in my head in Spanish.

I think I mentioned this the last time we met in Texas, an experience I've had with Guadalupe, which again is part of this issue. I've always been adamant about separating my Spanish from my English. Not that I don't believe in Spanglish. Spanglish is all right, I don't need it, I don't use it. I've separated my Spanish from my English all the time. My language is Spanish, not English. With English it's rather strange, in spite of all the years, in spite of the fact that I read more English literature nowadays, or more literature translated into English than Spanish, because I don't have access to Spanish books anymore as I used to, I tend to exclude English from my inner life. Well, I began to notice in my relationship with Guadalupe, when we had the children at home we always spoke Spanish, we made it a point not to mix the two languages, we wanted the children to be raised bilingually, Spanish in the house, in the streets they were learning their English, in school, and so on, and it worked beautifully for our children because they're bilingual both of them, they're very bilingual. But I never had a formal education in English. When I started studying Spanish literature, Latin American Literature, my English came to a halt and never grew further. Today, if I am writing a letter in English, and I use the word *beginning*, I have to be sure it's a double *n*. I don't know the rules, my grammar in Spanish is really very good, I know what I am doing, I was a teacher for thirty-two years. And lately with Lupe we would be talking (in Spanish naturally) in the house, her and I talking about an issue, or topic and as she speaks she suddenly uses English phrases or words, to this day she is doing that, a lot, and this began maybe two, three years ago: and at first I was a little bit puzzled that she's mixing the two languages, not Spanglish, but just mixing Spanish with English. I mean most of the speech is in Spanish, but then comes her saying something in English. And at one point I almost said, "Why are you doing this?" but I controlled myself, because it's her world, it's her right to do with her language whatever she likes. And her needs are different from mine, obviously; she doesn't write poetry. You know what I noticed? The minute she used a statement, a word in English, immediately I translated it into Spanish in my head. Immediately. It was an instantaneous thing. And if she said, "*estoy de acuerdo contigo, it's ok.*" her saying "it's ok" became *está bien* immediately in my head. It was an instantaneous thing. And then I began to wonder why am I being finicky to such a degree? And I realized I am so protective of Spanish, so extremely protective of Spanish. It is an extreme situation. Even in that "dailyness" I have to do that reconversion. So that without that reconversion, in terms of language, my poetry would not have grown, because I am *asediado* by English, I walk out of this room and all the signs I see around me are in English, the television is in English, the radio is in English, everything is in English. My library has more books in English than in Spanish. And how can I let go of the Spanish when I cannot write a single poem in English. I'd kill my poetry. I'd kill the poet. So there is that constant state of resistance, which is a healthy resistance because it is not a negative resistance in the sense that I learn from English a lot, I incorporate English a lot, the translations become then turned into Spanish, vocabulary, or phrases or



words that become alive in me so that there is no artificiality in there. It works very well for me, but it is a state of tension, the body is always tense in front of that “other” language. It is still a foreign language. I say I have written Spanish poetry in a foreign country. Now how can I call the United States a foreign country when I have lived here for fifty-one years? And I love the United States and I respect it very much. So how can I call it foreign? I call it foreign in terms of the poet. For the poet it is foreign. I am sure Nabokov felt this even though he wrote prose; but I am sure he always felt he was in a foreign country. Even though he was perfectly bilingual and he did *Lolita*, he did many of his masterpieces in English. This dichotomy, there’s no solution for it. I am the poet in Spanish, and English is a second language, it is a second language. So you know the experience of winter and this recent experience in my relationship with Guadalupe, I think says something about the state of self defense, but not negative self defense, I repeat, but rather, a healthy protective, which occurs when you need to protect a situation.

*D.R.: Eduardo Espina claims that to date, your best poems are those written about your father.*

*Do you think that is so, and is so why? Is there some inspiration from your father there due to your relationship with him that sparks a cord in you?*

J.K.: I’m going to be very vain. My best poems are all my poems. Eduardo is wrong; but I’m not going to be too vain, and I’m going to agree with him partially. What happens is that when I wrote a certain type of poetry I must have been maybe between thirty-five and forty years of age, in New York, and I was dealing with my grandfather and the biblical stuff to which I alluded in this interview with you versus the poetry that I wrote after. Those early poems, perhaps because I was younger and I had more energy, more emotional energy, are more intense and stronger poems, intense and stronger than what I’ve done later on. Later on, there’s more lyricism, delicacy, intertwining, “microscopism”, the intent is more as perforation, as *agujerear la realidad*. And it becomes very complex like that spider we mentioned before, that is weaving the spider web. The poems in *Carece de causa* which is a book I think is very important in my poetry, in *Carece de causa* each poem is of such intensity, of such tremendous referential intensity, it requires so much search and research in order to be comprehended and worked out in the reader’s mind (it’s gonna need glossaries) a lot of explaining. That began to change and to move in a different direction, perhaps from the masculine to the feminine, from the yang to the yin as we more or less said before, but it created a different type of poetry that I don’t think has to be categorized in terms of better or less better or worse or whatever, but I understand what Eduardo is saying, it is the intensity.

See, Espina’s intensity is in the very language he uses, and the very way he weaves language into the poem. My intensity is that but also anecdotal. Eduardo is not an anecdotal poet, although he’s becoming, after the deaths of his mother and father, more anecdotal. I think he’s producing a new type of *espinismo*, a new type of poetry for

himself. And I think he's right now in a crossroad where good things are happening to him, and he doesn't know exactly where he's going, but he's going someplace that's important, because he has the talent, and the knowhow, and the culture as well as the capacity to take chances. Those things in today's modern poetry are essential. You can no longer be a naïve poet, you have to know all the poets, you have to know all the poetry that has been written, and Eduardo knows a lot. Eduardo is a voracious reader, as I am. Perhaps Echavarren, Eduardo, and I are three of the most voracious readers that there are, as far as I know in our generation, and in Latin America. Well this may be an unfair statement, but at least we three are voracious readers. Let's not compare it with anything.

So that from his point of view, I can understand him saying those are my best poems. I would say it's not a question of best or worse, the question is to avoid categories, it is a question of an intensity that is more blatant, more direct, it kind of slaps you, it's a punch, it is boxing versus this long distance runner that I've become. That poetry has become (not I) a systematic continuity and complexity. There's a systematic continuity in variations. The poem that I wrote this morning has nothing to do with the poem that I wrote yesterday. If I take this notebook and I begin to look just at titles – I have a new series, which is called ACTA est FABULA. ACTA est FABULA means “Here ends the comedy.” This is how any play in Roman times ended. An actor came on stage and said, “Acta est Fabula,” “Show's Over,” “Party's Over.” And I've entitled a book of mine ACTA est FABULA because I am in the “acta est fabula” of my own life and of my own poetry. I'm finished, this is the end, as the Doors would sing. Fondo de Cultura asked me for a book and I sent them a book entitled ACTA est FABULA. And if I take this notebook and I look for ACTA est FABULA, I see there are a number of them in here which are totally different from the FABULA series for example, or *El recluso y su efigie* or *DE RERUM NATURA* (the title of another book that I'm publishing in Brazil this year). Here's a title *Divertimento* so you do see as you pass by the pages “*Koichijoin fue el primer príncipe que renunció al trono en Japón*.” There is the title of a poem, *Letanía*, another one, so that you do see, there's another *Divertimento*, titles get repeated, here's one called *Natividad* you see, so that what's happening to me is that I am constantly (as I write) living different experiences, yes from the point of view of a given voice, I can't deny I have at this point a given way of writing, I can't deny I have this voice at this point, but it is changing, changing, alternating, alternating. I always say I have two legs so as I dance I have to alternate the movement of the two legs. As I walk I move first one leg forward, then the other, then the first again. And this is never automatic, this is never preplanned, I have never written a poem that I planned, say the day before. I'm going to write about Diana sitting in front of me dressed in this way tomorrow. Then I get some information, she's wearing this type of a dress, well I cannot reproduce reality that way. But the fact that I sat with you in this room answering your questions, being with you, for a number of hours, somehow I sense it has (because of the nature of the beast, which is me) it has to sift into a poem at one point. Will it happen

tomorrow morning? Will it happen in two years? Will it never happen? This I don't know, because I don't control poetry.

What is good for me right now at this late stage in my life is that I don't control poetry but she doesn't control me either. We are very good friends, we are on very good terms and we understand each other very well. We're both very demanding but we are equal to each other, we're *primus inter pares*. You don't tell me what to do, and I won't tell you what to do. You give me what you've got to give and I'll give you what I've got to give. And many times I see myself as I am writing the poem that poetry tells me; "Go this way" and I say, "yes, but no" "yes I'll go this way but listen to me, I rather go this way," and I move the poem a bit to the left, a bit to the right, a bit to a certain word. And I learned also, because here goes the ego, how to sacrifice certain things. How to say no to a poem of something I think is delightful and very good, but it doesn't fit in that poem and there I'm like a surgeon, I just cut it, no pain, I experience no pain. I just cut it, I put it aside in my head, and maybe I'll use it some other time. I dream poems constantly, and you know, I'll get up in the middle of the night, and go take a pee, or I get up because it's morning and I have had an entire poem in my head, complete from beginning to end, complete, wonderful, in the dream, dreams are very tricky, and then I say, "It's gone, its lost." And you know, I say, "Ok, I'll take my revenge on you baby" which I'll do by writing another poem. And I write a poem, against the poem that I lost, that disappeared when I woke up. So you know when people say to me, "You're a poet," I deny that fact: I like what Lorca said. He was introduced to someone and the person to whom he was introduced said; "Ah, you're the poet," and Lorca reacted by saying, "If you say so." And, I think it is OK when people say; "Oh, you're José Kozer the poet," and I say, "If you say so." I never call myself a poet. It's very embarrassing, it almost embarrasses me to assume that, it is almost a category that is so sentimentalized and romanticized, no, none of that, but I live like a poet. My life has been always since early childhood, the life of a poet by which I simply mean that I live writing poems. I was talking to Arturo Carrera recently and he said that he was very impressed in an interview where I said that when I was about ten years of age in Havana, you know children play at many things, balls, baseball, children enjoy playing, they invent games, well my game was to sit on my terrace in Havana alone, absolutely alone, and play a game, which was called the game of languages, where I invented languages. And at one point, and this happened for a number of years, I was able to speak perfectly, perfectly, fourteen different languages. And I spoke Chinese, Russian, Yiddish, of course Spanish, English, French, Italian, Portuguese, perfectly. They were all invented and Arturo said you know when I read that I was so touched by it because what you said was what any poet really aims at - Babel, Babel, the tower that had to be destroyed (it should not have been destroyed). It is a wonderful tower. The mistake was they wanted to build it all the way up to God. It should have been a little bit more modest, and then we would have the tower, which we do have anyhow, because we have all these languages, we live in a world of different languages. And it is so magnificent we have all these possibilities. To this day, I for instance read Japanese poetry with the *romanji*, which is the transcription

into our alphabet of the Japanese words. And if I'm reading a Japanese poem and I have the *romanji*, I read it out loud, I don't understand a word of Japanese, and then I read either the Spanish or the English translation, which is what I understand. And I love it; I love just listening to that language which I don't understand, and making believe I'm Japanese, and talking like they would talk, and kind of making believe I am Japanese, this kind of thing. Those are exercises, but they are also forms of living, forms of *comportamiento*. *Yo me comporto como un poeta en mi vida privada, en mi vida interior porque vivo haciendo poemas*. And this is a good thing, a very good thing.

## APPENDIX B

### “SENTADA AL BORDE (DE) LA MEMORIA”

#### ENTREVISTA CON TAMARA KAMENSZAIN

*D.R.: Usted ha hablado en otras entrevistas sobre los antecedentes familiares, pero me gustaría que pudiera hablar sobre las circunstancias del fallecimiento de cada uno. (edades, enfermedades, si murieron en casa, en el hospital. Se fue una muerte prolongada o inesperada, y cualquier comentario que le gustaría compartir).*

T.K.: Bueno, no creo que esto tenga mucho valor para entender mi obra porque lo que interesa está en los libros y el resto son cosas personales. De todos modos, no tengo problema en contarlo pero simplemente diré que la muerte de mi padre no fue algo muy traumático. Creo que eso se ve en mi libro *El ghetto*, porque no hay ninguna constancia de que ha sido muy traumático.

Y la de mi madre si estuvo mediada por una enfermedad que si fue muy traumática y si duró bastante. Fue la enfermedad de la desmemoria, que no quiero nombrar aunque una vez la nombré en el libro y me arrepiento porque en seguida los lectores tienden a aferrarse a las nominaciones. Creo que lo que no se ve en los libros es porque fracasó la manera de transmitirlo o porque no era necesario transmitirlo.

Bueno, y después está la muerte de mi hermano que aparece más en *La novela de la poesía*. Allí está también bastante especificado. Qué murió de una enfermedad que se llama Tay Sachs que es una enfermedad de trasmisión. Ahí la tuve que nombrar porque no había metáforas para sugerirla. Es una enfermedad genética que en general se da más entre los judíos. Sobre todo, entre las generaciones de mis padres es casi una enfermedad que está en extinción menos. Bueno, es que mi hermano nació con esta enfermedad y murió cuando tenía tres años. Yo tenía seis. En mi familia nunca se habló del tema. Y a mi me dijeron que se lo habían llevado a curar, hasta que me enteré de la verdad, de que había muerto.

*D.R.: ¿Podría hablar sobre su relación personal con cada uno de sus padres antes y después de su muerte, y cómo han cambiado sus sentimientos como resultado de eso?*

T.K.: Mi relación personal con mi padre fue siempre muy cercana, más fuerte y cercana que con mi madre, que queda un poco más distante en mi recuerdo. Mi madre a partir de la muerte de mi hermano creo como que se volvió más distante. Se ve que no le fue fácil elaborar ese duelo, y se alejó de nosotros. Mis sentimientos en cuanto a mis padres, después de la muerte de ellos, más que cambiarse se clarifican, se ven más claros porque como no está el otro para intercambiar, los sentimientos quedan fijados. Entonces, queda como un resumen, una síntesis. Y en este sentido quedan más claros, uno los puede

enunciar más, porque cuando uno está en medio de una relación con los vivos, van cambiando las circunstancias.

*D.R.: ¿Cuál es el vínculo que existe entre los vivos y difuntos que propone en sus poemas?*

T.K.: Propongo un vínculo con la madre por lo menos, no sé si con el padre, no me acuerdo mucho qué tipo de vínculo propongo con el padre en mis libros. Pero con la madre, digo con la madre porque es un vínculo universal, no es mi madre solamente, creo que es un vínculo que yo llamé “espiritista”. Como encontrar un lenguaje para comunicarse con los muertos, escuchar la lengua materna, lo que queda en lo que permanece en uno. Y en el eco de lo que ella nos dijo; de cómo ella habló, del ritmo que tenía su decir. Y bueno, me parece que eso es con lo que me conecto. Con el caso de mi padre, creo que me conecto más con las ideas; con los mandatos, con los preceptos que con el modo de la lengua. Con mi madre es más un ritmo, un modo, una cadencia. En cambio, con mi padre es más “ah, mi padre hubiera pensado esto así si viviera”, creo que son modos muy diferentes de conectarse. Muy diferentes. Pero los dos están, y los dos me permitieron escribir, me permitieron que eso aparezca en mi poesía.

*D.R.: ¿Cómo le ayuda el acto de escribir y leer poesía para articular la construcción (lingüística y cultural) de la pérdida y el consuelo?*

T.K.: No se puede negar que tanto escribir como leer me permiten elaborar eso; darle paso a otra cosa, cerrar etapas, darle palabras a lo que no tiene palabras. Igual, tampoco quiero idealizar demasiado, como pensar que la escritura lo cura todo, no. Porque hay otras cosas que van por adentro para elaborar el duelo. Hay un tiempo, una temporalidad que es necesaria para elaborarlo y otras cosas de la vida. No solo la escritura porque si no, pensaríamos que los que no escriben o no leen no elaboran duelos y no es así. El modo tal vez de elaborarlo es diferente. Yo, mi hermana y yo, cuando estábamos muy desesperadas con la enfermedad de mi madre, ella me encontraba por ejemplo cuidándola mientras al mismo tiempo escribía y me decía; “ay que suerte que suerte que podés escribir y elaborar esto”. Y yo le decía “bueno, pero vos tendrás otros modos”. También es cierto que hay escritores a los que no les alcanza con escribir para elaborar el duelo, igual se quedan enganchados, serían los que clínicamente se catalogan como melancólicos.... Pero bueno, a mí me ayuda, leer también, muchísimo, porque también uno ve las experiencias de los otros. Cómo los otros pudieron reescribir eso y uno lo vuelve a escribir, tomándolo de ellos. Que es en general lo que yo hago en mis libros, sobre todo, en *El eco de mi madre* y en *La novela de la poesía*, tomo de otros, los cito, digamos, aunque ya no es una cita, ellos ya son como personajes en mis libros. Entran como si fueran mis amigos, o como si fueran voces. Voces que yo he llamado a participar en esa especie de juego “espiritista” que hago.

¿Si no habla el arte, quién va a hablar de eso? ¿Si no habla la literatura, quién va a hablar de la muerte? Entonces, en ese sentido, las lecturas para mi son muy importantes, también para escribir. Pero para mi es importante tomar la voz de los que hablan de la muerte, porque uno no sabe nada de eso, y de los muertos no puede aprender. Tienes

que aprender de los vivos. Entonces, bueno, yo me acuerdo mi hijo menor que se separó de una novia que era muy importante para él en un momento cuando era muy joven y entonces me dijo: “Sufro mucho, y no sé que puedo hacer. Y le dije, “Te voy a dar a leer unos poemas que son de amor pero de rupturas amorosas.” Después me confesó que eso le hizo muy bien. Es como que lo que otro puede decir sobre algo semejante, elaborar sobre una experiencia semejante, lo conecta a uno no con la melancolía sino con la productividad del otro, en decir con la vida, y con la posibilidad de salir adelante.

*D.R.: ¿Cómo usa usted el lenguaje para ir más allá de la especificidad de una muerte o de una pérdida en particular? ¿Cree usted que los rasgos lingüísticos y estilísticos del neo-barroco, sirven para mejorar o para eludir el tema universal de la muerte y la pérdida que lo acompaña?*

T.K.: Mi relación con el neobarroco es un poco ambigua, porque siempre es la crítica la que impone esos casilleros: estos son neobarrocos, estos no son. Yo, en una etapa de mi obra me identifiqué más con ese rótulo. Yo buscaba cierta ruptura en la sintaxis, ciertos juegos de sintaxis que me ayudaban, que parecían expresar mejor mi trabajo, mi investigación. Pero eso fue cayendo un poco. Creo que se ve en mi obra. No sé como fue, pero empecé a sentir poco a poco, que ya en vez de ayudarme, como una búsqueda de cambio, de ruptura, me estaba limitando. Era como una comodidad para mí seguir trabajando con esos recursos, recursos de sintaxis, recursos metafóricos, recursos metonímicos. En vez de servirme, se estaba transformando en una cosa estetizante, era muy obvio que yo había adquirido una habilidad para usar esos recursos, como un ejercicio, pero no me estaban sirviendo como una arma de ruptura, de avance. Entonces, tuve que empezar casi a trabajar en contra de esta tendencia. Y entonces, creo que empecé a abrir un poco mis posibilidades de expresión, entre otras cosas a aclarar, digamos, a ser menos críptica. Entonces ahí el desafío es doble, porque clara, pero nunca explicativa. No me interesa explicar, no me interesa expresar linealmente ideas, nada de eso me interesa. Entonces, no sé, estoy en otras búsquedas. Creo que esos “golpes de la vida” que dice Vallejo ayudaron también a buscar nuevas alternativas para decir. Creo que hay cosas de la vida que piden a veces decir las cosas directamente como son, como aparecen delante de las narices, sin velarlas, muy crudamente, es un trabajo casi que te diría un poco intimidante y que asusta. Uno siente como que se desnuda, que no tiene ropaje. Porque las metáforas ayudan a veces a velar cosas de lo real que son muy crudas. En cambio esta búsqueda que va por un despojamiento, digamos retórico, por un momento me deja muy desguarnecida, muy sin defensas. Y también me hace dudar más del valor “literario” de lo que escribo. De hecho en el trabajo más barroquizante, digamos, con el lenguaje, se ve más lo artesanal y ese trabajo asombra, uno dice qué bonito, que bien logrado está, que habilidad que tienes, etc. En cambio si suelto la artesanía, queda como al descubrimiento el crudo de los materiales ¿Cuál es el efecto poético que eso genera? En ese límite estoy trabajando, es un desafío conmigo misma, Y por momento, entro en crisis porque no encuentro maneras de expresarme que me convenzan y ahí vuelvo a recurrir a mis “habilidades” como artesana que me tranquilizan un poco. Y en eso estoy, por eso al neobarroco lo llamo como chiste neobarroso.

Perlongher habla de neobarroso, yo hablo de neoborroso en el sentido de borrar todo lo que es efecto, todo lo que es artificio, y a ver qué queda. Es como un desafío que propongo. A ver si borrando, sacando, despojando, a ver que queda de hueso en esa búsqueda de lo real, porque yo creo que no solo yo, creo la poesía en general va en busca de decir lo real. Que es un imposible, pero toda la poesía de distintas maneras busca ir al punto ése del que nada se puede decir. Y bueno, ahí esta el desafío.

*DR.: Mi pregunta es sobre la muerte y cómo la entiende. Ya que los poemas bajo investigación aquí tratan de la muerte y la vida, ¿podría usted hablar de sus poemas en el contexto de su concepto de la vida eterna?*

T.K.: La poesía probablemente sea el único género que puede hablar de la muerte. Por esta misma capacidad que tiene de buscar siempre un paso más allá en relación a las posibilidades que le ofrece una lengua. Un lenguaje es un archivo que digamos va de un punto a otro punto. Y la poesía es esa vocación de no hacerle caso a ese límite, a ese punto de terminación de la lengua. La poesía empuje la lengua hacia el “espiritismo”, tratando de empujar para ver si se puede decir lo que no se puede decir. Eso, yo creo que es una pulsión de vida que tiene la poesía de avanzar más y de decir más aunque no se encuentren las palabras. Me parece que esa es una pulsión de vida, y la única manera que tenemos de hablar de la muerte es desde esta pulsión. Eso es también una elección de vida que a su vez sale de la muerte, digamos. No se puede pensar muerte sin vida, no es pensable. Está el caso límite de Enrique Lihn en *Diario de la muerte*. Él ahí se pone como muy enojado con el lenguaje, muy enojado porque se da cuenta de que no le sirve, no le sirve para detener la muerte. No le sirve como magia para sobrevivir, sólo le sirve para cubrir, para velar. Uno puede poner máscaras, crear disfraces, pero no puede con la muerte, no puede con lo que no se puede decir.

Yo en relación a la religión, si me preguntas, soy muy agnóstica, tengo un contacto muy grande con la tradición, con la tradición judía, pero no es un contacto creyente, de creer por ejemplo que hay vida eterna, ese tipo de cosas. Tampoco creo que el judaísmo sea muy afecto a pensar en la vida eterna, o en la resurrección. Me parece que el judaísmo es muy crudo también en eso. Uno se muere y listo, no? No tiene esta cosa como ilusoria, y yo no la tengo tampoco. Mi poesía que tiene que ver con la muerte, estos libros sobre todo, no son pesimistas, no son dramáticos, no son melancólicos. Hay una pulsión de vida siempre en la escritura. Enrique Lihn tiene ese impulso, muriéndose ya, escribiendo en el hospital, evidentemente tenía muchas ganas de vivir. Porque si no, la escritura no aparece en un estado de melancolía. El escritor, como dice Deleuze, es médico de sí mismo. Yo creo que Enrique Lihn ahí, en ese proceso donde se estaba muriendo, está dándose su propia medicina, y eso es muy interesante, me parece. La vida eterna, ¡no!

*D.R.: En mi investigación es fundamental establecer un marco teórico para el (anti)sentimentalismo en la poética neo-barroca. Por lo tanto, es importante identificar las emociones del duelo y la pérdida en estos poemas en particular. ¿Podría hablar*



*sobre su definición de sentimentalismo y emoción y las técnicas que usted utiliza para desviar o apoyar sus sentimientos respecto a la pérdida?*

T.K.: Lo del anti-sentimentalismo en la poética neobarroca es una opinión tuya, no sé bien qué quiere decir pero supongo que te refieres a que habría algo como un no querer mostrar las emociones, algo del orden de velarlas. Bueno, creo que eso es lo que traté de explicarte antes, mi sensación de que habría que ir abandonando ciertos velos, ciertos recursos. De todos modos yo no hablaría de sentimientos. Yo usaría la palabra “experiencia”, que me gusta mucho porque alude a lo que se experimenta. Porque el sentimiento nos lleva al sentimentalismo, y el sentimentalismo a mí tampoco me gusta, es una especie de auto-conmiseración o sea, es creer demasiado en el “yo”; en que el “yo” sabe lo que quiere, incluso sabe lo que siente. Yo considero que ser escritor es descreer un poco del ego, descreer de que hay un “yo” central, y que sabe lo que dice, lo que siente. En ese sentido me parece que el dolor, la expresión del dolor es más una experiencia que un sentimiento, porque la experiencia es algo menos personal, más compartible. Yo nunca pensé mucho en el sentimentalismo pero sí en que ciertos recursos me impiden dar cuenta de la experiencia. No sé si cuando te refieres al sentimentalismo hablas de cómo se entendía tradicionalmente lo poético, lo lírico, como un lugar donde se manifiestan los sentimientos. Bueno, obviamente eso pensado así no me interesa y ahí diría que justifico ese momento, casi te diría histórico, donde fue importante darle más entidad o resaltar el valor del lenguaje, porque venía muy como escondido detrás de los contenidos. El pobre lenguaje estaba totalmente como puesto entre paréntesis, y lo que importaba era lo que se decía y los sentimientos eran los reyes de esos contenidos. Pero eso ya está, esa revolución que empezaron las vanguardias, que plantearon otras corrientes, como por ejemplo el neobarroco, ya está. No hay vuelta atrás ahí, no se vuelve a la ingenuidad. En el arte es así, unas corrientes empujan a otras y bueno, se va haciendo una espiral. Pero no se vuelve atrás; ya no se puede, es muy difícil pecar de contenidista o pecar de sentimentalista después de las vanguardias. No sé, lo que no es difícil y es peligroso es pecar de estetizante o sea, de apostar solo al puro efectismo a través del lenguaje. Entrar en contacto con lo real exige entrar en contacto con la experiencia. Es la palabra que me interesa, puede ser emoción, puede ser “golpes de la vida” como diría Vallejo, puede ser pero yo ya no me preocuparía tanto de ser o no ser sentimentalista. Me parece que esas alternativas son un poco viejas, no me parecen muy problemáticas. Hoy me parece más interesante preguntarse cómo preservar la intimidad sin a lo mejor caer en los nuevos sentimentalismos que ya son muy otros, digamos.

Ya estoy pensando, por ejemplo, en cómo irrumpe la intimidad que hoy vemos desde Facebook hasta ciertas novelas autobiográficas pasando por las confesiones de cualquier tipo. Son los sentimentalismos que nos impone la sociedad del espectáculo y entonces me parece que hay que estar muy alerta de no permitir que esto se cristalice. Son nuevos modos de crear un lenguaje estereotipado. De ese sentimentalismo actual yo estaría alerta. Que tiene que ver también con la tecnología, porque hoy hay un entendimiento rápido de códigos, de tipo, estoy pensando en Facebook cuando la gente dice “ay, como

te quiero” o el “me gusta”, esos son los nuevos sentimentalismos que me parecen peligrosos. Ya no los sentimentalismos digamos de los románticos o de Neruda. Yo estaría más atenta a estos otros, a lo que no se puede decir por Facebook por ejemplo porque no se va a entender o porque si no va a escandalizar por ser tan crudo o porque va a resultar en una frase hermética que no se va a entender. Ahí yo me pondría neobarroca de nuevo pero ya desde otra trinchera.

*D.R.: ¿Qué otras obras literarias y teológicas (poesía o prosa) han sido útiles para usted, mientras ha tenido que pasar por el proceso o "el trabajo de duelo"?*

T.K.: Teológicas no, porque ya te vuelvo a decir que la teología no es para mí, no me consuela. Me consuelan mucho las ideas. O sea la teoría – el pensamiento – la filosofía, mucho. Leo mucho la teoría literaria pero también teoría en general – los nuevos filósofos, eso me consuela porque yo veo que en general los filósofos – post-estructuralistas, hoy muchos de ellos están vivos, tal vez hasta son de mi generación como bueno, Giorgio Agamben o Roberto Espósito – filósofos italianos que trabajan la bioética – están pensando mucho en la enfermedad desde ahí. Henri Mechonick – el lingüista francés – también dice por ejemplo esto, que el ritmo no es sonido, que el ritmo es sujeto, ahí está la experiencia, me interesa mucho eso. El lenguaje pensado sin la subjetividad, sin estar atravesado por el sujeto de la experiencia, me parece que corre el riesgo de transformarse en algo estetizante, donde no entra la ética – solo entra la estética. Alain Badiou también tiene una posición que yo llamaría esperanzadora, donde se busca darle otra vuelta de tuerca a la comprensión de la vida, de la experiencia. En ese sentido por supuesto que leer a esos pensadores ayuda. Yo también leí, en el tiempo en que estaba escribiendo tanto el libro que tiene que ver con la muerte de mi padre como la de mi madre, libros de gente que ya estaba trabajando esto de la muerte – me acuerdo un libro de Philip Roth, *Patrimonio*, que lo leí como tres veces seguidas cuando mi mamá estaba en el hospital porque él trabaja ahí también en esa instancia – me parece que lo hace de manera muy arriesgada donde la línea de lo autobiográfico ya toma otra dimensión.

*D.R.: ¿Cree usted que los poemas de El eco de mi madre ofrecen una forma de consuelo, o le parecen a usted que estos poemas representan una poética de la pérdida inconsolable.*

T.K.: Yo creo que esto lo tienen que decir los lectores. A mi me gustaría que ofrecieran consuelo, me gustaría eso, pero si lo ofrecen o no, no lo puedo decir. Creo que en general si se logra alcanzar la poesía, lo poético siempre tiene que ofrecer consuelo, creo que el arte, entendido en uno de sus aspectos, sirve para eso. La escritura entendida como Pharmakon, es al mismo tiempo veneno y cura. Aunque los dioses griegos la entendían como puro veneno, lo mismo que Platón que decía que había que poder plasmar una idea sin tener que escribirla; que ya tener que escribirla era una caída, un modo de apelar a la memoria. Después la palabra Pharmakon fue tomando otros sentidos hasta transformarse en lo que cura – lo que uno se toma para curarse. Entonces es muy, interesante pensar esto. La escritura tendría en su interior la paradoja: puede curar y

puede envenenar. Eso es lo interesante, porque tampoco es la escritura una enfermera samaritana que quiere curar a la gente, no; pero si alguien sabe cómo tomarla, lo puede curar, ¿no? Por ejemplo el otro día vi una película sobre la vida de Violeta Parra, la cantante Chilena y me quedó un verso de una canción de ella donde repite el “maldigo” y lo aplica a todas las cosas del mundo. Sin embargo yo leí esa maldición obsesiva y rítmica como una cosa de vida, me dieron ganas de escribir. Yo me tomé ese Pharmakon, la maldición como una cura.... Entonces es muy relativo también, lo que consuela y lo que no consuela.

*D.R.: ¿Cuál es la cosmovisión de los judíos en general hacia la muerte? ¿Cambia o difiere con el paso del tiempo?*

T.K.: Los judíos, ya te lo dije un poco, no hablan de la vida eterna. Por lo menos yo nunca escuché hablar de eso o de la resurrección o de lo que pasa después de la muerte. Me parece que la religión judía en eso es mucho más acotada. No pesimista, pero es realista. como más aceptativa de la muerte. En la tradición judía hay ciertos rituales interesantes en ese sentido. Por ejemplo, hasta el año de la muerte no se pueden hacer determinadas cosas, recién al año se pone la lápida al muerto. Me parece interesante porque es una temporalidad, una noción de la temporalidad del duelo. Y un período como de elaboración. Y, la posibilidad de que genere eso, genere un poder soltar al objeto del duelo; no quedar fijado como si el ritual dijera bueno, ya pasó un año, pusimos la lápida, y bueno, a otra cosa. Me gusta eso también. Me parece interesante que no haya que recurrir a que hay una resurrección para consolarse.

*D.R.: Desde un aspecto multicultural, en cuanto a origen étnica, nacionalidad y religión, hay ideas en conflicto o hay un cierto sincretismo con respecto a las perspectivas sobre la muerte?*

T.K.: No sé mucho de eso, pero me parece interesante. Por ejemplo, la idea de resurrección, yo digo que no la tengo porque el judaísmo no me la aportó. Pero, por ejemplo, cuando César Vallejo trabaja en *España aparta de mí este cáliz* muerte y vida como un oxímoron inseparable y dice por ejemplo; “cadáver lleno de mundo” o que un cadáver sale de un libro, dice “un libro retoña del cadáver exabrupto” reconozco en él una educación cristiana que le permitió ese tipo de imágenes, que a mí me fascinan pero que probadamente yo, a través del judaísmo, no llegaría a ese tipo de imaginario. Pero entonces, ese imaginario del Vallejo tiene que ver obviamente con su formación, una formación católica, cristiana, con lecturas infantiles también, porque las lecturas religiosas en general son de infancia. Para mí son de infancia; las lecturas de la Biblia y de allí me parece que sacamos también un imaginario que nos maneja, y no lo manejamos nosotros. Eso me interesa de las religiones, ese arsenal de imágenes. No tanto cuando encuentro lo sagrado como un campo recortado y donde lo otro es lo profano. Pero si me gusta la parte de ritual cotidiano. Y creo que sí cambia con las religiones la concepción de la muerte, pero lo que es seguro es que hay una concepción de la muerte en esta sociedad. En el capitalismo o en la sociedad del espectáculo ¿no? Donde cada vez la muerte está más como recubierta del espectáculo pero donde cada vez

se habla menos de eso. Se arma todo un show alrededor pero a la vez de la muerte no se habla.

## APPENDIX C

### ‘VIVIR LA VIDA CON ACTOS HEROICOS’

#### ENTREVISTA CON EDUARDO ESPINA

*D.R.: Usted ha hablado en otras entrevistas sobre los antecedentes familiares, pero me gustaría que pudiera hablar sobre las circunstancias del fallecimiento de cada uno. (edades, enfermedades, si murieron en casa, en el hospital. Se fue una muerte prolongada o inesperada, y cualquier comentario que le gustaría compartir).*

E.E.: Es muy extraño hablar de esto porque cuando empecé escribir siempre tenía casi la certeza absoluta de que no iba tocar el tema de la muerte. Por la sencilla razón de que creía que la poesía no debía ser no una elegía sino un elogio que uno elegía hacer para toda la vida. Era un acto de la escritura y por lo tanto un acto absolutamente del hoy, del presente, de un lugar no de muerte, sino de existencia en plenitud. Lenguaje, pensamiento y sentimiento, y eso es la vida en su máximo potencial. Sin embargo, y esto es lo raro, lo digo muchas décadas después de haber pensado lo anterior, prácticamente una vida después ya que muchas cosas han sido las que pasaron. Cuando murió mi tía, mejor dicho la hermana de mi abuela, con la cual yo tenía una gran admiración y apego emocional (fue como una segunda madre), tuve la primera experiencia sobre la muerte, mejor dicho, sobre la diferencia que hay entre la vida y la muerte. Sobre todo, la gran certeza incumplida que deja la vida cuando desaparece, pues con la muerte se pierde, tal como digo en un poema, “una voz, una caligrafía, una presencia”. En ese momento, no obstante, pensé que algún día volvería a ver a mi tía en el cielo. Hoy, en cambio, aunque sigo teniendo fe, no sé si existe o no el cielo. Pero, ese es otro tema.

*D.R.: ¿Tuvo en esa época de la vida alguna experiencia cercana sobre la muerte?*

E.E: Sí, la muerte de mi abuelo. Estábamos cenando lo que en Uruguay llaman moñitas, “bowties”, y de pronto sonó el teléfono. Era para decir que mi abuelo estaba grave. Pero, la palabra grave era un eufemismo, pues en verdad mi abuelo había muerto; todos los que estábamos en la mesa nos dimos cuenta. Había tenido un infarto mientras corría tratando de alcanzar a un ómnibus. Iba con mi abuela. A partir de ese día nunca más volví a comer “bowties”, pues desde entonces los asocio con la muerte. Eso fue el primer gran recuerdo que me ha quedado y que hasta que el día que muera va a seguir acompañándome. Cuando me esté por morir voy a rescatar ese recuerdo casi absoluto, como fue imaginar a mi abuelo corriendo para poder alcanzar el ómnibus que lo llevaría a su casa. ¿Cómo fue que todo comenzó a ocurrir, como habrá sido intentar reanimarlo cuando ya estaba dentro del ómnibus y la respiración le faltaba? ¿Qué día fue? ¿A qué hora? Fue de noche, es lo único que recuerdo, y esto es lo raro: con el tiempo, las fechas y los detalles se van borrando. Pero mira lo que pasa. Muchos años después, escribiendo Todo lo que ha sido para siempre una sola vez, me encuentro con un proceso mental muy extraño; las muertes anteriores, las de mi tía, mi abuelo, y mis abuelas se cruzan en el mismo tiempo con las muertes recientes de mi padre y mi madre, transformando la

noción de muerte “en general”, y lo que eso representa para mí en este momento cuando me estoy acercando a mi propia muerte. A los 60 años de edad, me di cuenta de que la barrera que había entre mí y la muerte, es decir, mis padres, ya no está. Por lo tanto, la muerte puede entrar; la puerta está abierta, puede entrar en cualquier momento. Es decir, cuando hablo de poemas sobre la muerte, en verdad de lo que estoy hablando es de mi vida actual, una con color a crepúsculo. Es cuando el sol ya comienza a caer, y uno no sabe si la noche está por comenzar, o es el día que está por terminar. Ahora esto es lo que siento en la vida. Por lo tanto, cuando hablo sobre la muerte, hablo con gran naturalidad y quizás los poemas sobre mi madre y sobre mi padre, es la distancia que trato de evitar con esa abstracción, aunque no sea tan así, porque es una abstracción “real”, pues morir no es una abstracción. Hay que certificar la defunción, con firma del médico, hay un hecho biológico que se cumple. Lo que sí es una abstracción, es lo que vendrá cuando cerremos los ojos. ¿Habrán algo más?, ¿O será como cuando a uno lo operan con anestesia general y pierde absolutamente la conciencia y la posibilidad de recordar o imaginar?

*D.R.: ¿Recuerda bien a los primeros muertos de su vida?*

E.E.: La primera fue Aída, era su nombre, como la ópera de Verdi; era hermana de mi abuela, pero como ella nunca pudo tener hijos me adoraba, pasaba todo el tiempo con ella hasta que se murió de leucemia; fue la primera gran muerte en mi vida; fue muy difícil dejar de verla, no pasar tiempo con ella; después murió mi abuelo, Julio. Pero quizá el momento más fuerte fue cuando se murió mi perro, el único perro que tuve en mi infancia; se llamaban Piolín, era un rat terrier. Era un perro extraordinario que desapareció por seis meses, se lo llevó la perrera municipal, la cual recoge perros que andan por las calles, que luego son sacrificados. Nadie sabe que lo fue que pasó, pero el perro cruzó toda la ciudad y después de 6 meses desaparecido, en los que lo dimos por muerto, regresó a casa. Pensé en ese momento que quizás la vida más allá de esta vida podría ser algo así, como que en un momento pueden juntarse los vivos con los que están ya muertos. Cuando murió mi perro fue quizás la primera vez en la vida que tuve la sensación de la no repetición. ¿A qué me refiero con esto? Al hecho de saber con certeza que nunca más se escuchará el ladrido temprano de la mañana ni que al regresar de la escuela me moverá la cola para demostrar su amor. Son esos elementos tan específicos que le otorgan una visualidad a la abstracción que representa la muerte.

*D.R.: ¿La muerte ha sido un tema constante en su vida y en su poesía?*

E.E.: Mira lo que pasó. Desde ese momento, el de la muerte de mi perro, cuando yo tenía 14 o 15 años de edad, hasta cuando murió mi padre, en enero del año 2005, y estamos hablando de 45 años entre una muerte y otra, no pensé mucho en la muerte, ni siquiera cuando murieron mis abuelas, tal vez porque las dos ya eran muy ancianas y uno acepta que la vida humana no es eterna. Aunque en verdad, cuando murió mi padre, el hecho de depositar toda la energía, la vitalidad de todo en la sobrevivencia de mi madre, me hizo entender el luto o el momento de dolor de una manera casi imperceptible, porque al ver cómo había quedado mi madre ante lo sucedido, traté de evitar cualquier referencia a la

muerte y dedicar toda mi energía y entusiasmo en acompañarla, con las proyecciones de vida que yo podía aportar, y que fue por poco pues mi madre murió tres años después de la muerte de mi padre. Cuando murió mi madre sentí como que morían dos personas al mismo tiempo, pues me di cuenta que no podía llamar a mi padre para decirle que había muerto mi madre. Fue muy raro.

La aceptación de la muerte es un asunto racional. En un corto periodo murieron mis dos abuelas, pero todo lo entendí como un proceso normal de la vida, pues ambas habían vivido una vida extensa. Pero, en el caso de mi padre y mi madre, me costó mucho más quizás porque tenía mucha esperanza depositada en lo que podía hacer la medicina y prolongarles la vida. Fue difícil también porque ambos murieron de dos enfermedades muy contemporáneas, muy modernas, como son, la poliartritis que mató a mi padre y le produjo dolores terribles, pues no hay calmantes para aliviar tanto dolor en los huesos. Cuando aumentaron la dosis fue una forma de eutanasia; la alternativa fue, sigue con el dolor o no sigue, y el cuerpo eligió lo segundo. A mi madre la mató un cáncer incurable, de páncreas.

Las dos muertes de mis padres no fueron algo inmediato como un infarto o un derrame cerebral, sino que fueron después de largos años de lucha en favor de la vida, generada por la expectativa que dan las farmacéuticas, y lo que dicen los médicos. Siempre creemos que las nuevas medicinas pueden hacer milagros. De ahí que el libro *Todo lo que ha sido para siempre una sola vez* habla de la vida y de la muerte; al hecho de estar vivo y de ver a la muerte cerca, viendo también que la línea que separa a la vida de la muerte es tan fina, que en determinado momento podemos estar hablando de la muerte con la muerte todavía ahí, qué es lo que me ha pasado corrigiendo los poemas para el libro donde hago referencias a la casa de mi madre. Porque en el apartamento donde vivía mi madre todo está tal como lo dejó la tarde cuando fue al sanatorio porque se sentía mal. El reloj de ella cuyas horas ahora están paradas, está junto al reloj de mi padre. Al regresar al apartamento me encontré con una situación rarísima que me ha producido algún daño emocional colateral.

*D.R.: ¿Cómo ha sido el proceso de aceptación, por llamarlo de alguna forma, de la muerte de sus padres?*

E.E.: Ha sido algo realmente raro. La última vez que visité el apartamento, estuve limpiando la casa. Y de pronto, de manera consciente, o mejor dicho de manera inconsciente, me di cuenta: ¿para qué estoy limpiándolo tanto si mi madre no va a volver? Porque siempre me decía, “¿Por qué has dejado tirados los libros?”, ya que a mí me gustaba leer y poner los libros en el piso. Es decir, en una manera inconsciente todavía no he podido aceptar la muerte de mi madre, y, de pronto, de manera inconsciente, siento que puede volver en cualquier momento. A veces pienso que está en una especie de “twilight zone”, donde se va la gente que ha muerto pero que todavía no abandonó la vida por completo. Con mi padre no me pasa eso, porque mi padre nunca vivió en ese apartamento, se murió antes. En ese apartamento todo lo viví tal como lo

había ordenado mi madre, incluso las revistas que ella estaba leyendo cuando se enfermó de gravedad, que están todavía encima de la mesa. Son del año 2008. Y esto es lo que trato representar en ese libro, el misterio del tiempo que separa a la vida de la muerte y que en verdad no separa, sino que une. Es un lugar de intemporalidad, y de atemporalidad, pues no hay tiempo. Cada vez que entro al apartamento y veo los relojes detenidos, rodeados de objetos, me pregunto quiénes habrán sido los que le regalaron los objetos, en qué año. Tienen un valor histórico emocional muy grande y por no los puedo vender. En ese espacio solo la poesía puede dar razones, ninguna otra cosa. No hay otra cosa en la vida que puede ocupar ese espacio buscando explicaciones como la poesía, que trata de hablar de lo que no se puede hablar. De otra manera yo no podría contar quien soy ni de dónde vengo. Podría contarlo, pero caería en lo representacional, en lo sentimental y anecdótico. Y yo quiero saber, sabiendo que será imposible saberlo, ¿Qué es la vida? ¿Qué es la muerte? ¿En qué momento la memoria reaparece para dar vida a la continuidad?

Además, la mente funciona de una manera muy extraña. Ahora que han pasado seis años de la muerte de mi madre, me cuesta más volver a su apartamento que cuando recién murió. Le decía a mi hermano por teléfono el otro día que ahora me cuesta más regresar al apartamento a pasar tiempo ahí, mucho más que cuando murió mi madre. Porque he notado que ya el espíritu de mi madre no está ahí. Cuando yo iba y de noche me ponía a leer, poco tiempo después que ella muriera, notaba que ella me había estado esperando y me acompañaba. Yo notaba su presencia. Pero ahora siento que la muerte llegó completamente. Es un poco lo que pasa en la película *El sexto sentido*, la idea de que hay un periodo en que el alma se está alejando del cuerpo. Y cada lo creo más. Aparte pasó una cosa en noviembre de 2011 cuando con mi hermano tuvimos que ir a reconocer el cadáver de mi madre, para cumplir con una ley extrañísima que hay en Uruguay, no sé si hay en otra parte, en la cual se abre el ataúd, para reconocer si es la persona muerta y autorizar la quema de los restos. Se llama exhumación. Fue algo terrible. Fue ver su cadáver tres años después de muerto. A las dos semanas del reconocimiento quemaron el cuerpo y nos dieron las cenizas. Y cuando me las dieron, las cenizas estaban tibias. Después caminamos hasta un lugar donde las enterraron. Todo eso sucede en un espacio hermosísimo. Es el Cementerio del Norte con los árboles maravillosos, con una cantidad de pájaros, eso parece como un jardín botánico. Entonces, era una cosa rarísima. Era como salir del paraíso o entrar en el infierno o viceversa. Y todo eso es lo que trato de representar en el libro, la mezcla de lo visual, y lo abstracto, la vida y la muerte, lo incognoscible, lo imposible, pero también ese límite donde comienza la gran poesía. Y me ha sorprendido por ejemplo, en la antología que hizo Roberto Echavarren, *Indios del espíritu*, donde por primera vez aparecen poemas inéditos pertenecientes a este libro, que la gente me ha dicho que poemas son extraordinarias. Les he preguntado, ¿por qué? Y me dicen que porque los hice pensar en su propia muerte y en lo que dejamos cuando morimos. Es una de las preguntas que me hago, ¿Cuántas generaciones nos van a recordar? Nuestros hijos, quizás, si no se mueren antes, algunos amigos. Quiénes más. Es decir, pasamos del recuerdo a lo demás, que sería el olvido y el desconocimiento, que



en determinado momento del tiempo auspicia la pregunta ¿quién fue tal persona? Y esa persona somos nosotros.

*D.R.: ¿De qué forma se cruzan la muerte, la poesía y la belleza?*

E.E.: La belleza de la muerte es un gran tema. Yo recuerdo por ejemplo, cuando acompañaba a mi madre, a las sesiones de quimioterapia. Eso lo reflejé en un poema, en el represento la situación cuando la nurse llama a los pacientes que van a darse una dosis de quimioterapia y dice, que pase el que sigue. Era como que la muerte estaba llamando, pues uno veía las caras muy pálidas y demacradas de la gente y sabía que sería difícil que se salvaran. La poesía en ciertos aspectos es como la química farmacéutica; busca prolongar la vida, de la manera más humanamente natural. Es algo así como una supervivencia a toda costa. Hay que seguir escribiendo, y si es necesario quemar todos los árboles del mundo para que la poesía sobreviva, lo haremos. Los actos por la supervivencia son difíciles. Ver de cerca uno de ellos es una de las experiencias más raras que tuve en mi vida. Fue cuando murió la traductora Rose Shapiro, muy amiga mía. Fue la traductora de Carlos Germán Belli, y un día recibí un email de la madre, a la cual yo no conocía, diciéndome que Rose tenía cáncer, que iba va a morir, y que me quería ver. Yo viajé a St. Louis especialmente para verla. A un lugar que es como un hotel muy lujoso donde va gente con cáncer a morir, es un lugar terrible, porque uno ve gente que va ahí a morir. Ahí pasan sus últimas horas de vida con el mejor tratamiento médico, pero solo para eliminar en algo el dolor, no para salvarlos. Caminando por los pasillos, pues Rose se había quedado dormida, veo a un niño caminando que me dice, "You wanna come to the birthday of my Father?" Digo, "Where?" y me dijo, "Here". Fue como una película, "It's going to be the last birthday of my Father, my Father is going to die." Y fui con el niño sin conocer al hombre enfermo ni a su familia. Y hablé con la esposa y le dije que había ido porque era bueno para el niño. Terminé comiendo torta de cumpleaños con ellos, tomando Coca Cola, con gente que unos minutos antes no conocía. Sin conocer a esa gente, para mí fue una experiencia demoledora. Porque el hombre tendría 40 años, había sido muy grande físicamente, como un jugador de futbol americano, pero el cáncer lo había reducido a nada. Y sus hijos rezaban para que se salvara. ¿Puede haber algo peor que eso? ¿Puede haber algo peor que tener que aceptar la muerte del padre a esa edad? Después salí al pasillo y empecé a caminar y veo pasar a la nurse sonriendo, porque claro, las nurses deben siempre sonreír, esa es la forma como deben tratar a la gente, dándole a entender con los gestos de su cara que la vida es hermosa, pero que en cierta manera la muerte no es algo tan malo. Esa es la idea. Y me acuerdo que finalmente pude ver a Rose, que despertó, y me llamó pasa que entrara, y me dijo. "Te voy a regalar un libro. Este libro está muy bien traducido, es de un poeta boliviano". Y me dijo que era maravilloso que todavía hubiera gente capaz de traducir a la gran poesía. Yo le toqué la mano. Rose había sido una mujer hermosísima. Había sido mi compañera de clase cuando estaba haciendo el doctorado y todos estaban locos por ella, hombres y mujeres. Era una mujer hermosa, alguien que me recordaba a Diane Keaton en las mejores películas de Woody Allen, ese tipo de mujer divertida y dramática el mismo tiempo. y ahí estaba, una de las mujeres más hermosas que había conocido,

muriendo como un esqueleto sin carne, y yo me dije, esto no es real, esto no puede ser real, esto es poesía. Y eso lo viví un año después de la muerte de mi madre. Es increíble, pues ahora hablando contigo me doy cuenta que antes de llamarse Rose Shapiro, había sido Rose Pasalacqua. Y mira lo que son las coincidencias. Ella vino al simposio que organicé, Poetry of the Americas, en donde leyó sus traducciones de Belli. Al día siguiente de que terminar el simposio yo viajé a Buenos Aires, pues a mi madre la iban a operar para intentar sacarle el tumor del páncreas. La conexión entre ambas historias es increíble. A mi madre no le dijeron que no le pudieron sacar todo el tumor y que el cáncer seguía con ella, y a Rose en cambio en el Sloan Kettering le dijeron que seguramente lograría sobrevivir, pero al año se murió.

*D.R.: La muerte es un tema sobre el cual ha pensado mucho.*

E.E.: Después de la muerte de mi padre, de mi madre, y de la muerte de Rose, que me afectó mucho, me di cuenta de que hablar de la muerte es hablar de la vida. Por eso los poemas de este libro no son elegías. ¿Por qué? Porque en la elegía el poeta ocupa el lugar del vivo, es él en el lenguaje, quien defiende a la vida con palabras. Lo vemos en la elegía de Auden sobre Yeats, o en la de Brodsky sobre Auden, donde el poeta dice “estoy vivo y doy testimonio de que lo estoy”. En mi poesía en cambio digo, estoy vivo, pero no sé si estoy completamente vivo. Sé que no estoy muerto, pero al mismo tiempo estoy escribiendo desde dentro de la muerte, la de los demás, la de quienes fueron también mí. Por eso me doy cuenta de que debo seguir escribiendo sobre el tema, y quizá el tema es libro es infinito, pues tengo una obsesión con la muerte y con el hecho de seguir vivo para prestarle atención, escribiendo entre la vida y la muerte, tal vez para decir que entre una y otra realidad no hay fronteras, y que ahí precisamente está el misterio.

*D.R.: ¿Cómo imagina el espacio entre la vida y la muerte?*

E.E.: En medio están la poesía y la religión, para aplacar el misterio, distraerlo. En mi caso el elemento religioso no me lo puedo sacar de encima. La educación católica me hizo muy bien. De no haberla tenido hubiera sido una persona violenta debido a la influencia del contexto donde crecí, pero la vida con los curas me hizo bien. Sé que mucha gente ha tenido muy malas experiencias con los curas y con la iglesia, pero no ha sido mi caso. La educación católica me ayudó a desarrollar la imaginación. Porque el mundo católico es un mundo en donde uno vive preguntándose, ¿será esto real? ¿esto no puede ser real? Es un mundo de la imaginación, como el que vemos en una catedral barroca en la cual uno va a ver ángeles en las paredes. La religión, como la poesía, es una creación poética en torno a la creación, en torno a la muerte, en torno a la vida, una preparación, una transición, para la muerte. Además está la idea social asociada a la religión, muy fuerte en América Latina, la que dice, “si usted en la tierra es pobre, no se preocupe, pues en el cielo será rico”. Por eso es que ya no tenemos más revoluciones en Brasil o en México, países en donde gran parte de la población vive en la miseria. El Catolicismo sirve para eso.

Voy a misa todos los domingos, más no sea para mantener vigentes en mi alma las ideas cristianas con las cuales crecí y que son una ética de vida. También voy para ver si puedo ayudar a mi creencia en la próxima vida. Antes siempre creía en esta, ahora no sé. Antes pensaba que cuando muriera iba a volver a ver a mi madre y a mi padre, que las almas se iban a reunir. Pero después, y desde un punto de vista lógico, pensé, “pero como puede ser”, como las almas se van juntar con quienes vinieron en la tierra más tiempo, como será posible que todas las almas puedan estar ahí. La lógica y el pensamiento religioso no son afines, como podemos ver. Al mismo tiempo sigo creyendo que debe haber algún lugar después de esta vida al cual puede ir la gente de bien y en donde no dejan entrar a los asesinos, ladrones, violadores, criminales. Pero qué pasaría si al morir todos vamos al mismo cielo y nos damos cuenta que hay vida del más allá pero ninguna divinidad como para separar a los buenos de los malos; sería trágico y cómico al mismo tiempo. Sería un gran chiste del destino que hubiera un cielo en el cual todos son aceptados, un cielo con muy bajos estándares de aceptación. Todo este tipo de cuestionamiento entre en lo que llamo “lo racionalidad religiosa”, que incluye el pensamiento sobre lo que puede pasar después de la muerte. ¿O será esta la única vida que hay? ¿Cuáles son los límites de la fe? ¿Será esta una subsidiaria de la imaginación? Realmente no lo sé, pero siento cada tanto una fuerte comunicación con una dimensión diferente a esta. Mi abuela paterna una vez me dijo: “Vos vas a ser un gran poeta”. Hoy, cuando termino un poema, siento que una voz, la de alguien de mi familia, me dice con gran cercanía, “estamos muy orgullosos de vos”. Esto no es una construcción mental, es algo que me viene y que no puedo controlar pues sucede a nivel mental y espiritual. Quizá esta locura es la que me permite, y perdón por la modestia, ser un gran poeta. vivo rodeado del espíritu de los muertos alrededor mío.

*D.R.: ¿La poesía sirve para hablar con los muertos?*

E.E.: Para hablar con ellos, pero sobre todo para hablar conmigo mismo. Eso no pasaba cuando comencé a escribir poesía. Antes escribía para decirle a la gente que sabía escribir poesía, y buena. Cuando comencé, a esa edad, los 19, 20, 21 años de edad, quien escribe poesía se siente una estrella o quiere serlo pronto, sin tener una meta de trascendencia a largo plazo. Por eso es que tantos buenos poetas han muerto jóvenes o dejaron de escribir antes de cumplir los 30 años. Al principio se escribe buscando el reconocimiento inmediato, simplemente porque el cuerpo está lleno de energía y así lo exige. La meta es satisfacer al instante. Ahora en cambio los lectores no son el objetivo principal. Escribo para mí. Cuando termino de escribir un poema de la forma como lo quería escribir, soy la persona más feliz del mundo. Por alguna razón difícil de explicar siento que cumplí con un objetivo espiritual. Por eso hoy en día puedo escribir sobre la muerte, porque para poder hacerlo uno debe tener una idea clara de lo que es la vida. Quizás por eso también es que hay tanta poesía de duelo, poemas sobre la muerte de alguien querido o conocido, que son tan malos, tan superficiales. Para poder llegar a frases sobre la muerte como “El resto es silencio”, uno debe haber sabido vivir bien, y en profundidad, o bien ser Shakespeare. O las últimas palabras de Watteau, “y ahora qué”. La muerte es el mayor misterio de todos, por lo tanto no acepta que literariamente la

traten de manera banal o cursi. Oímos con frecuencia decir, “pobre hombre, que joven murió”, como si la muerte fuera la única culpable, cuando el hombre debía trabajar 20 horas por día para mantener a su mujer y sus hijos, pero al morir nadie dice, “pobre hombre, que mala vida tuvo”. La vida tiene siempre un trato mejor que la muerte, tal vez porque creemos que la entendemos mucho más, y mejor.

*D.R.: ¿Le teme a la muerte?*

E.E.: A veces pienso que la muerte quizá no sea tal mala y que después de ocurrida tendremos alivio para muchas cosas. Pero es un tema bastante difícil de tratar, nadie quiere hablar en profundidad sobre el mismo, especialmente aquí en Estados Unidos. La gente va los domingos a la misa y habla sobre la muerte de Jesucristo, pero durante la semana no quiere hablar de nada que tenga que ver con la muerte. La muerte es como la pornografía, un tema no aconsejable. Sin embargo, no es más que eso, un tema más, uno muy importante, que al tratarlo puede traer pesar, pero también un gran sentido de liberación, sobre todo cuando habla de la muerte de los padres, pues ha llegado a un punto de comprensión de la mecánica de la vida. Uno comprende que la vida no es todo. La muerte es sufrimiento, dolor, algo inexplicable, pero al mismo tiempo la esencia de un poderoso tipo de belleza que esconde el misterio de estar vivos.

*D.R.: Los poemas sobre la muerte de los padres, en general, ¿tienen alguna característica específica?*

E.E.: Fabián Casas, poeta argentino, tiene un poema sobre la madre, quizás su mejor poema. Según el mismo, entiendo que no tuvo una relación ideal con su madre. O sea, su poema sobre la madre, no va ser lo mismo que uno mío sobre mi madre. Es decir, no todas las muertes son iguales. Quizás en su caso sería como una expiación, un sentimiento de liberación y reconciliación, también de cuestionamiento, para saber por qué la madre no tuvo una buena relación con su hijo. Yo tuve una muy buena relación con mi madre, por lo que al escribir sobre su muerte debo tener cuidado de no caer en la obviedad. Hay una canción de Mike and the Mechanics, que es sobre la muerte del padre, una gran canción pop de la década de los ochenta, “In the Living Years”. Con mis padres siempre tuve una gran relación, y ellos me apoyaron siempre en todo, incluso cuando abandoné los estudios de abogacía para dedicarme a la literatura. Tenía condiciones para ser abogado pues era competente para discutir sobre cualquier tema, con argumentos, pero me pareció algo sumamente aburrido; era una cuestión más de memorización que de imaginación. Vi que ahí no había nada para mí, y si me dedicaba a eso iba a tener una vida hipotética.

Por lo tanto, decidí abandonar esa carrera y dedicarme a la literatura. Creo que la gente que en un determinado momento conocí me apoyó mucho con sus comentarios para orientar mi vida, como el profesor Enrique Paunero, a quien visité mucho en Buenos Aires y también en una playa uruguaya donde veraneaba. Fue un tipo brillante, un maestro de la vida. Un día, mientras estábamos comiendo ravioles, me dijo: “Eduardo,

debes vivir la vida con actos heroicos". La frase era de Kierkegaard y se quedó conmigo para siempre. De esa forma vivo.