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**Transcending Immanence: Poetic Reason and Mysticality in Twentieth Century
Christian and Jewish Latin American Poetics**

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and Jewish Latin American Poetics**

by

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Stephanie Anna Malak, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2016

Co-Supervisors: Naomi Lindstrom, César Salgado

This dissertation considers the notion of “mysticality” in the works of Cubans Fina García Marruz and Cintio Vitier, Brazilian Clarice Lispector, and Argentine Jacobo Fijman, (the latter two both born Jewish in Russian-controlled territory). The present research engages with mystical, gender, and poetic studies in Latin American literature; broadly, I look at the way religion is incorporated into Latin American post-modern poetics. I analyze how Latin American writers use mystical language to address high-stakes secular issues, such as political revolution, feminism, and cultural identity. I also discuss female writers whose poetic product is an exploration of a feminine Latin American lineage. Following the work of Spanish philosopher, María Zambrano, I develop her theory of poesis, showing how these Latin American poets conflate the Divine and the quotidian in order to “divinize” aspects of everyday life. I contend that this poetic strategy of rhetorical divinization reveals both the profane and transcendent nature of their poetics.

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Introduction

WHY LATIN AMERICA?: TWENTIETH CENTURY LATIN AMERICA AS AN ENTRY POINT FOR MYSTICALITY

The mid-twentieth century in Latin America experienced widespread political unrest, revolution, and explosive literary production. In this dissertation project I focus on authors from three countries in the Latin American literary milieu—Cuba, Argentina, and Brazil—to look at writers that develop complex, mystical reflections about dramatic, secular events during the time leading up to and after WWII. During this time, Cuba faces its revolution and subsequent dictatorship; Argentina experiences coups d'état, the Infamous Decade and Peronism; and Brazil witnesses the unfolding of decades-long control by the military junta led by Getúlio Vargas. At the moments leading up to and including this crucial mid-century crux, these authors produce what I will call mysticalist texts. In my work I explore and problematize how the anticipation of these political and literary environments galvanize such provocative and phenomenological poetic works. I posit that these authors' aesthetic and theoretical approaches interrogate their political/literary climates, such that their writing inhabits earthly experience (the profane) more fully instead of fleeing from it. Rather than label any author or text as mystic(al), I suggest a re-examination of how mysticism is expressed in mid-twentieth century Latin American literature.

I therefore argue the presence of, what for here on out I will call “mysticality,” in the works of Cubans Fina García Marruz and Cintio Vitier, Brazilian

Clarice Lispector, and Argentine Jacobo Fijman, (the latter two both born Jewish in Russian-controlled territory). The present research engages with mystical, gender, and poetic studies in Latin American literature; broadly speaking, I look at the way religion is incorporated into Latin American post-modern poetics. I analyze how Latin American writers use mystical language to address high-stakes secular issues, such as political revolution, feminism, and cultural identity. I will also discuss female writers whose poetic product is an exploration of a feminine Latin American lineage. Following the work of Spanish philosopher, María Zambrano, I develop her theory of *poiesis*, showing how these Latin American poets conflate the Divine and the quotidian in order to “divinize” aspects of everyday life. I contend that this poetic strategy of rhetorical divinization reveals both the profane and transcendent nature of their poetics.

MYSTICALITY DEFINED

I develop a new term, mysticality,—a rhetorical strategy used by my authors-in-question—which precisely addresses their use of mystical language for outcomes that are definitively secular. In short, mysticality is the use of mystical language to speak about secular ideas. By expanding the semantic value of mysticism to include mysticality, I encompass more inclusive, pragmatic notions of religious rhetoric. A broader spectrum for expression, whereby mystical writing appears on a continuum, is established, thus allowing for a more malleable definition of what I consider to be mystical rhetoric in poetry. Furthermore, I demonstrate that mysticality is a new iteration on this spectrum, espousing novel characteristics that move the focus to the positives of life on earth, rather than the staunchly mystical “life-as-obstacle-to-death/God” approach so favored by Golden Age European

mystics. Mysticality, thus, expresses the following characteristics:

- 1) Rhetorical structures and lexica reflecting mystical thought and language;
- 2) Symbolic communion with an “other”, not God;
- 3) Divinization of quotidian items;
- 4) Favoring a mystical approach to writing; and
- 5) A methodology for describing the authors’ environment.

I consider two Catholic Cuban authors (Fina García Marruz and Cintio Vitier) as well as two Jewish authors (Clarice Lispector and Jacobo Fijman) as writers whose religious commitment and experience filtered through to their secular poetic and literary works.

By expanding the semantic value of mysticism to include the broader term of mysticality, I explore its location on a modern and postmodern spectrum, lying somewhere between religion (as defined in more orthodox terms such as “organized religion”) and religiosity (a mode of fidelity that can also apply to secular practices such as “high patriotism” or “sustained party loyalty”).¹ I argue that in their works my authors use mystical language, without necessarily mystical ends, to achieve humanist poetic expression. For this reason, I do not believe the notion of neo-mysticism to be sufficient. Neo-mysticism suggests that their writing is merely a new or contemporary version of traditional mysticism. As such, neo-mysticism would necessarily characterize my authors as mystics, writing in either the strictly

¹ Here I highlight that mystical language has been used before to discuss secular ideas. William James describes in *Varieties of Religious Experience* that often writers endure mystical experiences that are not necessarily religious, e.g. in contemplation of and/or communion with nature. Religious language has been used for secular meaning in writing before, all over the world. However, my particular contentions are that mystical language is employed in Latin America at specific moments in time that reflect imminent or contemporary political change. For this reason, my dissertation contributes an additive voice to the field of religious and Latin American studies in my suggestion of mysticality as a reason to explain the advent of the texts analyzed.

Jewish or Christian mystical traditions; the only difference would be that their environment is contemporized. I contend, however, that my authors use this new mysticalist strategy to write mystically without needing to be mystics.² I assert that the authors often profess themselves to forms of "secular religiosity" instead of ritualized religion to avoid becoming resolutely pious writers.

METHODOLOGY

The primary methodological approach in this dissertation is close reading. I examine particular instances in poems (in one case, a novel) where I believe mysticality is most present. During the close readings I analyze rhetorical devices to support my argument such as apostrophe, anaphora, epistrophe, and anacoluthon, among others. I make certain to consider the potentially Catholic or Jewish aspects of the text, when applicable. From a more macro level, in order to situate the meaning of mysticality in the texts, I also present socio-political-historical information related to the time during which the texts were composed. It is my aim to showcase the importance of the authors' environment and how it may have affected his/her poetics. I ground my arguments in the scholarship of religious studies and Latin American poetry experts. Therefore, for this pursuit, I turn to the hermeneutics of religious as well as poetic theoretical frameworks (Michel de Certeau, Gershom Scholem, William James, and María Zambrano) in addition to considering feminist discourse (Simone de Beauvoir, Amy Hollywood, Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous) as three of the five authors are women "writing" women. As a result, my dissertation research contributes to the fields of poetry studies,

² Only one of my authors, Jacobo Fijman, claimed to be a mystic, although his definitions of any category (Jewish, Catholic, mystic) defy any and all norms.

philosophy of poetics, religious studies, and feminist studies as well as literary and cultural Latin American studies.

Scholars such as Luce López Baralt, Amy Hollywood, and Carolyn Walker Bynum have made excellent case studies to describe the mystical influences on contemporary poets in post-WWII Spain and Latin America. In my work I propose that, instead of just re-applying the archetypical values of traditional mysticism to modern poetry, we should redefine the trope of mysticism today altogether as “mysticality” to help us mark how the nature of mystical writing has changed in modern and postmodern times. By extending the definitions and the labels of mysticism to examine the added aspect of profane politics in mysticalist, I account for how mysticism is redefined in the Latin American context and to what degree this impacts: 1) social-political output and religious identity in putatively atheistic processes such as the Cuban Revolution (in the cases of García Marruz and Vitier), 2) mystical conversions of faith in the Cold War/Latin American context (Vitier converting from Protestantism to Catholicism and Fijman “from” Judaism to Catholicism), and 3) the prominence of the female gaze in the mid-century lyrical-mystic prose writing (Lispector).³

As is the nature of dissertation work, I acknowledge that my research does not present a comprehensive survey of all Latin American authors whose work might represent mysticality. As I have discussed, I examine the aforementioned poets and their work in light of political turmoil, feminism, and identity-forging. As such a broad scope would be impossible to include in this dissertation study, I do expect to include authors like Puerto Rican Francisco Matos Paoli (1915-2000),

³To say that Fijman’s conversion is typical would be problematic. His version of Catholicism was anything but orthodox; discussions of his unique conversion are discussed in Chapter Three.

Argentine Alejandra Pizarnik (1936-1972), and Uruguayan Delmira Agustini (1886-1914) in future iterations of this work, either in book form or in comparative fashion for journal publications. However, the authors I chose I do believe represent this larger trend of mysticality that I note throughout the dissertation. Firstly, the choice of Caribbean, Southern Cone, and Brazilian authors was strategic and purposeful—I hope that the following analysis showcases mysticality’s presence in each of these unique places. The countries represented are located at disparate extremes of Latin American—the northern most representation is Cuba, the southern most, Argentina, to underscore mysticality’s significance in a variety of places within Spanish-speaking Latin America. I include Brazil, consequently, to highlight mysticality’s incidence across boundaries of language in Latin America. And lastly, the authors-in-question are all writing during a time that either anticipates or reflects political change. Every text I chose best represents this apprehension: Fina García Marruz’s *Las miradas perdidas* (1944-1950) is composed during the height of her literary group’s emergence in Cuba; Cintio Vitier’s *Experiencia de la poesía* (1944), *Extrañeza de estar* (1945), *Vísperas* (1953) and *Testimonios* (1953-1969) are likewise written during the pre-revolutionary period; and Clarice Lispector’s *A paixão segundo G.H.: romance* (1964) reflects the implications of the prior Vargas era and the novelist’s own expression of her Brazilian identity. Jacobo Fijman’s works appear a bit before the others: *Molino Rojo* (1926), *Hecho de estampas* (1930), and *Estrella de la mañana* (1931). These poetry collections certainly mirror Fijman’s own apprehension regarding identity and belonging, coming out fifteen to twenty years before the advent of Peronism. However, I place importance on the way in which Fijman himself wrestled with understanding his place as an outsider in Argentina, as his country faced the

aftermath of WWI, economic achievement, and surge in the presence of literary circles in the nation's capitol. Perhaps Fijman's writing addresses the very uncertainties that were to come for his adopted homeland. For the reasons stated, I believe my argument for mysticality is strengthened in using authors and texts from varied Latin American settings.

RELIGION AND SECULARISM

History shows that religion and politics have always been intimately tied, whether by symbiotic or dissonant connections. Because I focus specifically on Latin America, this dissertation aims to demonstrate the ways in which writers in Cuba, Argentina, and Brazil reconcile the political and social events of their surroundings, expressing themselves through poetic, mystically-charged language. In order to explore the link between writers and their mystical rhetoric, I turn to some broad notions of religion and secularism by discussing the re-establishment of U.S.-Cuba relations.

In December 2014 U.S. President Barack Obama announced that the U.S. would start working to restore political and economic relationships with its former Cold War foe, beginning with reducing travel restrictions between the countries. It was not until about eight months later when Secretary of State John Kerry visited Havana for the re-opening of the U.S. Embassy (formerly the U.S. Interests-Section, staffed by U.S. diplomats officially part of the Swiss mission in Havana) in Cuba. The embassy was closed in 1961 when the Eisenhower administration severed diplomatic ties with the newly-installed communist government of Fidel Castro, only thirty-four years old at the time. Kerry's stay, fewer than twelve hours in duration, was intended to be the most potent turn in events symbolizing a shift in

relations that would (will) eventually engender a productive diplomatic engagement. Many media publications spent time covering the hard work put in by both U.S. and Cuban employees at the embassy, the hopefulness felt by those affected, as well as the exclusion of many dissidents.

Appearing to a lesser degree in news outlets was the poetic oration given by Cuban-American poet Richard Blanco, son of Cuban exiles who came to the U.S. from Spain in 1968. Blanco, President Obama's inaugural poet in 2013, recited his poem "Cosas del Mar" or "Matters of the Sea," which Blanco himself described as "...the easiest poem and the hardest poem to write. In some ways all of my body of work has circled around this idea of cultural identity and negotiation of this sense of home" (www.voanews.com). According to Blanco, the purpose of the poem is to "spur Cubans to reunite emotionally after years of separation due to politics, travel restrictions and an economic embargo," gesturing to the great cleavage between Cuban-Americans who support negotiations with the Castro government and those who decidedly do not (www.voanews.com). There is no doubt that President Obama selected Blanco strategically, back in 2013 as well as 2015; a writer is often a symbol of cultural significance and national sentiment, especially in circumstances of inaugurations and reconciliatory celebrations. Importantly, however, the writer Obama selected is a poet, writing a poem explicitly for the embassy-opening event. I believe the choice of a poet and his poem is highly suggestive; poetry can transcend. It can be understood and adopted by the reader or listener in a way that is different from prose—it is transient and emotive. Blanco himself stated, "[h]ere I am, this bridge between the American side and the Cuban side. My hope was somehow that my word would continue to strengthen that bridge, to strengthen a conversation" (www.voanews.com). Blanco's Cuban-American heritage is one evident bridge, but

his poetry is the second, more subtle example. His “word” has the capacity to connect people and traverse space to ultimately create and substantiate conversations. Poetry, in short, is a powerfully transcendent force.

Let's consider the events that unfolded after the official embassy ceremony. Within weeks, Pope Francis announces a visit to Cuba, officially an agnostic state. The title of an Associated Press article appearing in the Los Angeles Times dated September 19, 2015 reads, “Pope Francis hails U.S.-Cuba relations as model of reconciliation” (www.latimes.com). The general gist of the article, heralded by the title, suggests that the Pope was more than just a bystander observing the re-establishment of relations and that the U.S. and Cuban governments are to be considered the “model” and leaders of such developments. Pope Francis himself, however, was an integral, arguably, the most significant marshal of U.S-Cuba talks. Francis himself called directly for progress toward normalization, despite the Vatican's press releases weeks before indicating the Pope would not address politics in such an explicit manner (www.latimes.com). What was also revealed, in a short, one-sentence paragraph, was the following: “Francis served as mediator and guarantor of 18 months of secret negotiations that led to the resumption of diplomatic relations between the two countries this year” (www.latimes.com). The elected head of the Catholic faith and one of the most renowned religious leaders worldwide turned out to be the clandestine, effective negotiator between two secular governments. Francis diplomatically, yet steadfastly explained as much on the tarmac of the José Martí International Airport:

For some months now, we have witnessed an event which fills us with hope: the process of normalizing relations between

two peoples following years of estrangement...I urge political leaders to persevere on this path and to develop all its potentialities as a proof of the high service which they are called to carry out on behalf of the peace and well-being of their peoples, of all America, and as an example of reconciliation for the entire world. (www.latimes.com)

My purpose in including these events with the Pope as orchestrator between the U.S. and Cuba is to underscore the importance that religion has on secular movements in our contemporary world. It is impossible to suggest the two are ever fully divorced from one another, especially as we confront the challenges and terrorist activities presented by ISIS and Boko Haram, among other groups. The Pope was very cautious, I believe, in choosing his words when he addressed the public in Havana, making no insistence that Cuba permit religious (nevermind Catholic) institutions, though presumably one would argue these are his desires. He declared that his trip was to help the church “support and encourage the Cuban people in its hopes and concerns” (www.latimes.com).

Now if I consider the Pope’s hopes for Cuba together with Blanco’s poem, I do it to reflect on the particular importance of this “reconciliatory bridge.” By re-establishing relations, the physical divide that is overcome is the sea separating the two nations. Poetry—and specifically for my analysis, mysticism in poetry—can help bridge this oceanic space between the U.S. and Cuba. In a strange twist, religion has been used as a mediator between two sides of an ideological problematic that was strictly economic and political in nature. Blanco’s poem is not mystical or mysticist, but it does speak to cultural landscaping and identity-forging—I include

his work to highlight poetry's strength in acting as this "bridge." What follows in the dissertation is an exploration of a poetic writing that goes in this "bridge-like" direction. It also speaks for secularism (the people, politics, and immense historical moment Blanco addresses) but it also relies to the unverifiable religious or faith "call" that set this historic change in motion in the first place.

WHY MYSTICISM?

In this section I will address the primary question of mysticism as the central crux of my dissertation, and why I argue mysticality best describes my authors' work. First, I will discuss mysticism in terms of the way scholars perceive medieval mystical experiences. I have presented the notion that poetry itself is a transcendent force—as such, poetry that is imbued with mystical rhetoric carries with it a special charge. I argue that each author examined in this dissertation writes with some degree of mystical language precisely because mysticism offers an additional way to speak outside the text. Each author searches for some apostrophic value: the reader, a nation, a god, a cause. Mysticism necessarily implies a separation from one's body and unity with God; that is, there is an "other" desired and acquired (James 67). In the texts I examine, this other becomes the rhetorical apostrophe, again resulting in the reader, a national discourse, a god, or a cause that the author/meditator seeks. I therefore argue that a "mysticalist" (relating to mysticality) tendency evinces the rhetorical techniques used by each author-in-question.

To develop this author-as-meditator idea, I turn to Barbara Newman in her study in medieval visionary culture. She discusses monastics' development of a wide range of meditational techniques aimed at mystical encounter, among them *speculatio*. She explains:

...the meditator's gaze was directed toward some specific visual focus, whether this object was a part of the natural world, an illuminated book, a crucifix, a consecrated host, or an internal image constructed by the mind. This deliberate training of the gaze was sometimes explicitly theorized as conducive to visionary experience. Programmatic accounts of the stages of contemplation often begin with *speculatio*, the attentive and reflective study of a visual object, and end with ecstasy. (Newman, *What did it mean* 15)

Newman identifies a number of objects with which the meditator engages: a book, a host, even an image created in the mind of the seeker. All my authors-in-question participate in the exercise of *speculatio*—they engage “attentively” and “reflectively” in the study of some object, in the end achieving and connecting with something textually extra-diegetic. For Fina García Marruz, her Catholicism breeds a consecrated host in her poetry becoming the Catholic object-of-desire of the *Orígenes* movement in Cuba; for Cintio Vitier, his conversion and nationalistic discourse are the object of his visual focus; for Jacobo Fijman his self-proclaimed religiosity inspires godly union in his poetry; and for Clarice Lispector her protagonist's penetrating self-reflection engenders a re-born image of the self. In every text, the poetic voice or protagonist is written with an imbued desire to locate something outside of him/herself. There is a constant struggle to reconcile the limits of words, muddying the boundary between inner and outer experience.⁴ Religious

⁴ The idea of the limits of words will recur throughout this dissertation; I will examine the way each author conceptualizes and combats the limits of words in his/her writing.

Studies scholar Robert Orsi argues for not just the study of religious practices but how people imbue these practices with meaning to understand “the totality of their ultimate values, their most deeply held ethical convictions, their efforts to order their reality, their cosmology” (Orsi, *The Madonna of 155th Street* xvii). His study is a cultural anthropological one, but I will still borrow this notion of the way people (in my case writers) render their cosmologies as a reality in their poetry/lyrical prose. Finally, in Ann Taves’s book *Religious Experience Reconsidered* (2009), she discusses “what Robert Orsi calls ‘the otiose boundary between ‘inner’ experience and ‘outer’ environment that so bedevils religious studies” (Furey 21, citing Taves). Ultimately, this vexing difference between “inner” and “outer” will always be debated in religious studies; this dissertation merely aims to add another perspective to this conversation.

To couch my argument for mysticality from another perspective, I briefly will discuss mysticism in Freud’s psychoanalytic terms. Julia Kristeva presents Freud’s views on how the psyche conceptualizes mysticism as the:

vague self-perception of the realm, beyond the ego, of the id...The path of mystical belief plunges the ego into the id by means of a sort of sensual autoeroticism that confers a kind of omnipotence on the id: revelation and absence, pleasure and nothingness. The analytic cure is addressed to the same pleasurable encounter of ego and id, but allows these two psychic apparatuses to circulate, by means of the transference words, from the id to the ego and back, from the ego to the id. Resemblances? Absolutely. But no confusion! Easier said than done! (Kristeva, *This Incredible Need to Believe* 11).

In the textual analysis that follows in the next chapters, the issues of autoeroticism are not of interest for this particular body of research. However, Freud's dichotomous presentation of "revelation vs. absence" and "pleasure vs. nothingness" plays a key role in the way I argue the authors write their poetic voices/protagonists. It is often evident in my authors' texts that poetic revelation is derived from the absence of or longing for something necessary: identity (ontological, national, revolutionary). Freud's notion of the "transference of words" suggests that there is some fluid play between the id and the ego, that the "cure" is the implied "omnipotence" of the id through language. As the id is defined by the unconscious part of the mind that corresponds to basic needs and desires, the mystical experience fully overtakes the person's conscious and unconscious self. Hence, the typical description of some sort of syncope or otherwise unawareness of the person's state of mind or body is common in mystical encounters.

Kristeva's central focus of her book is what she calls a "prereligious need to believe." Such need to believe is likely tied to Freud's confluence of the id and ego. Suggesting that this need is "prereligious" presents a paradox, potentially dating back to what William James would call the time before institutionalized religion. All of my authors engage in some form of "needing to believe," though they all do so under either the direct guidance or relative influence of some organized religion. However, I do argue that they are responding to some innate desire to express themselves that differs from the way other poets and writers choose to do so. Kristeva herself questions, "[i]s it not surprising that our secularized societies have neglected this incredible need to believe? By this I mean they deny the necessary paradox that consists in responding to the anthropological need to believe, without

reducing it to the historical forms that the history of beliefs confers upon it but by sublimating is (as Freud says) into diverse practices and elucidations” (11). Most people deny this necessary paradox and succumb to either religion or secularism, without accepting the possible convergence of the two. It is at crucial intersection that my authors write mysticality because of their fervent need to believe in something beyond themselves that cannot be considered strictly divine. And mystical language permits this course of poetic praxis. Kristeva further explains:

I call it *incredible*, this prereligious “need to believe,” for it is not a question of making of it an absolute, faltering it and using it as a basis for this or that order or hierarchy—neither is it one of ignoring it, at the risk of mutilating the individual capacity to think and create, at the risk of harming that which does not want the social bond itself to congeal into constraints but to be a bulwark, an optimal condition for democratic debate. (11)

Kristeva’s “need” does not categorize itself among any absolute terms, conditions, or institutions. It is not a foundation from which to grow a belief system; rather it is the fertile groundwork for an individual to think and create. This synchronized process of thinking and creating, of *poiesis*, (concurrent poetic expression and creation) licenses the writer to use whatever language best fits his/her expression. In the case in this dissertation, such language is mysticality.

To close this section, I will discuss the ideas of the experience of God and the different notions of what is included in “mystical union.” William Alston reminds us:

"our working criterion for mystical perception is that the experience is, or would be taken by the subject to be an awareness of God" (*Perceiving God* 29). Considering God as "object," Alston discusses the various ways in which a person might perceive said object. He furthers his point:

[j]ust as one can sensorily perceive the same physical object with different degrees of attention, and just as a sensorily perceived object can be more or less within the focus of attention, so it would seem to be with the perception of God. I see no reason to think that these long-lasting background awarenesses of God are a radically different sort of phenomenon from the overwhelming momentary awareness that blots out all else. (33)

Alston's point is that essentially that 1) people perceive objects differently, and 2) having long exposure vs. short exposure to such an object does not give preference to the latter as necessarily "more mystical." There are more or less two groups of people who experience mystical states: those that engage in systematic discipline (quiet prayer, meditation, austerity) and those who have no former knowledge or prior preparation whose experiences are spontaneous and otherwise unexplained. Both, effectively, constitute mystical categories. In my textual analysis I will discuss the mysticalist manifestations of these two categories.

Lastly, I will briefly outline some of Emmanuel Levinas's work on the ambiguity of God through Joseph Ballan's article "Divine Anonymities: On Transascendence and Transdescendence in the Works of Levinas, Celan, and

Lispector" (2008). Levinas describes the very tenuous line between monotheism and atheism by his presentation of *illeité* and *il y a*. Ballan writes, "Levinas posits the *impersonality* of God, for which he coins the term *illeité*" from the French *il*, meaning "he" or "it" (541). *Illeité* marks the minimal gap between atheism and monotheism. It lends a subtlety to Levinas's explication of religion often missing from the bare reduction of the religious to the ethical in his 1950s essays. Understood as *illeité*, the impersonality of God has important consequences for the use of religious language, most especially (given the context of his work) for philosophy of religion and for theology, but also perhaps for literature (Ballan, "Divine Anonymities" 542). Thus, for Levinas, the use of religious language can and does reflect the impersonality of God. Here, I use the term impersonality to take on other meanings of "otherness"; with the (aforementioned) object of desire rooting itself in whatever the author chooses it be. Therefore, the *illeité*, or "itness" can be, for my argument, that which the author chooses as his/her visual object or mental image. And consequently, the *il y a* designates, according to Levinas, "bare, senseless material existence." (Ballan 541). This term, ultimately becomes indistinguishable from *illeité*, or "it-ness;" denot[ing] the absolute distance or anonymity of God (541). As the *il y a* is congruous to the Spanish *hay*, or "there is/are," it is used by our poets in an analogous fashion. Therefore, the "itness" and declaration of "there is/are" of God, allows my authors to infuse their poetry/lyrical prose with *illeité*. The result is a divinization of secular circumstance, absorbing something quotidian as if it were the sacred presence of God.

To further this argument, let us consider an untitled Celan poem, also discussed by Ballan:

Spasms. I love you, psalms,

the feeling-walls deep in the you-ravine
rejoice, seedpainted one,

Eternal, de-eternalized are you
eternalized, Uneternal, you.
hey,

into you, into you,
I sing the bone-rod-scratch

Redred, far behind the pubic hair
harped, in the caves

outside, all around
the unending none-whatsoever-canon,
you throw me the nine times
twined, dripping
eyetooth-wreath. (Celan *Threadsuns*; Joris, *Selections* 112)

Celan here is subverting traditional religious language “verging on points of blasphemy” (Ballan 547). He uses neologistic compound nouns to depict both God (“you-ravine”) and the experience the poetic voice encounters surrounding Him (“feeling-walls”). God is eternal, de-eternalized, eternalized and uneternal all at once. The poetic voice falls into complete consumption, desiring such “spasms” to experience God. Such subversion of language in Celan, as is present in the following chapters, allows the transcendence of the immanent. What Hent de Vries calls, “[t]he

anonymity of *il y a*—the ‘impersonal, anonymous, yet inextinguishable ‘consummation’ of being, which murmurs in the depths of nothingness itself”—returns as the highest, most transcendent term in Levinas’s vocabulary, namely *illegité* (Ballan 543, citing Hent de Vries “An Ethical Sinngebung” 357-359).

WHY POETRY AND LYRICAL PROSE? POETRY AS MYSTICAL PRAXIS⁵

In her book *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* (2002) Susan Stewart engages with the dynamics of poetic sound. Stewart’s analysis lends an interesting insight regarding the unsatisfied condition of reciprocity put forth by the poetic voice, addressing the notion of what is “inner” and “outer” in terms of rhetorical apostrophe. She explains, “[w]e humans speak in conditions of reciprocity, but also, like mockingbirds, we speak in conditions of imitation—and when we practice the arts of fiction, we are imitating, and responding to, our own conditions of reciprocity” (Stewart 60). As I have already discussed, poetry is powerfully transcendent, and hence I believe the poetic voice’s desire to speak to the “outer” functions in light of Stewart’s condition of reciprocity. The voice seeks this “other” to establish union. In order to more fully develop an explanation of why I chose primarily poetry to examine in this dissertation, I will analyze a poem of Uruguayan modernist poet Delmira Agustini, titled “¡Poesía!” appearing in the Uruguayan journal *La Alborada* (1902-1903), though the edition I use is *Poesías completas* (1993) (García Pinto 64, 72). I believe it perfectly exemplifies poetry’s supremacy in conveying mysticalist or proto-mystical experience. I use Agustini here as an additional example of a mysticalist poet, but this mystical mode is present in all the

⁵ A discussion of poetry vs. lyrical prose is presented in Chapter Four in my analysis of Clarice Lispector’s *A paixão segundo G.H.: romance* (1964). Therefore, in the introduction of my dissertation I am to only present why I have chosen poetry and lyrical prose.

poems I will examine in the chapters to follow. While Agustini is not a poet I will consider during the course of my chapter analysis, her poem is illustrative of my argument as a whole.

DELMIRA AGUSTINI'S "POESÍA!" AS EVIDENCE OF MYSTICALITY

The poetics of Delmira Agustini thrust the feminine and feminist voice into Latin American *modernismo*. Agustini skillfully recreates the apostrophic "you," which takes on many forms, including the archetypical apostrophe directed at someone outside the text; the frequent use of questions, colons and exclamations; and the invocation and suppression of this very same "you" that ebbs and flows throughout her poems, speaking greatly to the prior arguments made regarding Levinas, Freud, Kristeva, and Newman. The soundless gap, or pause, that results from what I will call her "apostrophic devices," divulges an intimacy the poetic voice develops with someone outside the text.

Agustini's succinct and forceful use of language is inscribed in her poem "Poesía!". Much of this forcefulness issues from a consistent use of a particular rhetorical figure, the apostrophe. Traditionally, the apostrophe takes an archetypical form of a certain "you" or being addressed outside the confines of text that is neither present nor described otherwise to the reader. This outcry to an invisible listener conjures up an entity unto which the poetic voice ascribes personhood and therefore meaning. As a result, the apostrophe's function is multifarious as it bridges a spatial and—importantly for this analysis—sound barrier presented to and confronted by the reader. This apostrophic gap that is created invites the reader, or perhaps listener, to venture beyond the confines of the written word and to explore the silenced voices that are aroused by the apostrophe

itself. I turn to Helen Vendler's definition of the apostrophe in her book *Invisible Listeners* (2005) where she gives a brief explanation of its utility: chiefly, the apostrophe is "...literally a turning away from one's strophe to address someone else..." (Vendler 1). As a strophe is defined as, from the Greek, the act of turning, Vendler means to imply a movement of the poetic voice. In this case, a movement beyond its own voice toward another is the primary goal. But what is the purpose of such a dialogue beyond the page of the written poem or the utterance of the poet? Vendler indeed asks why the poet feels the need for this "colloquy with an invisible listener" (1). Agustini answers this problematic. By invoking the rite of the apostrophe and its many manifestations and thus the outsider that is implied, she creates an intentional pause, a gap, a meditation, or better, a soundless caesura. The apostrophe invites reflection and mediation on this outsider who is invoked. A mere moment is dedicated to the pausing and consideration of this outsider where the reader's hesitation is simultaneously silent and silenced. Through this mediated hesitation, the understanding that there will be silence, the lack of response (either literally through the lack of words or figuratively through the use of metaphor and metonym) is created, accordingly.

Typical poetic caesura can be linked to famous verse such as that found in the *Cantar del Mio Cid* (1140-1207) where each side of the caesura contains the same number of syllables, in this case, six each. In Agustini's case, the caesura takes on a more widely applicable approach to mean any sort of pause or interruption to make a rhythmic point, often an unexpected one. Stewart explains that "...when irregularity is presented by the sudden or idiosyncratic use of caesura or enjambment is used, the speaking voice is counter to the rhythm" (Stewart 65). Here, she discusses the prosodic elements of meter in terms of the halting apparatus

one encounters with a caesura; however, the basic principle applies also to apostrophe as a moment of caesura. If, according to Stewart, “[t]he caesura ‘calls up’ and breaks through the transport of rhythmic propulsion” Agustini employs the apostrophe to introduce this unexpected moment of suspension within the rhythm of the poetic verse in which it appears (Stewart 66). My discussion of the apostrophe will not so much concern who is being summoned but rather what is the result of this summoning in terms of the momentary breath that is taken. I will discuss four different kinds of apostrophes, or apostrophic devices, that Agustini employs in her poetry to allow for this soundlessness. They are the following: 1) The archetypical apostrophe (the direct addressing of a “you” in this case), 2) The colon which pauses the poetic voice as it turns to another, 3) Questions posed to this ‘other’ and; finally, 4) Exclamatory remarks invoking this ‘other’ or speaking directly to it.

¡POESÍA!

“¡Poesía!” engages with apostrophes in myriad ways. The title itself dons an exclamation mark: ¡Poesía!, but does not (initially) concretely make grammatical sense as, alone, it is just a word like “Pen!” or “Pocketbook!”. If we take Stewart’s proposition that the “image of the speaker in relation to a listener” as always paramount to the poetic voice, then Poetry becomes a listener and thus, the title does make grammatical sense. It is a calling out, a request to be heard. The title itself calls out to the anthropomorphized Poetry itself, nearly as a call to arms. It is as if she says, “Poetry, stand up! Alert! Write!”. Throughout the poem the poetic voice seems to punitively address Poetry—through the constant use of exclamation—as she attempts to find herself within it as well. Likewise, the meta-nominalization of

titling the poem “Poetry” is provoking in that it is both representative of the specific poem that follows as well as all poetry. For this reason the self-titling serves as its own explicit apostrophe. Furthermore, aside from the apostrophic Poetry that is called up in the title, there is also productive use of exclamation points and questions that both open and close this poem, acting as a sort of circular appendage that apostrophically keeps the poetic voice in rhythm. There is arguably an overabundance of exclamatory remarks, counting eighteen in total, appearing in each quartet and in over two-thirds of the verses. An exclamation is used conventionally to mark emphasis and to highlight the energy of the voice. This standard holds true for “¡Poesía!”; however, the excessive usage changes this traditional exclamatory function in that it invites a moment of silence afterward precisely because of the overabundance. The reader’s eyes yield to the exclamation mark. The apostrophic value ascribed to Poetry in the title that is then surrounded by exclamation points underscores the urgency and energy with which a poem is read. Poetry uplifts the voice momentarily, allowing for only a mere breath to be taken before the next exclamation is to come. It is as if the verses are constantly set to an upward rhythm because of this exclamatory punctuation and on this consistent upward trajectory, excitement leads to short slides before the next mountain to climb. The consistent placement of these exclamation points in sequential order mandates a slight pause for the reader’s voice or eyes to jump from one verse to the next.

The first verse, “¡Poesía immortal, cantarte anhelo!” continues the apostrophe, not just to address this concept outside of the written word but also to Poetry as it exists throughout all of time and space, as immortal. It is the most omnipresent of all apostrophes as it invokes a continuous and ever-lasting outcry,

which follows the pattern of the exclamation mark. This unceasing apostrophic presence is followed by the voracious desire to sing it, to sing “you,” so much so that it carries an intrinsic extralinguistic property because it is not only absent from the written poem but is also unattainable to the poetic voice. The extra-diagetic or extra-textual character of the desired Poetry-song will never be manifested. Stewart explains:

To speak of the aural aspect of poetry is to begin to speak necessarily of its linguistic dimension, but we will also need to consider the prelinguistic and extralinguistic dimensions of sound embedded in the language of poetry. (60)

An unrelenting yearning to sing out Poetry—to bring another aural component to Poetry itself via song—is attempted. Yet the effort is in vain:

¡Mas mil esfuerzos he de hacer en vano!
¿Acaso puede al esplendente cielo
Subir altivo el infeliz gusano?

Her need to sing out is halted; moreover, it is prevented. It is an impossibility of fate to transcend. On the one hand, poetry is needed, to a great extent, to actually utter its words; on the other, the poetic voice is arrested, restrained. If there is no ability to sing out, then there is silence, due to mystery and desire—an impasse is exposed via the apostrophe ignited at the beginning and silence results. Because, like in prayer, there is no overt verbal answer to the apostrophe, not even the sad earthly worm can ascend or transcend the utterances of Poetry and all we are left with is a moment of contemplation of what could have been.

Why, then, does "Poetry" exert such an enigmatic hold over the poetic voice? Agustini delves into the bones of Poetry, describing it as "...la sirena misteriosa / que atrae con su voz al navegante." The apostrophic outcry is such because it searches for Poetry's meaning. Regarding this search, Stewart explains that "...poetry presents an image of the speaker in relation to a listener and begins the social work of making that relation intelligible through its own projected conditions of reception" (Stewart 67). Agustini begins this questioning of the existence of the listener by including a question and importantly, providing no answer to it. When she asks if "the unhappy worm can ascend triumphantly to the glorious skies:" the question's function is twofold. Firstly, this unanswered rhetorical question invokes and maintains temporary silence due to the necessary caesura after a rhetorical question. Poetry, to whom the question is directed, cannot answer and the poem itself must go on without reconciliation. The poetic voice moves past this silenced gap and continues in the search for an answer. Secondly, like the exclamations, the question mark also projects forward and upward the reader's eye or voice. It leaves a moment lingering in the air knowing that a response to the question will not only be improbable, but also unheard.

Poetry, then, is itself is a magnetic force; it attracts a navigator, who fittingly, is a traveler who seeks out a place, direction, and meaning in the world. Poetry harkens to the navigator but consistently eludes him/her, as is evidenced by the remainder of the apostrophes used throughout the rest of the poem, carrying us to its end. There is a constant pursuing of Poetry, to define it, to sing it. Yet, the poetic voice can neither find it, nor itself. At the end she exclaims:

¿Yo soy quién soy, que en mi delirio anhelo

Alzar mi voz para ensalzar tus galas?
¡Un gusano que anhela ir hasta el cielo!
¡Que pretende volar sin tener alas!

A fierce desire leading to delirium, an inability to reach the heavens without wings, results in a sort of Phaeton-Icarus like failure. Like in the opening quatrain, there is a question called out, yet this time, an indirect answer is energetically announced. Even though the little worm's great desire overcomes him, he only attempts to fly; we are to assume a miserable failure as earthly worms do not spontaneously grow wings. Throughout the entire poem, the poetic voice's escalating exclamations encourage and maintain the upward movement. The great rhythmic upswing in this closing question, permits a pause for a final space and time for an answer. The reader meditates on high. S/he momentarily ponders the desire to raise the poetic voice's actual *voz* in order to extol Poetry's virtues; but then in a swift and crashing descent is taken back to earth. This last question and answer series function nearly like the poetic voice's last attempt to search out Poetry. While the answer given is one of failure, it is not of despair. The voice may fall earthbound, but we never see its collision with the ground. This is precisely because we know that the little wingless worm *tries* to fly, but we never directly know if this effort is made. Perhaps the poetic voice is perpetuating her promise to continue the search for Poetry whose aesthetic she so greatly desires to sing.

Stewart examines this idea of promise in poetic language. She explains that "the sound of poetry is heard in the way a promise is heard" (104). She arouses the concept of poetry and the sounds it implies function as a sort of illocutionary act, as defined by J.L. Austin and John Searle. Such a speech act would be thus defined as

“commissive” in that it commits the speaker, or in this case, the poetic voice or even reader, to a future action to take place, that is, a promise.

Stewart:

When I promise I create an expectation, an obligation, and a necessary condition for closure. Whether we are in the presence of each other or not, the promise exists. Whether, you, the one who receives the promise, continue to exist or not, the promise exists. Others may disappear, you or others may no longer remember, or deserve, or make sense of that promise—nevertheless, the promise exists. (104)

Perhaps this “promise,” as directed toward this apostrophic person is the reader. Or maybe it is the subject in question, such as Poetry itself. It is precisely this reflection that promotes the pause, the moment of silence that is created in the mind’s eye (or ear) of the reader.

METONYMIC MYSTICISM IS MYSTICALITY

All of the apostrophic devices give way to a soundlessness in Agustini’s poetry that opens her verse up for the reader/speaker to give in to the silenced moment and movement the poetry creates. Such a rhetorical strategy I label as mysticalist. Once the verse is hence opened up, where does the reader move to? And in what direction or with what guidance? Vendler explains the verticality of the apostrophic address as being “directed to a person or thing inhabiting a physically inaccessible realm conceived as existing ‘above’ the speaker” (2). Often, this movement is described as toward God or Parnassus or some other higher being that

would naturally require the use of the apostrophe to begin with. In Agustini's poems a superior being is not referenced, but the apostrophic devices earlier discussed do forcefully lead the reader to an extralinguistic place outward and upward. The intensity, force and connection between self (and other) with which Agustini writes is an exceptional example of mysticity.

This human and poetic will is boldly evident in "¡Poesía!". The eighteen exclamation marks and four questions that open and close the poem provide the perfect environment for this exterior motion so yearned for by the poetic voice's clamoring. Each exclamation invites the reader to incrementally increase the excitement and fervor with which s/he reads, which tails the previous and next. Even the anaphorous use of "Eres el/la..." that begins six lines of the twenty-four encourages this movement via its repetition. She unquestionably defines Poetry apostrophically as saying "You are" on these six occasions and chooses a variety of natural, environmental elements as metaphor. They include:

Tú eres la sirena misteriosa...
¡Eres la estrella blanca y luminosa!...
¡Eres la brisa perfumada y suave...
¡Eres la inquieta y trinadora ave...
¡Eres la onda de imperial grandeza...
¡Eres el cisne de sin par belleza...

All of these sentences are coupled with the continuation of Poetry's description, a resounding likening to the natural world, set to words invoking the apostrophic presence of Poetry. Paradoxically though, Agustini achieves what perhaps might be the first evident apostrophe in the title of the poem itself—the

subject called upon, i.e. Poetry, is being represented, metonymically, by the poem “¡Poesía!” itself. It is important to note her clamoring to Poetry as an entity existing through immortality that can be wholly conceived of in this one poem, so aptly named. The poetic voice beseeches this muse or creature to know it, to sing it. It is a mystical desire to forgo earthly methods (the worm) in favor of the divine right to Poetry itself. If as E. Allison Peers explained “...the Spanish mystic’s primary care is to know himself, and this to him is an inseparable part of his great ideal...” then Agustini’s poetic voice boasts no other objective than to know Poetry. The poetic voice searches with urgency, but after each “You are” apostrophe, it turns up empty-handed, straining its voice and invoking a moment of necessary silence to grieve this loss (that is, *illegitimacy*). There is no passivity of the poetic voice in “¡Poesía!” nor in Poetry—it is ardent and incorrigible. The use of the constant questioning and repetitive exclamations may force the reader to imbibe this intensity without reprieve. There is never a union with Poetry or the full knowing of its voice, only the constant and elaborate search to gain its essence. Agustini’s poetic voice, like that of the Spanish mystics, is “all energy, activity, strife” because “only in the state of Union can true rest be found” (Peers 44).

This relationship Agustini is describing via the poetic voice she presents is consumed by this constant state of yearning because it states, simply, “*cantarte anhelo*.” The poetic voice searches to transcend the limits of the written or spoken word in an attempt to redefine the limitations of Poetry’s definition, by song. Helen Vendler accurately problematizes the poet’s desire vis-à-vis the apostrophe. She questions, “[b]ut what is the poet (any poet) to do who wants not to *express* such relations but to *redefine* them, who yearns, for example, to adopt a more intimate relation to God than that offered by the church” (Vendler 3). Again, while a union

with God is neither the intention nor the objective, Agustini's poem achieves a majestic *redefinition* of knowledge in its search of an essence.

Poetry as an immortal "beingness" or "*illieté*" transcends time and space and religion. All of these redefinitions Agustini provides of Poetry encompass knowledge that is immanent, yet desires transcendence. Poetry is, according to Agustini, a siren, a star, a breeze, a bird, a wave, a swan, a flower, and a pearl. Poetry is that which exists in the natural world. And yet, even after this profane pursuit of defining Poetry as each of nine different natural phenomena, Poetry cannot be found. The poetic voice is left open-ended, with the only resource left to move extralinguistically, outside the poem to a new space and to a new interlocutor. Precisely through these means, Agustini achieves a mystical trajectory toward an immortal Poetry that proves divine and sacred, though restricted to the immanence limited by language, that is, sans transcendence. This mysticist approach through apostrophic Poetry, though invisible to the reader's eye, is achievable through mystical language producing an intimacy effect (Vendler 5).

Through the analysis of Agustini's poem, I have demonstrated the influence of mystical rhetorical language on poetry and the use of apostrophe to introduce an element of the "outer" that will be evident in my chapter analyses. In my first chapter that follows, I will discuss in detail my definition of mysticity as well as Spanish philosopher María Zambrano's theory of *poiesis*, contributing to poetry as a vehicle of apostrophic engagement with a mystical "other" that is immanent but exterior to language.

Chapter One: María Zambrano's Poiesis: A Movement toward Mysticality in Latin America

MYSTICISM

Noted religious studies scholar William James aptly observes that mysticism is only essentially comprehended by the mystic him/herself; only the experiencer can philosophically identify an experience as mystical or not and that an outsider attempting to define such a notion is, at best, lost in the mire of knowledge beyond that which is humanly immanent. He admits, "[o]ne may say, truly, I think, that personal religious experience has its root and centre in mystical states of consciousness...my own constitution shuts me out from their enjoyment almost entirely, and I can speak of them only at second hand" (*Variety of Religious Experience* 301). If, as James establishes, the mystical experience is fundamentally a spiritual but also physiologically constitutional experience, then it is not necessarily an intellectual experience, but rather one of feeling. Such an experience that is rendered noetically unintelligible is also paradoxical; it is an enlargement of perception and condensation of the intimate that occurs simultaneously where, according to nineteenth century English priest Charles Kingsley, "the 'real soul' [is] imperceptible to [one's] mental vision, except at a few hallowed moments" (*Variety of Religious Experience* 298). While James admits his failings in understanding mystical proficiency, he and Kingsley both describe a favorable approach to "outsiders" writing about mysticism. If every human being possesses a waking, rational consciousness, there lies beneath it potential forms of consciousness that require the application of a certain stimulus" (308). Thus, at the precipice of these "hallowed" measures of time, every human being can avail him/herself of this

consciousness if the parameters are correctly set and developed.

James's interrogation of these so-called "achieveable" mystical states of (sub)consciousnesses by the average person inform my expansion of mysticism's long-standing, time-tested definition. James, among other scholars of this branch of religious study such as Michel de Certeau, Evelyn Underhill, E. Allison Peers and in more recent scholarship Amy Hollywood, Gershom Scholem and Luce López-Baralt, discuss the primary characteristics of mysticism as such:

An intimate knowledge of the self to achieve union with/consciousness of God. Ecstatic union with God is sought and is necessarily transient, passive and separate from the sentient being in wakeful consciousness. The discursive intellect is both active and passive as the mystical experience is both a state of feeling and knowledge. The experiencer succumbs to the "One" and relinquishes all bodily control. (135)⁶

All facets of the mystical experience are ones in which the experience itself is authoritative over the person, yet across different religions, there is often a prescribed methodology to achieving this state. For the purposes of this analysis, the Christian and Jewish states of mysticism are of most interest. Many medieval European Catholic mystics such as Italians Catherine of Siena (1347-1380) and Angela of Foligno (1248-1309) and Germans Meister Eckhart (1260-1328), and Christine of Stommeln (1242-1312) describe their personal mystical experiences via their interpretations of scripture and their descriptions of God's oneness and presence during moments of rapture. Meister Eckhart, the famed 13th century

⁶ This definition is my own based on the scholars' work previously mentioned.

Dominican German scholar, considered by many including James to be one of the first mystics, (though widely considered an apophatic writer) indulges in the notion of the “Spark of the Soul” where “the intellect touches infinity” and man as the image (*imago*) of or being according to God (Tobin, *Meister Eckhart: Teacher and Preacher* 128). It is this image, or piece of soul, that contains the divine imprint, a constant experience: a light, a temple, a beam, a spark. Even St. Thomas of Aquinas (1225-1274), his Italian contemporary, defines mysticism as the knowledge of God through experience.⁷ Through his *quinque viae* (five ways), Aquinas lays out how we know and experience God by explaining physical phenomena we witness in the natural world. Thus, Eckhart’s “divine imprint” is thus explained by Aquinas’s “evidence of God” in motion, causation, necessariness, gradation and ordered tendencies (*Summa Theologiae* q.2). Now that we have considered the presence of God, as described by Eckhart and Aquinas, I turn to how mystics specifically express this presence.

In his seminal work *The Mystic Fable* (1982), Michel de Certeau discusses the evolution of mysticism from the early medieval period to the late 17th centuries during the time of the Golden Age mystic writers in Europe. De Certeau explains, “[t]he mystical body is the intended goal of a journey that moves, like all pilgrimages, toward the site of a disappearance” (79). In the *corpus mysticum* it is precisely a body—a mystical/hidden body—that is sought. If Christianity then was founded, as de Certeau argues, upon the loss of a physical body, Jesus Christ and consequently his physical and geographic genealogy, then mysticism is the attempt to overcome this physical and spiritual void (*Mystic Fable* 81). It is, therefore, the experience of this body that mystics so intensely pursue, discover and write about. The Christian body’s mystical experience is “an initial privation...that goes on

⁷ Here I reference St. Thomas Aquinas’s work *Summa Theologiae* (1265-1274)

producing institutions and discourses that are the effects of and substitutes for that absence: multiple ecclesiastical bodies, doctrinal bodies, and so on” (81). The lack of body fuels the search for one.

The role of women mystics in the late medieval period has been often denigrated and gendered along a binary cleavage, that is, the mystical experience in the female body opposed to the male body. According to Amy Hollywood in her book *Sensible Ecstasy* (2002)—where she discusses many 20th century (predominantly French) psychoanalysts' treatment of medieval Christian mystic women—they are categorized in one of two ways: either mystical encounters are “simply associated with femininity or with women...or a distinction is made between good and bad, acceptable and unacceptable, non-pathological and pathological forms of mysticism, with the first category in each case associated with masculinity and men and the second with femininity and women” (*Sensible Ecstasy* 8). From this early period onward, a mystical encounter described by a pious woman was belittled and reduced to a pathologically determined health lapse, often controlled by devil-induced hysteria. Women were often precluded from formal monastic (or otherwise general) education because their mystical writings were (and by many scholars continue to be) cited as effusive, perhaps even maudlin. In Hollywood's opinion they were considered “affective”; women were more “porous and imaginative...and therefore open to possession (whether divine or demonic)” (9). It is to say that many High medieval *female* Christian mystics were identified as visionaries, but their vision was firmly rooted in their meditative, solitary and liturgical practices, not the discursive intellectual, canonical practices/heuristics of their male counterparts (Meister Eckhart would be an example).

To consider the process a mystic endures, I turn to Evelyn Underhill's book

Mysticism (1977). She details the various points of “the mystic way” where she sets out and justifies a theory of mystical consciousness and the organic growth process through which a mystic passes. These such stages include: 1) the awakening of the self, 2) the purification of the self, 3) the illumination of the self, 4) voices and visions, 5) introversion, part one: recollection and quiet, 6) introversion, part two: contemplation, 7) ecstasy and rapture, 8) the dark night of the soul; and 9) the unitive life (xiv). As we see, the process is highly unique to the individual mystic, who, for Underhill is “...like other persons of genius, is man first and artist afterward” (453). Underhill portrays what a mystic might say if s/he were to describe the process:

Union with reality—apprehension of it—will then upon this hypothesis be union with life at its most intense point: in its most dynamic aspect. It will be a deliberate harmony set up with the Logos...*Ergo*...union with a Personal and Conscious spiritual existence, immanent in the world—one form, one half of the union which I have always sought: since this is clearly life in its highest manifestation. (35)

A mystic has transcended the “sense-world,” functioning always with the “hunger for the Absolute” (41). There is an expansion of consciousness, including an acute awareness of the Divine. Christian mystics travel constantly on a quest, Underhill says, which embodies unity in diversity, and stillness in strife. Though intimately world-changing, a mystical experience for a Christian mystic possesses paradoxical qualities: stillness and contemplation must be kept to produce ecstasy and rapture. And eventually, this ecstatic state leads to the complete disappearance of selfhood in the divine, and the “substitution of a Divine Self for the primitive self” representing

this “unitive life” or state of “lived divinity” (408). Christian mysticism, here, is represented by acute moments of mystical rapture brought on by quiet prayer and contemplation. Afterwards, some mystics go on to live the “unitive life,” though strictly speaking, this ultimate, lasting phase is not requisite for Christian mysticism.

By-in-large Jewish mysticism takes on a much more scriptural approach. The esoteric discipline of Jewish mystical thought, the Kabbalah, includes analysis of the Zohar, a collection of sundry Jewish texts, including mystical interpretations of the Torah. De Certeau describes the difference of the Jewish tradition in the importance of the Text, which “does not cease writing” (81). It is a living body that is morphed and displaced by the proliferating mystical interpretations of Jewish texts. Gershom Scholem presents a pantheistic view of mysticism in *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (1941) where he describes appearance of mysticism as a religious art of interpretation. He contends that mysticism is a “definite stage in the historical development of religion and makes its appearance under certain well-defined conditions” (8). He describes the first stage of proto-Religion where Nature is man’s relation to God, namely, man can conceive of God only through the natural, earthly elements. There is no prescriptive path to God by way of an institutionalized religious organization; instead, there is just man’s personal experience: “man encounters God at every step” (9). Then, as Religion is established, Scholem identifies a “vast abyss” between man and God that man fears, respects and reconciles only within the doctrinal confines of the Religion. Mysticism, then, is Scholem’s answer to man’s confrontation with this abyss that he neither ignores nor feels coerced to deny. Mysticism “pieces together fragments broken by religious cataclysm, to bring back old unity which Religion has destroyed, where the world of mythology and that of revelation meet in the soul of man” (8). Because there exists a

certain chronology of events for mysticism to take shape, it is therefore “incompatible with certain other stages of religion” and while I will later argue that “modern” mysticism exists on a spectrum with more flexible characteristics, traditional mysticism, according to Scholem, is indeed separate from other states of religion, though still connected to a streamlined state of religious consciousness (8).

Much scholarship is dedicated to understanding the meaning of “union”; the primary difference between Christian and Jewish mysticism is that the former can experience it more personally and in durative fashion, and the latter is often regarded as the mystical interpretation of the Zohar. If mysticism is meant to transform religious knowledge of the believer/experiencer into a novel “living experience,” then Christian mystics describe confined states of ecstasy, which may last for thirty minutes (in the case of Saint Theresa) to three days (in the case of Christine of Sommeville) to even periods of one to two years where the presence of Jesus was acutely felt and lived. Jewish mysticism, on the other hand, seems to exude more malleable qualities, defying any clear categorization in terms of mystical texts or mystics themselves.

To tease this out further, I will briefly discuss the debate about mystical union in kabbalist studies. Hartley Lachter addresses the notion of the mystical place in the Zohar (*Paradox and Mystical Union in the Zohar* 2004). He argues that the Zohar repeatedly emphasizes the separateness and unity of God, man, and world. He presents the following argument: “the paradoxes and contradictions regarding God, and the concomitant sameness and otherness of the self and God, are incorporated into the presentation of mystical experience. The kabbalist is capable of mystical union with God because he is, in the end already one with God” (137). The chief definition of Jewish mysticism, then, appears to be the broad notion of

paradox. If man and God are equally separate and the same, then it follows that mystical experience could be either highly personal and intimate or wholly divided and intellectual. Lachter points toward the idea that union with God is within reach for a kabbalist precisely because s/he is a kabbalist, i.e., is a student or practitioner of Jewish mystical thought. And as such, the inherent unity with God would suggest that further study of the Zohar would increase the feeling of such unity. In the Zohar, the term *devekut*, or cleaving, is commonly used to refer to the idea of a mystical union. According the Merriam-Webster, cleaving, as with a substance like wood, implies sharp division, but the definition also includes that of loyal adherence (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/cleaving>). However, Lachter suggests that it is a “kind of desired proximity to God, but stops short of actual union” (140). Here, Lachter nuances the meaning of union, suggesting instead that the desire to be close to God is what engenders the paradoxical and simultaneous spiritual harmony and separation, and not the mystical union itself. Lachter goes on, “[i]n this way, the Zohar never ultimately answers the question of how the world and human self can come to be from the infinite. The response is a poetic paradox rather than a rational resolution; the infinite and the finite are always united and separate simultaneously” (138). Lachter’s use of the term “poetic paradox” is useful for the following chapter analyses as I will be only concerned with poetry and lyrical prose. What Lachter aims for though, I believe, is the idea that the paradox is perhaps aesthetic and/or lyrical in nature, much like poetry itself. Rationality might be a part of the Kabbalah, but a rational resolution is not. That which is infinite and finite are always possibilities for the kabbalist. This constant state of agreement and division, of together and separate, allow the kabbalist to consider the multiplicity of interpretation.

It is also possible for a kabbalist, accordingly, to see mysticism as a constant state of revelry and ongoing presence; there no one single act of revelation. Lacter explains, “[f]or the Zohar, mystical union is a drive for the return of everything to the primordial transcendent depths of the Godhead from which it never left” (139). Kabbalist scholars use passages from Biblical texts collected in the Zohar and, in homiletic fashion, make mystical interpretations as was the case for second century Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai who interpreted scripture in Aramaic. The Zohar is thus a collection of writings, including fragmented stories, oracles or secret revelations that is not defined by one (nor many) text(s) nor to a canon of accepted scripture. Scholem offers this insight: if the Torah is “a living organism animated by a secret life which streams and pulsates below the crust of its literal meaning” we can assume the metaphorical interpretations are many and omnipresent (*Major Trends* 14). A famous parable from the Zohar, re-written by 21st century Mexican Jewish author Angelina Muniz-Huberman in her book *En el jardín de la Cábala* (2010) exemplifies this interpretative quality; it is entitled “The Four Sages in Paradise.” She tells the story of four learned men and how only the fourth—who chooses the mystical interpretation of words and encompasses multiple ways of knowing—is capable of entering the *pardés* or garden/Paradise. It is fascinating to also consider how she narrates this story, which breaks down the word *pardés* into its component consonant parts (P, R, D, S), each possessing a symbolic meaning regarding the interpretation of words, making it triply symbolic:

P=*peshat* represents the literal understanding of words. This sage dies because he is unable to advance his knowledge.

R=*remez* or allegorical meaning. This sage falls victim to fantasy for having believed literally in allegory.

D=*derashá*, or Talmudic interpretation. This sage becomes apostate after gaining so much knowledge.

S=*sod* or mystical understanding. This sage could approach knowledge from various angles and thus was granted entry into the garden. (32)

This parable warns of the solely literal, allegorical, or scholarly interpretation of words. In this way, she evokes the Zohar in the desire to not just use one approach to understanding words nor one approach to meditation on God. To help understand this, I turn to Paul Ricoeur, in his discussions of hermeneutics, who observes the narrative aspect of novels and their emplotment. In this series of plotting events, there is usually a clear referent, or as he puts it an “ostensive” referent (*The Rule of Metaphor* 21). However, the purpose of this ostensive referent is to evoke that which is essentially non-ostensive, that which cannot be delimited to the confines of linguistic signs. I think this notion fits appropriately with the present discussion of Muñiz-Huberman's exploration and understanding mystic Judaism beyond just her own writing.

Moshé de León recommended these four steps (detailed above) for any kind of reading, above all, the kabbalistic reading, to truly understand the hidden meaning of words. The (un)knowability of God is of particularly importance to kabbalistic inquiry. Moshé de León, medieval Spanish kabbalist, ~~termed~~ regarded by scholars like Heinrich Graetz to be the redactor of the Zohar, offers a similar parable to express the interpretive quality of scripture with regards to the knowability of God. This kabbalistic parable is helpful in understanding the concept of knowability of God and follows as such: when Rabbi Simeón attempts to define the four elements

as parts of God's image—fire, earth, water, air—to his travelling companions, they become so exhausted of the same repetitive explanations, they abandon Simeón, who then worries and regrets having attempted to explain the earth's origins and significance. By questioning whether one can really understand these elements, Simeón successfully demonstrates the unknowability of God and His creation, and that we must be content to accept this. In Jewish mysticism God can disclose himself in two ways: Either He chooses to disclose his undisclosability or that which man can come to understand is only what God chooses Himself to disclose to him. During the chapters that follow, the notion of the unknowability of God will emerge, particularly in the analysis of Jewish authors, Fijman and Lispector.

PHILOSOPHY OF THE SELF AND BEING

Before discussing this chapter's primary author, Maria Zambrano (Spain, 1904-1991), and her philosophy of poetry vis-à-vis the poet and the creation of meaning, I find it useful to discuss some of her notions of the self, together with Hegel's processes of being and becoming. Discussing the philosophical notion of being from the first-person perspective, Zambrano notes that there are boundaries regarding the sovereignty this "I" commands. Under the mandate of this sovereign being are "emisarios subordinados y a menudo clandestinos [que] transmiten órdenes hacia las murallas que defienden lo que se llama la persona, el 'ser' entendido como toma de posesión de la realidad, ante todo de un espacio y de un tiempo" (*Soñar* 39). As it were, Zambrano establishes that there is a centrality to being/self, or the human psyche, and then a series of underlying controls/attentions that often go unseen yet cautiously control boundaries of the central being. They make this being a part of "possession" not just of reality, but of a real space and a

real time. It is precisely this situation of being in a space and time that is considered, as Zambrano I think is suggesting, to be both an interior knowledge of being and its sovereign right and the exterior knowledge of its boundaries. Herein lies the paradox of the mystical inquiry that is couched in profound knowing of the interior—that which is immanent—while reaching for those moments in time and space that are at the limits of the exterior—the transcendent. James makes a similar observation regarding this paradox, but instead of grounding his theory in poetry, he does so in psychology. If we substitute consciousness with being, Zambrano and James are flirting with this very same notion of the essence of religious knowledge and how one comes to achieve it. James explains:

I cannot but think that the most important step forward that has occurred in psychology since I have been a student of that science is the discovery first made in 1886 that...there is not only the consciousness of the ordinary field, with its usual centre and margin [here compare Zambrano's sovereign being with its boundaries], but an addition thereto in the shape of a set of memories, thoughts and feelings, which are extramarginal and outside of the primary consciousness altogether [here the transcendental, the mystical], but yet must be classed as conscious facts of some sort, able to reveal their presence by unmistakable signs. (*Varieties of Religious Experience* 233)

In essence, both James and Zambrano identify that which is known to the individual and that which exceeds the limits this individual knows. In James's Lectures XVI and XVII on mysticism he details his own definitions as well as those of

other mystics and mystic scholars by setting forth this set of tenets where 1) an unreachable is identified but never fully “known”, and 2) the ability to “reach” is only known to the mystic him/herself. Though he does not consider the role Religion plays, I turn also to Hegel's discussion of being vis-à-vis states of becoming to explore the philosophy that predated and informed this formative distinction for Zambrano, that is, the difference between poetry and philosophy.

In Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) his famous dialectic is established stressing movement and change over stasis. The stages of becoming are in constant flux and thus the world's human population possesses indeterminate moments of “being” along this grand stage of becoming. Any meaning, truth, significance or even self-consciousness is never fixed; thus, stasis is never present. Hegel questions then how we acquire self-consciousness. His Master-Slave dialectic explains in detail the existence of one self-consciousness only by the recognition and contentious interaction with the other. However, on the philosophical plane that precedes this Master-Slave relationship, there is the notion that one must confront one's limits, with the “not-self” as Hegel puts it, which permits the identification of what is “self” (45). The confrontation of boundaries arises again as a common thread. Again, Hegel's discussion here is not concerned with any conventional Religion, but his distinction between the self's “body” and this body's limits is a useful one as it pertains to the phenomenology of mysticism. If the self can identify what belongs to it, it can presumably recognize the boundaries that contain and define it. Here, James's set of “extramarginal feelings” and Zambrano's “sovereign being” are explained by Hegel's discussion of the self's labored encounter with its limits. Even de Certeau argues that this very same recognition of self is present in memory; as Amy Hollywood suggests, “it recalls something that is not a past; it awakens what

the body does not know about itself" (*Sensible Ecstasy* 201). It is precisely what this body does not know about its own self when the limits are ascertained and evaluated and, in some very special cases, a poetic and perhaps also mystical experience is born.

ZAMBRANO'S POIESIS

Maria Zambrano's principal philosophical offering—poetic reason—is a response to vital reason (*razón vital*) presented by her longtime mentor and colleague José Ortega y Gasset (Spain, 1883-1955).⁸ Living an exiled life, traveling often with her sister it is argued that Zambrano (Spain, 1904-1991) was confronted with this borderland lifestyle between two different philosophical, political and societal worlds. It was Ortega y Gasset's opinion that “necesitamos toda una nueva filosofía, todo un nuevo repertorio de conceptos fundamentales y aborígenes. Estamos iluminados por una nueva fluoruración” (*La aurora de pensamiento* 14). Zambrano struggled, however, with her teacher's belief in the modernity before them. She believed this new philosophy was neither new, modern, nor a “reforma de la Razón,” but rather she sought a reasoning that was broader than reason itself, a concept that “se deslice también por los interiores, como una gota de aceite que apacigua y suaviza, una gota de felicidad” (*La aurora de pensamiento* 15). Fleeing Spain in 1939 into the south of France at the imminent victory of Franco's nationalists, Zambrano eventually found her way to the Caribbean and Mexico before returning to Europe where she would live a good deal of her life in Rome and Paris. Perhaps it was this confronting of a new despotic, political order in her homeland that fuels her desire for a reason that is not just “modern” but also

⁸ Consult José Ortega y Gasset's work *El tema de nuestro tiempo* (1923) for more information about vital reason(*razón vital* o *raciovitalismo*) as well as historical reason.

metaphysical, internal, interior. Something congenital that, for each person, “[t]iene, ha de tener muchas formas, [y] será la misma en géneros diferentes” (15). This new philosophy is *poetic reason*, which valorizes the role of being, the metaphysical, one's intuition.

It does not surprise us that her father, Blas Zambrano (Spain, 1874-1938), a great Spanish thinker and friend of Antonio Machado, was one of Spain's greatest humanists of the twentieth century, having founded intellectual discursive groups with Machado, Mariano Quintanilla and poet Juan José Llovet, as well as the Human Rights League established in Paris in 1897 (*Algunos lugares* 38). Though her father was chronologically a member of the Generation of '98, Zambrano disagreed with one of its founding members's philosophical treatises: Ortega y Gasset's idealization of the world as something manageable by philosophical doctrine and domination, i.e., vital reason. Arguably, in her most trenchant critique of her esteemed mentor, she characterizes his philosophy by describing it as a “endiosamiento totalizador, por su idealismo descarnado, por su olvido del hombre concreto, por su distanciamiento y aislamiento del mundo real y de las otras manifestaciones de la cultura, como literatura, arte, etc.” (*La aurora de pensamiento* 16). This philosophy, she explains, does not live in the real world, nor is it applicable as such because it functions independently. If we consider the way rational philosophy explains its surroundings there is a fundamental role that God plays. This philosophy imitates and attempts to overtake God's omniscience. This is put forth principally by Descartes's theory: ~~if~~—there is nothing the human mind cannot conceive or dominate.⁹ It is all-encompassing and thus, knowledge of reality is possible through reasoning. Hence, intuition is unnecessary. Here, Zambrano would insist that

⁹ See René Descartes's work *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641).

instead, we not change reality, but rather the way we perceive it to allow for the rebirth of understanding through the sacredness of the human/humanity/human experience. Hers is a philosophy that attempts to know the world rather than seeks its domination; it is the journey that is valued, not the objectified mastery of knowledge.

To further explain this philosophical praxis, I turn to Zambrano's aforementioned work *Algunos lugares de la poesía* (2007), where she extrapolates the poetic words to construct a philosophy of poetry by examining the birth of poetry (poiesis), the crisis of the word, relations of time and poetics, poetry vis-à-vis ethics and history, and the poetry of Gods. Zambrano's discussions of poetic reason, more specifically *poiesis*, examine the exteriority of poetic words versus the interiority they are meant to express; the function of Zambrano's poiesis is to engender this spirit as a rejection of more secularized philosophy. Here, I offer Zambrano's bare bones definition of poiesis:

Apegados a cultivar discernimientos y a ahondar diferencias, habíamos olvidado la unidad que reside—y sostiene—en el fondo de todo lo que el hombre crea por la palabra. Es la unidad de la *poiesis*, expresión y creación a un mismo tiempo en unidad sagrada, de la cual por revelaciones sucesivas irán naciendo, separándose al nacer—nacimiento es siempre separación—la poesía en sus diferentes especies y la filosofía.
(61)

Zambrano explains that the poet is exactly the person who claims the ability to push the limits of the self to be capable of exploring these limits. Poetic reason carries a great discursive advantage over vital reason: the ability to allow for the

unsaid, “...de todo lo que se esconde en el silencio; la palabra de la poesía temblará siempre sobre el silencio y sólo la órbita de un ritmo podrá sostenerla, porque es la música la que vence al silencio antes que el logos” (102). Vital reason, conversely, relies of the reasoning, on the responsibility of the philosopher to monopolize the process. Zambrano professes, “[e]l otro camino es el del poeta. El poeta no renuncia ni apenas buscaba, porque *tenía*” (*Filosofía y Poesía* 17). The poet simply *has*. S/he possesses the capabilities to make this knowledge possible for himself through the poetic word and the poetic word only. She goes on to explain, “[t]enia por lo pronto lo que ante sí, ante sus ojos, oídos y tacto, aparecía; tenía lo que miraba y escuchaba, lo que tocaba, pero también lo que aparecía en sus sueños y sus propios fantasmas interiores mezclados en tal forma con los otros, con los que vagaban fuera, que juntos formaban un mundo abierto donde todo es posible” (18). Is this open world of revelatory possibility, of uninhibited intellect and knowledge, is poetry not also the “beyond” of the Hegelian self-consciousness dialectic? In Hegel's rhetorical terms, Zambrano's poet accepts and recognizes the confrontation of his/her limits and is able to identify the poet-self, the being-in-poetry, de facto, what belongs to the self. I contend, then, the poet's creation is also this ongoing process of “poetic being” that form the stages of being leading towards a full self-consciousness, or *poiesis*.

Zambrano's supposition is that the poetic word generates something beyond the meaning of the word itself and thus transcends communication. She discusses the *logos* of the word itself:

...el cuerpo de la palabra, en poema o pensamiento, se vuelve irreal: la extensión la posee, y en vez de germinar, prolifera. Un *logos* proliferante sustituye al *logos* que germina...en esta

poblada extensión, la sombra del reino, y sorprende y maravilla el encontrar palabras, pensamientos, fragmentos, de una deidad nada maléfica: remite al orden perdido que en la actividad poética es al par el orden propuesto, que se ofrece con sólo mostrar su ausencia. (94)

This notion of poiesis as a simultaneous poetic expression and creation, of being and becoming, is a proliferating *logos*, that is, a reasoning that is continuously burgeoning and multiplying, to a degree unknown. In this uncertain proliferation, Zambrano describes the body of the word as something that rediscovers its order, its *logos*. According to this *logos* nothing is idealized or mechanized and as such, “[n]ada tendría que desaparecer. El universo físico no tendría por qué envejecer sostenido y aun abrazado en una forma” (96).

Zambrano argues that the poetic word “es una pura trascendencia que hace olvidar que sea palabra, audible, visible, corpórea por tanto” (49). For Zambrano, poetry is both transcendent and transcendence, representing the birth of words as it leaves behind its own awareness of their presence (56). It is this way we achieve being and fundamentally an alternative to logic/philosophy. Because Zambrano is frustrated by the limits of rationality, of the mechanics of reason, she presents that there is something purely creational and primal about poetry; language is magical and, in a Babelic twist, not only is divinely given, but even after the human appropriation, is still divinely controlled. Poetry unifies our being with the life that we experience through language and thus language boasts this transcendental origin. Zambrano spends much of her work detailing the differences between poetry and these limits of transparent rationality (philosophy); however, she abides by their common birthplace. She suggests, “[e]l origen común de filosofía y poesía es

la poiesis” (52). This poiesis is fundamentally an *inspiración*—namely, inspiration, creation, inhalation, or the taking-in of something invisible. The unity of poiesis is expression and creation at the same time in sacred unity, from which successive revelations will be born, separating themselves at this birth (as birth is always separation). This separation produces poetry (in its different species) and philosophy. Poetry and philosophy are born of this sacred inspiration, which comes forth from a sort of primordial soup-ocean that is pre-historic and pre-lingual. That moment in which philosophy becomes expressive, goes beyond philosophy, and what is left a surplus in terms of what it wants to convey logically. Something more is generated, that is, that which transcends communication. She explains, “[a]sí el poeta en su poema crea una unidad con la palabra, esas palabras que tratan de apresar lo más tenue, lo más alado, lo más distinto de cada cosa, de cada instante” (Zambrano, *Filosofía y Poesía* 21-22). For Zambrano philosophy does not provide the answers to life, and thus poetic words are this alternative to logic.

THE DEATH OF GOD IN LITERATURE

In discussions of mysticism there is the inevitable questioning of the purpose of life vis-à-vis death. Is life merely a Bataille-esque death drive?¹⁰ Is it a “living toward dying” approach so favored by Spanish Catholic mystics Saint Theresa and Saint John? Dovetailing with Hegel's being-becoming paradigm, Zambrano's unique philosophy offers death as a “...una preparación para la muerte y el filósofo es el hombre que está maduro para ella” (Zambrano, *Filosofía y Poesía* 56). I question to what degree a mystical interpretation roots itself solely in a religious framework. Is

¹⁰ Here I refer to George Bataille's *Inner Experience* (1943) where he sets up the notion of the “death drive.” It was his first philosophical treatise, followed by *Guilty* (1944) and *On Nietzsche* (1945), together comprising his volume, *Summa Atheologica*.

it, de facto, couched in religious terms? Or are there other possible ways to conceptualize mystical qualities of literature? Zambrano definitely argues that it is poetry and by this virtue, the poet, that first encounters and confronts the sacred. Bataille offers us one of his poems in “Part Five: Manibus Date Lilia Plenis” of *Inner Experience* entitled God:

With warm hands
I die you die
where is he
where am I
without laughter
I am dead
dead and dead
in the pitch-black night
arrow shot
at him. (165)

There is the evident preoccupation of death, of darkness, of finitude and yet infinity. The poetic voice favors apostrophe in metaphysical wonderment. The poem evokes an enveloping of emotional and physical being while nebulizing life and death—a death three times dead. If dead is finite, then what is the purpose does declaring it threefold? Death, then, and the aspiration to it in mysticism, is something which I consider to be a state, an evolution of being. Here, it is infinite, as a state of slow movement, of space, void or not, that can be manipulated or engaged with. Thus, a mystical approach to life, and its progression to death, does not need to be constrained by a God-centered mysticism; but rather it is parsed out into a philosophical conceptualization of mysticism as it relates to literature.

Zambrano describes in her book *El hombre y lo divino* (1955) “toda muerte va seguida de una lenta resurrección, que comienza tras del vacío irremediable que la muerte deja” (229). In this philosophical treatise Zambrano is describing the processes of the divine and looking at a somewhat anthropologic transition from paganization to gnosticism to more modern, organized religion; one of the fundamental basis she uses to explore these ideas is death. She goes on to explain, using the decadence of the Roman empire as a metonymic expression of historical/cultural death, that history has simplified death to be a linear experience, simplistic and finite. But, she argues “mas, en realidad, el proceso de la muerte del Imperio romano se funde con la vida, no con la de los países reconocidos como sus hijos directos, sino con lo que hoy llamamos ‘cultura occidental.’ Un abismo se abrió un día, más hondo que el de la extinción del poderío imperial. Fue cuando los dioses quedaron bajo la luz del Nuevo Dios, único, y comenzaron a entrar en una lenta agonía” (230). From here there was a transition from paganism to a singular God looking toward to future “viviendo en función de Él” and between these two conceptions of life emerges the notion “vivir una muerte: vivir un morir.” I am not suggesting categorically that Zambrano is a mystical philosopher in stating this *vivir un morir*, that she writes in a Teresian styled concept that living is akin or equal to dying. But rather that his contrast of archetypical death with that of one identified rather as transcendent/movement/life, is useful in examining some of García Marruz's work, which will be discussed in Chapter Two. Fascinating to consider is the transition to an institutionalized Religion that considers the flux of life and death as transient and also variable, and coterminous in many ways. It is not the stagnant, isolated, linear death of the pagan years.

The last point I will discuss is Zambrano's consideration of death in relation

to religious nascence, codified by Zambrano in terms of “*la nada*,” nothing(ness). First, Zambrano explains this somewhat gnostic *nada* and its roots in defying the convention of death as end to life (what I discussed earlier). *Nada* is “una luz nacida en la agonía [que] es la temporalidad que se consume y puede dar por ello una cierta aproximación de muerte superada; de muerte consumida también al par que la vida y la muerte. Pues la muerte no es el contrario, ni la negación de la vida en su integridad. ” (176). Could this *nada* be the the very mystical state of awareness, connection, or unification (with God) that produces this light? A light born from the agony that is not just experienced, but consumed, digested. It is a *nada* that overcomes death itself, Zambrano suggests, that is in some way equal to life and death simultaneously. I argue then that this “*muerte superada*” most closely approximates the state of mystical ecstasy achieved only by the contemplative state prior to the mystical union and then the passive ecstatic state afterward. I use the term mystical state to a degree that is different from a strictly Christian understanding; rather, I believe this state, which I will further detail as “mysticality” more closely resembles the philosophy of Georges Bataille's notion of inner experience in his eponymous work. He codifies the difference between an inner experience and mystical state, establishing a dislike for the term mystical, based on the grounds that mysticism is a de facto confessional state, tied to a prescriptive Religion (Bataille 3). He explains that the inner experience he refers to is “vague, to any confession whatsoever” and resists isolation from other experiences or categorization by religious framework. I think the best definition he offers is put forth in the endnotes where he states, “...inner experience is linked to the necessity, for the mind, of putting everything into question—without any conceivable respite or rest. This necessity came to light despite religious presuppositions, but its

consequences are all the more far-reaching if one puts them aside" (175). His argument, then, is rooted in the philosophical questioning of being, rather than the strictly religious one, though he does not deny the overlap. He takes issue with the pre-ordained rite of passage a mystic endures before reaching the ecstatic state, explaining that a "'mystic' sees what he wants—this depends on powers which are relative. And in the same way, he discovers—what he knew" (175). Bataille's mystic therefore is encountering a self that is already known, native to the *ser*; thus I believe Bataille's inner experience to be a simultaneous discovery of Zambrano's *nada* that offers the Zambranista "light" and understanding of the *originario*. Bataille quotes Hegel, referencing his inner experience:

Such minds...when they abandon themselves to the disordered unrest of their souls, imagine that by masking their consciousness of self and by overcoming their understanding they are the chosen ones to whom God gives wisdom during their slumber; in fact what they conceive and bring into the world during this slumber, are dreams... (175)

To this definition, however, I add a further caveat. Bataille suggests that the inner experience is in-dwelling and experienced without the necessary effort a mystic puts forth. I question what difference there really is between these two philosophies. Here, I offer the term mysticality. I posit that the asceticism, strife, and devotion to a desired mystical state can be engendered by a person who identifies as religious but who chooses to use this mysticality as a means to a non-religious end. Mysticality, then, is like Bataille's inner experience that thrives in a constant state of questioning, but whose religious antecedent does not preclude inquiry or discovery. I offer that it is precisely the religious identification that permits the person to avail

himself of the philosophical journey and uneasiness (mystical state) that is contemplated in Bataille's "experience."

It should be noted that Zambrano's philosophy here could be pan-religious, though she does not specifically identify a doctrine. She does foreground, however, the Christian's consideration of death and what it means to conquer it: "...para el cristiano, la salida de las tinieblas está abierta a un camino ya descubierto y trazado" (*El hombre y lo divino* 177). Thus, the reckoning with death and the afterlife is, for a Christian, a pre-ordained path which ends in Judgment Day, standing "desnudo ante Dios" (177). This does not surprise us, as it is in keeping with Christianity's foundational paradigm that commitment to Jesus the Savior will reunite you with God. It is at this precise moment, when confronting death, that Zambrano's fascination with this *nada* comes to play:

Y desde ese momento, comenzó a surgir la nada. La nada que no puede ser ni idea, porque no puede ser pensada en función de ser, del Ser. La nada se irá abriendo camino en la mente y el ánimo del hombre como sentir originario. Es decir: en los infiernos del ser. (177)

This *nada* I believe is a recognition of the poesis of the self. If this *nada* is, as I previously stated, a state that supersedes death, it is omnipresent and everlasting part of the *ser*. It provides man with the ability to be *originario*, that is, native, indigenous. But native to what? Arguably, it is a recognition and re-taking of the self—a unification with the self's most intimate native innateness—upon the confrontation with death. This is why *nada* is so paramount for Zambrano to one's own subjectivity: one's own perception is shaped. Here, then, a return to one's own intimacy, to the interior self/origen takes place.

AN ARGUMENT FOR MYSTICALITY

Now that I have laid out these discussions of mysticism and philosophy, it now time to begin amplifying what mysticism means to me and to the authors I will investigate in this analysis. By expanding the semantic value of “mysticism,” I can incorporate my own new term, “mysticality”; I explore where it exists on this spectrum, lying somewhere between Mysticism/Religion (as defined in more orthodox terms) and Religiosity. Here are the loci at either extreme and the characteristics inherent to each definition:

Mysticism	Mysticality
<----->	
Orthodox Catholic or Jewish mysticism	Mystical rhetoric/language
Union with God	Symbolic communion or union with ‘other’
The Divine	The profane divinized
Mystical approach and ends	Likely mystical approach only

If a mystic, as earlier discussed, is in constant search of a body, either through ecstatic experience or biblical exegesis, then it is my intention to prove that mysticality—and not necessarily mysticism—uses poetry as the medium by which to search for this body. Here, I rely heavily again on Hollywood, specifically with regard to the “emotional, bodily and excessive forms of mysticism” (*Sensible Ecstasy* 5). French feminist and psychoanalytic scholars Hélène Cixous, Catherine Clément, Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray as well as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and

Jacques Lacan have all discussed mysticism at different points in their work, specifically as it related to feminism and hysteria. Because I push for this term mysticality and am insisting on the extra-mystical writing offered by my authors in question, then I must flesh out these “bodily” and “excessive” types of mysticism that other scholars discuss. In my argument, however, the excessiveness can still be rooted in a psychoanalytic (and feminine) desire; the end result (the written word) is meant to neither achieve nor propagate mystical thought alone. Rather, the desired side effect is of a more secular nature: political poetry, ontological poetics, or revolutionary/feminist doctrine. In other words, a mystical literary approach—or personal religious beliefs of the author—permits a body of written work whose effects are infallibly religious, yet not necessarily mystical in the traditional sense.

Hélène Cixous's discussion of the intersection of femininity and mysticism considers the pathological marker of “hysteric” to actually be a re-taking of the psychoanalytic repressed desire, to the degree that she still writes using the term “hysteria” as medical lexicon. However, as Hollywood observes, “Cixous's argument leads to the conclusion that mystics, in that they are *religious*, are obsessive-compulsives, whereas in that they are *hysterical*, they are artists and revolutionaries” (*Sensible Ecstasy* 4). Hollywood identifies this classification as a transvaluation of values, “a radical reversal of the deployment of medical and psychoanalytic categories...” (4). While Cixous's observations are astute and game-changing, I argue for a movement beyond this transfiguration of medical/psychoanalytic lexica. Why must we consider only the examples of traditional mysticism and the way women writers, for centuries, have survived writing them(selves) in Mysticism proper? Is a poet confined to convicted mysticism just to be able to evoke mystical writing? If mystics write, as James explains, in a

“mystical state of consciousness,” then what do we call those that write mystically, without knowledge or intent of mystical constitution? Certainly, there is a place card for them within the mystical *logos*. The authors I will consider in Chapters Two, Three, and Four all share some foundational characteristics: they are personally religious (only one self-identifies as mystical); they employ poetic expression (either in poetry or prose) to explore mystical rhetorical notions; the sacredness of profanity/mundanity is highlighted over the Divine itself—thus instituting a transvaluation of divinity; and ontology is a central theme to each author's work (and for me specifically, the ontology of mysticism).

A more recognized example of an author's interpretation of mystical values can be cited in Borges's short story “El Aleph.” His interest in Jewish mysticism—evidenced by his poem “El Gólem,” “Death and the Compass,” and “The Other Death”—is well-known but Borges is not a mystic, nor is he necessarily a mystical writer. Ontologically speaking then, what renders a written work mystical? In Borges's story, when the narrator descends into the cellar, he closes his eyes, open them, and see the Aleph. The Aleph has been described to him as a point in time and space that contains all other points: “el lugar donde están, sin confundirse, todos los lugares del orbe, vistos desde todos los ángulos...todos los lugares de la tierra están en el Aleph, ahí estarán todas las luminarias, todas las lámparas, todos los veneros de luz” (166). Borges, like James, recognizes his failure as a writer to aptly communicate the Aleph's essence in this meta-textual revelation:

Arribo, ahora, el inefable centro de mi relato; empieza, aquí, mi desesperación de escritor. Todo lenguaje es un alfabeto de símbolos cuyo ejercicio presupone un pasado que los interlocutores comparten; cómo transmitir a los otros el

infinito Aleph, que mi temerosa memoria apenas abarca?
(Borges 168).

He recognizes an anxiety in confronting this analogous, transitory experience and his neophyte presence as inadequate. Therefore, he relies on the mystics to help explain, though he himself is not a mystic:

Los místicos, en análogo trance, prodigan los emblemas: para significar la divinidad, un persa habla de un pájaro que de algún modo es todos los pájaros; Alanus de Insulis, de una esfera cuyo centro está en todas partes y la circunferencia en ninguna; Ezequiel, de un ángel de cuatro caras que a un tiempo se dirige al Oriente y al Occidente, al Norte y al Sur. (No en vano rememoro esas inconcebibles analogías; alguna relación tienen con el Aleph.) (169)

Borges offers a series of inconceivable relationships that to the non-mystic are paradoxical, yet to the Aleph are contiguous, ineffable, and ever-possible. And though the diameter of the Aleph is only a few centimeters, its cosmic contents do not suffer a reduction in size whatsoever. What his eyes perceive is *simultáneo* yet what his pen writes (in the aftermath) is necessarily *sucesivo* because language only functions in this linear manner (169). If Borges calls on the mystics to philosophically explain, or, at the very least, to effectively narrate, the protagonist's encounter with the Aleph, does there need to be mystical conviction or union to understand this analogy? Borges knows that the mystics are the ones who best comprehend and express an enigma such as the Aleph, yet there is no union with God or ecstatic state (in the rapturous, traditional sense) experienced. How do we codify, then, the protagonist's intimate exposure with the Aleph? If it is not mystical,

by mysticism's standards, this is where I argue mysticality plays a crucial role. The experience is mystical-like, yet not religious; intense but not ecstatic; there is awareness of the infinite cosmos but not an innate understanding of it. Mysticality, then, aims to provide an alternate identification for this sort of writing, which I will exemplify with the works of Fina Garcia Marruz, Cintio Vitier, Jacobo Fijman, and Clarice Lispector.

Chapter Two: Fina García Marruz: What is a Catholicist Poet?

INTRODUCTION

Before I begin the textual analysis of features of mysticality in the poetry of Fina García Marruz, I will briefly take a broader view of the poetics of humanity. I am interested in poetic moments of union—or ecstasy—that poets such as García Marruz explore thematically in their work. Let me consider for a moment, however, similar moments in daily life outside that which is poetically described. The noted twentieth-century American psychologist Abraham Maslow changed the way the world saw his field in first describing people-in-need as clients, instead of patients, as had been the establishment precedent. In his famed hierarchy of needs, he outlines the basic structure of human behavior, beginning at the bottom with physiological necessities (shelter, food, sex); next comes safety (in self and employment); after which we see love/belonging; self-esteem; and finally, the ever-elusive self-actualization atop the rest. The idea, then, is that higher levels are achieved only when prior levels are securely attained. Poetically speaking, and with regard to writers in general, I do not suggest that this linear pyramid of reference serves as a guide to poets, nor should it inhibit their poetic intentions or abilities. Still, I am interested in what Maslow described as “peak experiences,” where the happiest, most stress-free moments of life are felt and enjoyed. These moments have often been labeled as religious experiences; yet, I seek out their logos in the non-religious sense as well. These peak, euphoric moments embody the most idyllic confluence of experiential ideas: stimulation, mindfulness, effortlessness, loss of self, harmony, and expressiveness. They are perfection; a kind of perfection unique to every individual. Yet, like the writing, recitation, or reading of a poem, they are

transient in nature. Maslow famously admitted, “In some great moment, man can be perfect, it's possible. But for five minutes” (www.npr.org “How did Abraham Maslow?”). With this in mind, I embark on the following poetic analysis recalling the peak experience of optimal performance in creativity as a means to mysticalist poetry and expression.

These peak performances, together with the concepts of mysticality laid out in Chapter One, will now be applied to the early work of the Cuban essayist and poet Fina García Marruz (FGM) (La Havana 1929-).¹¹ Many scholars of her work, including Carmen Ruiz Barrionuevo, indicate that there is a certain mysticalist quality to FGM's early poems in *Las miradas perdidas* (1944-1950). Author of the introduction to FGM's most recent 2011 anthology, *¿De qué silencio, eres tú silencio?* (Salamanca 2011), Ruiz suggests the following:

El punto de partida para García Marruz está también en una comprensión de la poesía como una actividad mágica que en algo recuerda a la mística, y al proponer lo exterior como objetivo, 'está traspasando su sustancia misma', por lo que ya no se puede hablar de poesía sino de religiosidad. (26)

Thus, these magical, mystical poetics, such as FGM's in this case, attempt to understand that which is exterior to the poetic voice. Her poems harmonize poetics with religiosity, a harmony for which she has become famous as noted by Ruiz, in addition to Jorge Luis Arcos, Robert Lesman, Emilio de Armas, among others. These analyses examine the mysticism, inner experience, and inner exploration of the exterior in FGM's work. Similarly, it is for this eminent supply of mysticalist qualities

11 From now on referred to as FGM.

that I choose FGM's early poems. However, my investigation differs from these previous studies in that it assays the presence of the divine in the mundane and the degree to which profanness contributes to and causes mysticality. I believe FGM's early work exemplifies my notion of mysticality and therefore have elected to examine it in my first poetry-focused chapter. These early poems encircle an intimate space to FGM, often simple daily items, toils, and memories as well as imagery reflecting the larger intimacy of the island itself, Cuba. Lesman describes FGM's nostalgia not as political, "sino celestial; el impulso restaurativo de su nostalgia se orienta hacia lo más allá mientras la nostalgia restaurativa se obsesiona por recuperar, aquí y ahora, lo que se anhela" (Lesman 83-84). I conclude, then, that FGM's nostalgic celestuality reaching for some type of "beyond," perfectly suits an approach that incorporates mysticality, instead of mysticism.

In addition to the religiosity of her poetics, I will also consider FGM's role as a central member of *Orígenes*, the Cuban literary movement of the 1940s and 1950s, particularly as only one of two women to be cited among the group's members. Hélène Cixous's and Luce Irigaray's notions of women writers and mysticism will be analyzed to examine the way in which these women seek transcendence through mystical means and love of God. I, as others have, will discuss one of FGM's most cited poems "Una dulce nevada está cayendo," which opens *Las miradas perdidas* and echoes the symbology used by fellow Cuban writers Julián del Casal and José Lezama Lima (Ruiz 31). However, FGM's "*dulce nevada*" is infused with new sounds and intimacies, new movements between the interior and exterior, and the infiltration of divinity into the mundane. In order to examine how FGM manages this female, poetic triumph, I must first examine her role in *Orígenes*.

FINA GARCÍA MARRUZ AND *ORÍGENES*

During the pre- and proto-periods of *Orígenes* production—that include the end of Latin American and peninsular romanticism, the beginnings of *modernismo*, as well as the Generations of '98, '14, and '27—poetic works identified as pure poetry (*poesía pura*), social poetry (*poesía social*), as well as *modernista* poetry would come to influence *Orígenes*, especially one of their most foundational members, José Lezama Lima. According to critic, Enrique Saínz, Lezama dialogued with Spanish '27 poet Luis Cernuda and his notions of corporeal mysticism. As with the Generation of '27's desire to counterbalance ideological dualisms, the poets of *Orígenes* sought to foment a creative individualism within an artistic and literary community that defended the rights of the nation and the national under the guise of Catholicism.¹² But a rupture was necessary. Lezama was described as having broken cleanly with pre-existing poetic ideals: “su espacio y sus fuentes no estaban en relación esencial ninguna con la circundante atmósfera poética. Su tiempo no parecía ser histórico ni ahistórico, sino literalmente, fabuloso” (Saínz, “Espacio Laical” 101). *Fabuloso* here emits many meanings: fabulous, regarding the extraordinary; relating to fables as in the stylistics and thematic preferences of the *modernista* poets paying poetic homage to the works of the ancient Greeks and Romans; and the mythical and/or mystical, reaching out to an “*aventura metafísica o mística*,” one of the tenets of the *Orígenes* group. Having been present during the burgeoning period of the group's lifetime, María Zambrano, among others, called them “un grupo de poetas cubanos” that had more “unidad de aliento más que grupo” (Alfonso Reyes, “Correspondencia” 344-345). But to distance *Orígenes* from

12 See Alvaro Salvador's 2008 article in *Letral*, “Los escritores hispanoamericanos y la generación del '27 on the Generation of '27.”

the previous artistic movements, Cintio Vitier (CV) proposed his own description of Lezama's work in what would become a canonical text for the group's manifesto, *Diez poetas cubanos: 1937-1947*:

...de la elegía, la rosa, la estatua (típicas de la generación anterior, y persistentes aún en otros poetas hispanoamericanos) sucede entre nosotros un salto, que diríamos en ocasiones sombrío de voracidad, hacia más dramáticas variaciones en torno a la fábula, el destino, la sustancia; el justo y transparente endecasílabo es abandonado por un verso imperioso e imprevisible; una poesía de delirio, en fin, da paso a una poesía de penetración. Comprobamos así cómo el intimismo esteticista...se abre a la aventura metafísica o mística, y por lo tanto muchas veces hermética. (Saínz, "Espacio Laical" 2012)¹³

A swift abandonment of the stagnant stylistics of the past (hendecasyllabic) is exchanged for the unpredictable, yet imperious preferences offered by Lezama himself: a poetry that penetrates (masculine, aggressive) versus one of delicacy (feminine, faint) (101).¹⁴ It is, at its core, a version of poetic expression that looks and seeks out the inward path—through a poetic ontology—so much so that this poetics becomes enclosing, even secretive, private, and reclusive. Worthy of mention, however, is the addiction of the *origenistas* to ensuring their poetry was not exclusive of other poetic forms or readers; its purpose was decidedly *not* to incite more dualisms between the divine and the mundane, the refined and the

¹³ Cintio Vitier now referred to as CV.

¹⁴This gender discourse will be further discussed when I examine FGM's poems from *Las miradas perdidas*.

plebian, described by Saínz as the “sterile” division in poetic fields. Rather, the desire is to penetrate the self, to “encontrar su unidad esencial y alcanzar entonces su verdad más profunda” (Saínz 296). Amid this poetic ontology, there is the methodology by which to achieve personal intimacy: Catholicism. I turn again to Saínz’s description:

Los poetas origenistas, desde una religiosidad católica que se nos evidencia en sus más importantes textos poéticos y ensayísticos, nos han dejado una obra que nos conmueve por su riqueza y su honda espiritualidad, más allá de sus aciertos formales o de la reiterada sobreabundancia de sus numerosas páginas...hallamos una singular asimilación [en las obras de Lezama, FGM y CV] de importantes líneas del pensamiento católico universal, labor integradora...[e] incorporativa de un saber espiritual de procedencia múltiple. (102)

A deep spiritual (and Catholic) meaning infuses the pages of the *origenista* literary corpus, a thematic thread that ties together this group's ontological search. But apart from the Orígenes poets being themselves Catholic, I question why this pervasive Catholicism is called on time and time again for the *origenistas* to serve as the vehicle by which to reach this desired intimacy, that is, transcendence. Why does institutionalized religion serve as this foundational paradigm in the post-avant-garde, pre-revolutionary setting, when often times the poets seem to eschew dogma/dogmatic principles? FGM explains in her *La familia de Orígenes* (1997) the importance of Dante to their poetic struggle, even more so than Verlaine was to the

modernistas.¹⁵ Here enters the idea of catholicity, according to Saínz, which both *modernistas* and *origenistas* sought: “[una] universalidad que habría de integrar vida y muerte, cuerpo y alma, Poesía e Historia” (102). What matters most is the universality of Catholicism, not its exclusivity, thereby underscoring the value of spiritual harmony when facing the greatest dichotomies of religion: life and death, body and spirit. The questioning turns away from a traditional approach in which the believer uses Catholicism first to ask *and* negotiate these mortal questions and instead prefers an avenue where the believer first pursues these questions and then mediates meaning by way of Catholicism.

THE WORK OF FGM AS POET, ESSAYIST, AND FEMINIST

To bridge the historicity of FGM’s work with the poetic selection and analysis that follow, it is important to note the chronology of the chosen poems. FGM publishes in 1951 *Las miradas perdidas*, a book of poems composed between 1944 and 1950, selections of which are also published independently in the literary journal *Orígenes*, edited by José Lezama Lima and José Rodríguez Feo. In the mid 1930s, Juan Ramón Jiménez and María Zambrano both visit Cuba—the former organizing poetry festivals in the Teatro Campoamor in which FGM and CV participate. Additionally, FGM spends time with Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral. FGM, a young, prolific, ebullient poet merely in her twenties, makes a lasting statement in the artistic and intellectual community in La Habana—her most recent anthology of poetry was published just in 2011, indicating her continued importance. It is during this time as well that she personally meets José Lezama Lima and in the year after, 1947, at age 24, marries CV, with whom she shares her life until his death in 2009.

¹⁵Paul-Marie Verlaine (1844-1896) was a French poet, representative of the *fin de siècle*, Symbolist movement, which influenced the Latin American *modernismo* developing at the same time period.

FGM is additionally an academic, having completed her doctoral degree in social sciences at the University of Havana in 1961. Beginning the year after, she took on the role of researcher/scholar at the Biblioteca Nacional de Cuba. And for ten years, between 1977 and 1987, she worked at the Centro de Estudios Martianos, heading up the publication of the critical edition of Martí's *Obras completas* (1982). While I will not be discussing the post-revolution literary period in Cuba, it is noteworthy to mention FGM's vast publications of essays during the 1960s and 1970s, predominantly those regarding Martí's work (*Los versos de Martí* (1968, Havana) and *Temas martianos* (1969, Havana)) as well as philosophical treatments of poetry and her collaborations with husband, CV, (*Poesías y cartas* (1977) and *Flor oculta de poesía cubana* (1978)).

Thus, in consideration of FGM's poetic publications—and keeping in mind her role as female, wife of CV, and *Orígenes* figurehead—I turn first to a corpus that both precedes the revolution but also, significantly, reflects FGM's arrival on the literary scene as a neophyte, yet as one with considerable agency and talent. Therefore, all the selections detailed below from *Las miradas perdidas* echo these formative years during the 1940s.

MYSTICALITY AND CATHOLICITY. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE CATHOLIC TO FGM?

I argue that FGM successfully writes about the sacramental precisely by reflecting intimate moments and experiences outside the Church and its dogma. As discussed in Chapter One, the use of a mystical rhetoric gives way to the phenomenon of mysticality, which allows FGM to make her poetry more liturgical without being dogmatic. Therefore I argue that her poetry represents the practical, ceremonial, and social (liturgical) aspects of Catholicism instead of the more

abstract, theoretical, and convictional parts of Catholic thought. As Catherine Davies astutely points out in her book *A Place in the Sun?* (1997), “[a]lthough a Catholic reading is important, it sometimes seems to miss the point” (93). The close readings that follow attempt to unpack FGM’s mysticity as this new literary, phenomenological, and religious approach and to specifically divorce it from mysticism, using an apophatic theological strategy.¹⁶ FGM describes sanctity in the mundane, divine in the ordinary, and Godliness in earthliness. Here, the “-ity” of mysticity, therefore serves my purposes better, rather than the -ism of mysticism, much in the way I have employed the term “religiosity” instead of religion—just as I suspect Davies would argue as well—to explore FGM’s poetry. The -ity challenges the dogma by necessarily placing it outside that which is dogmatic, yet it still espouses principles found within the Church. In a similar fashion, as mentioned in Chapter one, Thomas Aquinas takes up an apophatic approach to address God in his *quinque viae* (five ways) of knowing the existence of God, all of which deduce His presence by assumptions based on observation. FGM need not provide proofs, though poetically speaking, she does exactly this. I turn to CV’s comments on his wife’s work in the introductory remarks of *Diez poetas cubanos* (1986):

...los poemas no constituyen para ella fines en sí mismos, sino sencillamente y estrictamente caminos o instrumentos que sirven al progreso del alma y la visión. La poesía es lo que abre nuestra capacidad de ver; sus más perfectas cristalizaciones no pueden sustituir el objeto a que el propio rapto poético tiende, o sea, la intemperie de la realidad, el ser

¹⁶Apophatic theological strategy refers to the *via negativa*, or the belief in humanity’s limited understanding of an infinite God due to our own finiteness.

virginal de lo exterior que es al mismo tiempo la más inefable
intimidación de la Creación. (184)

The long-time scholar of FGM's work, Jorge Luis Arcos, examines closely the role of the exterior in her poetic corpus, asserting that she often "trata de expresar lo inapresable a través de lo paradójico," an ethos particularly pertinent in FGM's poems, "Sonetos de la lluvia" where she declares "esa música que soy que no abarco" (Arcos, *En torno* 112; García Marruz, *Las miradas perdidas* 9). In this approach to determine a poetic interiority—poetically and religiously—there is often a rhythmic, tidal coming-and-going: a declaration of what *is* for the poetic voice and mutually what *is not*. That is, the *via negativa*, becomes a type of phenomenological discourse by which FGM examines Zambrano's poetic reason. Beyond what Edmund Husserl would identify as essential objectivities, I suggest, as does Ivette Fuentes, what Merleau-Ponty describes as "phenomenology of perception."¹⁷ If we first perceive and then bridge this gap between our perception and the written narrative of this perception, then we can create a poetic ontology, as perhaps FGM does in her early work. Merleau-Ponty's central notion of the primacy of perception offers a dialogic relationship between the body and the mind and their connection with the world, rather than a dichotomy of one versus the other (*Phenomenology* 25). A diachronic inter-subjectivity between body and mind underscores the importance of the two, especially of the body and the role it plays. Arguably, FGM uses this same perceptive body to experience the phenomena of subjectivity, of experience, and of poetic embodiment.

¹⁷Taken from a paper given by Ivette Fuentes at conference on FGM in Havana, Cuba, November 2014, entitled, "Príncipe Oscuro, Hombre de Luz. Las metáforas lumínicas en la poesía de Fina García Marruz".

Paradoxically, though unsurprising in FGM's technique, these body and mind phenomenologies are simultaneous and coterminous. To exemplify this notion of poiesis as it demonstrates a sort of exteriority of self, and the creational conundrum that it describes, I turn to a selection of FGM's poems, where I argue she attempts to access this exteriority and approximate or draw closer to the essence of Zambrano's poetic language. Arcos insists that FGM's poetry "... se manifiesta con una particular intensidad, pues ella siempre se sitúa frente a la realidad desde una perspectiva poética, lo cual hace que tanto su pensamiento crítico o ensayístico como su obra en verso o sus prosas poéticas, encuentren su raíz fundacional y unitiva en la poesía" (103). FGM's poetic reality becomes her poetic philosophy, or alternatively, her poiesis.

Arcos further describes this unifying poetics of her early work by stating that she always chooses "una ética, una filosofía, una ideología, un universo axiológico, expresados en ese pensamiento y transfigurados en su objetivación poética a través de la individual perspectiva del escritor" (*En torno* 103). An axiological universe constructed by FGM would be, then, one where the poet and poetic voice problematize (by questioning) and evaluate (by versification) the values and value judgments made in verse. In the following first two stanzas of her sonnet "Una dulce nevada está cayendo," there is first a presentation of this axiomatic space, more abstract, where the poetic voice situates herself, and then a transition to the voice's own subjectivity within this space:

Una dulce nevada está cayendo
detrás de cada cosa, cada amante,
una dulce nevada comprendiendo
lo que la vida tiene de distante.

Un monólogo lento de diamante
calla detrás de lo que voy diciendo
un actor su papel mal repitiendo
sin fin, en soledad gesticulante (*De qué silencio* 109).

First, the poetic voice offers the philosophy that behind each thing there is a silence, a whiteness, that falls, sweetly; here a universal observation as it is encapsulated by each worldly thing. Then, this snowfall is identified behind each lover, a more concrete, intimate subject, but unspecified nonetheless; the chosen approach is both distanced and inclusive. Life is anthropomorphized, and as a protagonist in the poem, it is limited in its self-actualization. FGM creates here a universe where the world is perceived as a silent snowfall, latent and exterior to the poetic voice, but present. At this moment FGM begins the inward turn, invoking a (meta)monologue and the first person ([yo] voy). Now, instead of the hidden space behind things or lovers, there is the “behindness” of her own voice containing a slow, diamond monologue. A diamond, while perhaps glittery like snow, is hardened and durative, unlike its ephemeral sky-fallen poetic counterpart. This behindness is compared to a bad actor mindlessly repeating his own words, opposed to the sweet snow sharing (and understanding) life’s complications. Even though the poetic voice created this axiology and located herself within it, hers is a reality that is expressed in mere un-witnessed gesticulations in solitude. Perhaps she questions “where do these words fall?” and “what meaning do they have outside of this universe?”. There is a meditative, universal approach followed by a self-realization. She describes an exterior by way of examining her interior; that is, she attempts an approach to a

poetically-fashioned universe, to a grander meaning within it, by way of a inward gazing upon her own meaning, voiced or not. Here, I argue that her methodology is mystical by way of the *via negativa*, yet her ends are rhetorical and poetic. The last two stanzas portray the internalization of this universe within the poetic voice's reality:

Una suave nevada me convierte
ante los ojos, ironistas sobrios,
al dogma del paisaje que me advierte

Una voz, algún coche apareciendo,
mientras en lo que miro y lo que toco
siento que algo muy lejos se va huyendo. (109)

This internalization is palpable; it penetrates her. It converts her into the landscape itself, into the dogma of the Cuban countryside, into the faith of her literal environment. Regardless, though, she is suddenly devoted to this new force, not doctrinal, but consuming and converting. Upon the conversion to this new "faith" there is a grasping of what *is*, what is tangible, that which she sees (*miro*) and touches (*toco*) and alternatively what *is not*, feeling/perceiving something that is escaping (*se va huyendo*). This axiological universe is created; a paradox is formed; the poetic voice questions and struggles within it; and there is simultaneous experimentation of this paradox. A resolutely mystical poet/poem might often find God smiling at the poetic voice at the sonnet's end. However, FGM garners poetic brilliance in using this mystical rhetoric—including the archetypical paradox, dogmatic belief and constitutional conversion—all while ending the sonnet with the poetic voice's inability to sense (physically) this behindness that escapes visibility

and tangibility. Is it God's presence? Or his absence? While possible, my argument for a reading of mysticality proposes that God's presence may or may not manifest itself, but the union with a(ny) presence, in this case, poiesis, is what counts.

By what mechanism, then, does FGM look to her interior, vis-à-vis her Catholic faith, to her own intimacy with herself and with God to examine the process of poiesis? She considers otherness, often expressed by suffering—a method hallmarked in Catholic tradition to encourage empathy—and this otherness is reflected thematically by her poetry. She often focuses on the mentally handicapped, children, the homeless, and those that are marginalized in Cuba, and instead of evangelizing, she reaches out by way of poetic voice and stands with them and suffers with them. They are those who are outwardly visible to her, but their suffering is rendered unreachable in that only empathy is emotionally possible; there is no physical analogy. Thus, the poetry is for FGM the vehicle by which she approaches this hermetic suffering. As in the poetry of Jiménez, an attentiveness to that which remains outside (exteriority) results in a greater intimacy (interiority).¹⁸ She even chooses Jesus as a societal subject in co-suffering in a poem entitled “Transfiguración de Jesús en el Monte.” She doesn't theatricalize or sensationalize this Biblical narrative. Rather, the poem is intimately descriptive, with daily smells, “las calles empinadas y estrechas olían a comida simple y brutal” and day-in-the-life-of descriptions, “el paso lento de los fariseos y el paso rápido de los mercaderes.” She engages in a biblical discourse by re-writing it in her own words and making it mundane and operational at this quotidian level. It is almost as if she were commuting to work during the late Roman era and happened on Jesus'

¹⁸ Here I refer to the aforementioned Juan Ramón Jiménez (1881-1958), Spanish poet who was renowned for his use of “pure poetry”; he heavily influenced the *Orígenes* group.

transfiguration at the side of the road. It is both metonymic (Jesus' transformation as representational of poiesis) and metaphoric (Jesus' suffering is her suffering).

Perhaps this quotidianizing of Jesus' transformation is an attempt to reconcile FGM's belief with her poetic expression, to phenomenologically express the perception of the body. This is her poetic rendering of a parable which gives it personal meaning for her. She refers back to the Bible often, but not in an orthodox or theological way. She describes the Israeli town near where Jesus' transformation occurs, describing it as a familiar conversation, "y las casas sucedían como las razones de una discusión de que ya conocemos todas las partes" (144). By including the first person plural (*nosotros*), FGM accesses and appeals to the congregational, liturgical side of the reader. And in so doing she invokes the quotidian aspect of the experience of religion. In this way, I find that her voice is not necessarily limited to the Catholic tradition—though espousing it—but rather it is both intimate and universally public at the same time precisely because of this act of quotidianization. She finds union in just the things that a traditional mystic considers mundane. Thus, FGM suggests a kind of quotidian transfiguration to express the innate divinity of the mundane. Unlike a mystical Christian poet, who feels and responds to the beckoning of Christ and her union with God, she is fascinated with life and the possibilities that life offers in moments of compassion. Perhaps it is a deconstruction or a de-Catholicizing of Catholicism—that is, eminent importance placed on what occurs outside the Church and its rites. In emphasizing the non-sacramental, FGM allows its very own sacralization. Carmen Ruiz Barrionuevo comments that, for FGM, "el acto creador no responde a una tesis, como el arte social, del que se desliga..." (*De qué* 23). FGM's artistic muse, as it were, would be her personal Catholic project embodied in the social reality in which she found

herself. Arcos adds, "...la autora [FGM] esgrime en sus textos la defensa del carácter simbólico del arte, así como la superación de las fragmentaciones de las vanguardias y del purismo en la poesía...en la poesía pura se produce la separación de la esencia de aquello que la encarna, es decir la realidad" (*La pobreza* 150). If the *origenista* project sought the essentialness and enhancement of being in poetic form, then FGM offers a pristine vision of this poetic reality in going beyond *poesía pura* owing to its commitment to exteriority.

FGM indeed makes Christ part of her own "reality." She selectively discusses Christ, the mortal, not Christ the Messiah, before his transfiguration, prior to crucifixion, (though the poem's title echoes the miraculous transformation): "he aquí que Jesús ha tomado de la mano a Pedro, a Jacobo y a Juan, y los ha llevado al monte" (García Marruz, *De qué* 144). Jesus is presented as a member of humanity, and in consideration of founding tendencies of the *Orígenes* group, both the individual and the participatory are favored over theoretical aesthetics or trending literary movements:

Así pues el manifiesto sustentador del quehacer origenista se perpetuó en el punto medular de la cultura, entendida como defensa de la libertad del hombre, en su ser individual y participativo, entraña y raíz de sus formas de decir y actuar, ajenas a la imagen circunstancial requerida o deseada...
(Fuentes www.cubaliteraria.cu).

If the function, then, of *origenista* poetry is to foreground the mission of poetic *humanitas* within a Catholic framework, then FGM chooses to advance this project by rendering it quotidian, accessible, and human. As Arcos suggests, "el misterio de la poesía es el misterio de la encarnación, misterio cristiano por

excelencia, el del verbo se hace carne” (*La pobreza* 151). FGM embodies Christ and poetic words in reality.

To further reflect on FGM’s ability to quotidianize—and how this relates to mysticality—I must examine her own considerations regarding how a poet/poem becomes mystical. In a 1991 essay “San Juan de la Cruz: la Palabra y el Silencio,” where FGM discusses San Juan de la Cruz’s use of words to communicate silence, she puts forth a pertinent question that considers the potential innate mysticality in poets of all types. She wonders, when accessing something new about oneself, “en que entra, o empieza a entrar, aquello que nos excede y sólo por eso nos alegra y aquieta,” how does the poet manage this simultaneous satisfaction (*alegra*) and assurance (*aquieta*) regarding that which is always beyond (*nos excede*) his/her comprehension (*San Juan* 8). How do we parse out mystical poetry from poetry? Or is all poetry subscribing to some degree to mysticism?

Preceding this question, however, how does FGM define a mystical poet? Her thoughts on the matter are somewhat polemical: “Toda poesía, aun la negadora, ¿es de entraña mística? Toda mística, aun la arribada a vía iluminativa, ¿es de entraña poética?” (8). Indubitably she classifies San Juan as both poet and mystic, but her suggestion proves that as both a poet and a critic of poetry herself, she locates a certain crux of poetry’s purpose: if a (religious) poet’s ontological presence is manifest in a poem, does that make it mystical? I do not believe her to have wholly answered this question in her essay as the purpose was to merely present this idea more than offer a precise resolution. However, my interest lies primarily in this problematizing, which serves to explicitly highlight the coalescing of religious writers and their religious poetry. It is not simply a linear production, that is, a religious writer produces a religious poem. Perhaps it is better queried: *does a*

religious writer produce a religious poem? She turns also to Zambrano's "*saber del alma*" to explain: a poet (religious or not) seeks this "saber del alma," and this is particularly the case for the *origenistas*:

y este 'saber del alma' no se opone a la luz intelectual sino que la traspasa, no toda ciencia negando sino 'toda ciencia trascendiendo'Así este 'sé bien' no lo es sólo de lo poco que sabemos sino de lo mucho que ignoramos, saber que es un 'no saber' sino aquello que esencialmente nutre toda sabiduría y que en forma tal nos excede. (11)

What we know of ourselves must also encompass what do not know; a poet's work then is to nourish him or herself on this search for his/her interior. If it so happens that a given poet's nourishment is Catholicism, then his/her work may or may not give way to mystical poetry. If, as is the case with FGM, catholicity is the chosen sustenance, Catholicism permits mystical fusions among the poetic words.

How, then, do Catholicism and its views on the afterlife present themselves in FGM's work? Arcos underscores FGM's fidelity to both the self and to death, particularly in the book of poems *Visitaciones* (1970), asserting that the latter "no es sino una forma de consumación" (*En torno* 166). As precisely this act of culmination, I examine an earlier poem, "Vendrá la muerte" from *Las miradas perdidas*. It is the culmination of the poetic voice waxing nostalgic about two experiences of death: the physical and the spiritual. Themes of sound(lessness) and sleep recur as the poetic voice finds acceptance in knowing death comes for her. With assurance the poetic voice states that death will arrive at an unexpected moment:

Vendrá la muerte a transformar el lila
reminiscente de tus trajes idos,

sorpresa será el cesp d conocido
y la taza en tu mano ya dormida.

According to Arcos, “[l]a muerte [marruciana]...es abordada directamente como un misterio que afecta su condici n humana y que, como todo misterio, se busca comprender” (167). Death’s appearance is familiar (*tus trajes idos*) yet surprising to the common objects surrounding the chosen *t * (*cesped conocido, taza*). It partners with FGM’s presentation of the human condition; death does not destroy life, coming to transform, rather than to take away. FGM works immediately to set an atmosphere of comfort and familiar intimacy—the image of a friend asleep on the sofa, coffee cup still in hand. What is the essence of these daily things she illustrates poetically? Using them as a methodology, the poetic voice soaks them in and moves through them to finally move past and transcend them. They are the way to the “*exterior no externo*,” giving way to the interior. She states in her famous essay, “Lo exterior en la poes a”:

Reparemos que s lo hay dos realidades absolutamente exteriores a la imagen que de ellas tenemos o nos hacemos: nosotros mismos y Dios. He aqu  dos imprevisibles po ticos, dos desconocidos.  Es que, hasta hoy, se hab an constituido alguna vez en objetos para la poes a? Es evidente que no. (16)

FGM argues that her work—and largely that of the *origenistas* as well—reflects this exposition of ourselves and God (two unknowns) in poetry for the first time. She pursues transcendence without divorcing her poetry from reality; hence the inclusion of the “daily” and “known,” precisely to serve as a foil to (and to aid in approaching) the two “imprevisibles po ticos, dos desconocidos.”

She continues with images of morning routines of anthropomorphized household items, “el sonido y la dulzura de la madrugadoras cucharillas,” inserting familiar touches to show affinity to *tú* on the other side of the apostrophe (*tu bata oscura*):

Barroco el reverbero que encendía
la seda antigua de tu bata oscura,
no dorará el sonido y la dulzura
de la madrugadoras cucharillas.

In the first two stanzas the voice harkens to a familiar outsider, beyond the words themselves, but she turns inward, to the self/*yo* in the final two tercets of the sonnet:

Perderé tu manera de llamarme
que me hizo desear aún otro rato
en la tarde más fiel poder quedarme

Y en traje nauseabundo y desasido
perderé la honda sombra, que no el árbol
perderé lo que había ya perdido. (122)

With physical death comes the inability to communicate as before, a loss she laments but recalls with favor (*me hizo desear*). The sonnet closes with the spiritual death, alluding to a two-fold loss (*lo que había ya perdido*). A pending loss of what was previously lost indicates a reconciliation of what at one time was possessed and dispossessed; that is, something that the poetic voices knows intimately but carries

no longer. FGM employs a variety of verb tenses, yet excludes the present—the future and past are favored. Speaking to the *origenistas's* aforementioned atemporality, the ubiquity of the types of death becomes embodied by the lilac, by the apostrophic *tú* and by the first person *yo*. If poetry is as FGM describes much later in an essay, “Hablar de la poesía,” “[l]a poesía no estaba para mí en lo nuevo desconocido sino en una dimensión nueva de lo conocido, o acaso, en una dimensión desconocida de lo evidente,” then the two unknowns (ourselves and God) are approached poetically only by a new dimension that is already manifest (4).

Here, Wolfgang Iser's discussion of the relationship between the text and the reader offers an alternative access point to FGM's work when considering the poetic relationship to the exterior. In Iser's fundamental chapter in his *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, “Interaction between Text and Reader” (1978), he discusses more broadly the structure of reader-response theory. It is extremely useful to examine how he views this particular relationship, even though it is not specific to poetic or philosophical texts:

Communication in literature, then, is a process set in motion and regulated, not by a given code, but by a mutually restrictive and magnifying interaction between the *explicit* and the *implicit*, between *revelation* and *concealment*. What is concealed spurs the reader into action, but this action is also controlled by what is revealed; the explicit in its turn is transformed when the implicit has been brought to light. Whenever the reader bridges the gaps, communication begins. The gaps function as a kind of pivot on which the whole text-reader relationships revolves. Hence, the structured blanks of

the text stimulate the process of ideation to be performed by the reader on terms set by the text. (293)¹⁹

Here, I challenge the consideration of a relationship only between text and reader and move it to the author-text relationship with the author as reader. Iser's communicative gaps are filled in by FGM's ideation of what a divine relationship could mean and how it could manifest itself poetically. In an effort to explore the diaphanous relationship between the implicit and the explicit, FGM writes the transformative, transcendental possibilities in poetic texts.

FGM manages this textual relationship in addition to the casual, stoic, yet unencumbered relationship with the divine and the presence of the divine by writing about daily activities that humans experience. As she often favors death thematically, though it is not something one experiences daily, it is universally familiar, as is expressed in "A una recién difunta" where she says "Lo más raro, después de todo, no es morir. Es no haber podido terminar el dobladillo de la saya que dejamos sobre la mesa, oh qué confiados" (64). The unfinished garment can obviously represent any unfinished project/business in one's life, and lamentations of life's incomplete narrative are unsurprising on a deathbed. Here is where I think FGM is innovative: the poetic voice takes on a perspective that is ontological perhaps in its "reverse" positioning. Instead of describing the two conventional views of death 1) uncertainty or fear of death, or 2) even the sweet welcoming of meeting one's Creator, she instead directs the poetic voice to look back at life from death, describing her observations of life as both divinely ironic and strange. We are naïve, she says, to think that the exiting of life is what's strange. It is the mundane

19 Stress is my own.

details of life that can be reflected upon and, from death, be appreciated and thus considered divine.

If the mystic, at times, revolves his/her writing around death, I must consider mysticality in relation to FGM's engagement of death in relation to religious nascence, codified by Zambrano's term "*la nada*" (nothing, emptiness, nothingness, vacuousness) in the poem titled "Nacimiento de la fe." I will again cite Zambrano's *nada* and its roots in defying the convention of death as the end to life. *Nada* is "una luz nacida en la agonía [que] es la temporalidad que se consume y puede dar por ello una cierta aproximación de muerte superada; de muerte consumida también al par que la vida y la muerte. Pues la muerte no es el contrario, ni la negación de la vida en su integridad" (176). This sonnet begins with a great distancing of God, where we are witness to the not-knowing of the poetic voice and the complete negation of the physical body's capability to know or accept God. There is an abyss that gives rise to an insurmountable impasse:

Nada podría hacer que mereciera
tu altivez o tu júbilo, Dios mío,
solo puede tu amor llenar el frío
abismo que al nacer mi carne hendiera.

We then transition to an explanation of this perceived impasse in stanza two, during which the poetic voice furthers the notion that she does relinquish her body to God's will:

Mas no porque esta cal perecedera
de mis huesos haciendo su albedrío
no sume ver tu cuerpo bendecido

se ha de escandalizar lo que en mi espera.

In the third stanza, as is conventional with sonnets, there is a change in tone where the poetic voice accepts this gift of unknowing, though her soul is still impenetrable.

Ahora que sé, Señor, lo miserable
de esta dádiva y del incierto juicio
que puedo hacer de mi alma impenetrable.

The poem closes with the poetic voice seeing and believing:

Ahora creo, Señor, en tu Mirada
en mi obra y su oscuro sacrificio,
con esa fe que se alza de la nada. (54)

It is the belief in the *nada* that permits the belief in God. The sonnet both begins and ends with the word *nada*. It is replete with words with meanings of uncertainty: *frío, abismo, hendiera, perecedera, miserable, incierto juicio, impenetrable, oscuro sacrificio*. Zambrano's *infiernos del ser* are painted beautifully in this poem and unexpectedly faith is born.

Here, the ubiquity of Zambrano's poesis is patent; however, I believe that the poet's struggle with God and notions of *la nada* and *abismo* together with concrete figures of religion like Jesus and physical churches, which are often protagonists in her poetry, enrich her work with these polarities. I do not believe they are destined to polarize negatively but rather serve to enhance the approach of plurality to God though she only subscribes to one sect of one religion, Catholicism. By infusing her critical approach with this poesis, she can achieve a plurality of meanings poetically

and religiously through items which the traditional mystic would find mundane.

In another poem, “Ama la superficie casta y triste,” recurrent images of the lilac, the *traje*, and atemporality are again revealed. The poem reads as follows:

Ama la superficie casta y triste
Lo profundo es lo que se manifiesta
La playa lila, el traje aquel, la fiesta
pobre y dichosa de lo que ahora existe

Sé el que eres, que es ser el que tú eras,
al ayer, no al mañana, el tiempo insiste,
sé sabiendo que cuando nada seas
de ti se ha de quedar lo que quisiste.

No mira Dios al que tú sabes que eres
-la luz es ilusión, también locura-
sino la imagen tuya que prefieres,

que lo que amas torna valedera,
y puesto que es así, sólo procura
que tu máscara sea verdadera. (*De qué* 14)

That which is patent and superficial is constructed by what is invisible and profound. Paying homage to the ancient Greek lyricist, Pindar, she quotes him, “Sé el que eres”: Be what you are. Yet, FGM again moves through and past these words,

thus transcending Pindar's suggestion. She insists on an addition in the first verse of the second quatrain, "Sé el que eres, que es ser el que tú eras," recalling again the atemporal nature of her project coupled with a suggestive glimpse of an ontological enterprise. What you are, she explains, is being what you were and then when you are gone, what remains is what you made of yourself ("cuando nada seas / se ha de quedar lo que quisiste") (110). She observes the effects of an ontological inquiry on *tú* but makes herself visible—in speaking directly to *tú* and commanding actions—thus illustrating the *origenista* fundamentals of individualism and participation in poetry itself. According to critic Giorgio Serra, "[l]a poesía de Fina García actúa a modo de intermediario entre la realidad y el observador, con el fin de llegar a percibir lo inmanente, lo que se encuentra detrás de la realidad de los hechos y los objetos. El objetivo de tal labor trascendente es rescatar tanto lo exterior como lo profundo de la caducidad" ("Lo religioso" pendientemigración.ucm.es). FGM mediates observed reality and pure reality by infusing meaning into these facts and objects. Both the surface and the depths offer support during this quest.

Furthermore, FGM begins this hendecasyllabic sonnet with the eponymous verse and commanding voice, "Ama la superficie casta y triste" only to immediately turn from the exterior to the occult/interior in the next verse, "Lo profundo es lo que se manifiesta" (110). In parallel fashion, in another eponymous poem "Privilegio tristísimo y ardiente", the poetic voice demands: "[a]caba de una vez, que ya hace frío...y contesta por Dios, quién soy, qué he sido" (123). Rumination on what is and what has been is manifest in both poems, thus a re-taking of the *humanitas* in a poetic reality, questioning the role of FGM's so highly favored Catholicist approach. It is by way of this Catholicist phenomenology that the poetic voice, like that of Pindar, problematizes the function of the poet in his/her poetics.

LA CUBA SECRETA DE FGM Y ZAMBRANO

In her work *María Zambrano: entre el alba y la aurora* (2004), FGM discusses Zambrano's philosophy as well as her arrival in Cuba. She frames Zambrano's poiesis by using words like *ausente* and *desnudez*, Zambrano's own philosophical terms, "[v]ivía en un estado pre-natal, en el que, inevitablemente, iba a ser presa de delirios, y recorrería galerías oscuras, empujando puertas semiabiertas..." (30). There seems to be a constant search for a *sendero* by which Zambrano seeks out a practice by which to *adentrarse*. Here we see emerge the atemporality for which the *origenistas* became so famous: FGM recounts that Zambrano had described herself as follows:, "huía...del tiempo humano," that, "quería vivir justamente el mundo de la Niña--¿no llamaban así a la República, en otro tiempo?—a la que no habían tampoco dejado madurar" (30). If the *origenistas* were forged in the notion of poetic atemporality, then how do we reconcile this poetic ideal with the socio-historical reality that comes a mere eight years after the publication of *Miradas perdidas*? Do the two diverge at some later point? Or does this assume they were at some nascent point joined and perhaps these two movements in time grew to be mutually exclusive? Regarding Spanish mystic San Juan de la Cruz, FGM declares, "[n]o niega ninguna de sus tres potencias: memoria, entendimiento, voluntad, sino las remonta a su fuente, la Trinidad divina, transformando así, enamoradamente, la memoria en esperanza, el entendimiento en fe y la voluntad en la caridad que todo lo obra" (*San Juan de la Cruz* 9). Duanel Díaz has commented specifically on the conflation of *origenistas's* religiosity and regime fidelity. He describes accurately the previously held belief in the "Revolutionary Event" instead of the more suggestive government-

incited “eternal Revolutionary Regime” that Cubans were experiencing. Propaganda in Havana reveals exactly this: an ongoing revolutionary state, according to Díaz, a sort of static *mise-en-scène* that is at the same time dynamically tied to the “Event” 56 years its predecessor.

In his development of a theory of trauma, Dori Laub, M.D., makes an interesting case for the listeners of a narrative of “extreme human pain,” here, specifically with reference to those listening to verbal accounts from Holocaust survivors (*Bearing Witness* 57). It is useful to extrapolate here to see just how Cubans—particularly those who were precisely *not* yet alive during the time of the revolution—might bear witness to the aftermath of the revolution. Laub explains, “The victim's narrative—the very process of bearing witness to massive trauma—does indeed begin with someone who testifies to an absence, to an event that has not yet come into existence, in spite of the overwhelming and compelling nature of the reality of its occurrence” (57). For those who did not live through the revolution, the event of the revolution necessarily does *not* come to exist until it is “given birth to” by the victim/experiencer him/herself. The emergence of the narrated story codifies the experience of the event, so that there is then cognition and witnessing of the event. The event-narrators can be considered in the Cuban context to be both the concealed family and friends in private gatherings in addition to the overt, public, government-stylized propaganda. Both these sources insist that the Cuban listener bear witness to the event on a constant basis and face this stormy narrative as an “in-process” 56-year-event. Laub further details the role of the listener-participant:

By extension, the listener to trauma comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event: through his very

listening, he comes to partially experience trauma in himself...the latter [participant] comes to feel the bewilderment, injury, confusion, dread and conflicts that the trauma victim feels...it [is] henceforth impossible [that] witnessing can indeed take place. The listener, therefore, by definition partakes of the struggle of the victim with the memories and residues of his or her traumatic past...feel[ing] the victim's victories, defeats and silences, know them from within, so that they can assume the form of testimony. (58)

The revolution is characterized a massive rupture, politically, socially, and historically. At the moment it occurred, arguably those pushing for Cuban independence/nationalism would not have agreed lexically with “trauma.” Notwithstanding, the unfolding of decades of isolation, lack of resources, and government-controlled access certainly reflects the traumatic pain experienced by Cuba over the past half-century. If the Revolution itself is, as a single event, as many critics including Díaz have suggested, a utopian-socialist-messianic rupture, then Cuba lives in sort of “negative space” of the Revolution, contained within the umbra of the event itself.

Díaz explains that the relationship between the anticipation of the Revolution and the death of Castro: “La congelación temporal que reflejan las calles de La Habana sería la contraparte del Evento que fue la Revolución, y a la vez la espera por ese otro acontecimiento futuro que será la muerte de Castro” (*Hasta 2*). To further his point, Díaz quotes Žižek’s perceptions of today's Cuba, “It is not that the revolutionary Event was ‘betrayed’ by the Thermidorian establishment of a new order; the very insistence on the Event led to the immobilization at the level of

positive social being. The decaying houses are the proof of fidelity to the Event” (*Hasta 2*). Though aptly chosen, this term “fidelity” raises some questions regarding who is considered to be *fidel*; given the prevalence of black market goods, widespread lack of resources, omnipresent propaganda, and the surge in the establishment of local cooperative markets, this would suggest that it is the government alone who retains “fidelity to the Event.” The defunct businesses and destroyed landscapes that the people suffer on a daily basis are the mere consequences of police-state-like control and lack of physical mobility. If there is indeed a contiguous consumption of the Revolution, we cannot simply presume that all Cubans are selectively and willingly part of it. If for Alain Badiou, “an event is the creation of new possibilities,” then certainly the Revolution acted as such: a stimulus.²⁰ The question of whether or not it is a continuing set of stimuli, again, relies on—and begs the question—Whom is it serving well? Or is it really serving anyone well?

In Antonio José Ponte's collection of essays, *El libro perdido de los Origenistas* (1992), he discusses, somewhat quixotically, the foreseeable “lost book” of this generation from a metatextual, cartographic perspective. The book serves my analysis to briefly examine what Ponte considered to be “missing” in order to see, retrospectively, how FGM fit into the revolutionary narrative. James Buckwalter-Arias writes about Ponte's essays in his book *Cuba and the New Origenismo* (2010):

The figure of the lost book, however, appears at least initially to elude this prose cartography. The Lezama and Diego narratives Ponte discusses, in fact, are not about defining a terrain or getting one's bearings but about losing a cultural

²⁰ See Alain Badiou's book *Being and Event* (1988).

heritage or an irreplaceable account of cultural origins. The map and the book, then, might be thought of as contending epistemes. The first denotes certainty and precision while the second denotes absolute loss and disorientation. (166)

If Ponte's essays are in search of a bygone cultural heritage or mythical story of origin using literal and narrative mapping as a source of epistemology, then I argue that FGM writes these Cuban epistemes by way of a religious mapping. By serving the *Orígenes* project a healthy dose of introspection, both artistically religious and phenomenological, she offers what I think Ponte could see as this first glimpse of a sound cartography. FGM provides a jumping-off point for the reader-poet. Buckwalter-Arias goes on to explain:

Whereas José Eugenio Cemí and the other cartographers very confidently 'vuelven exacto...un bosque encantado,' the characters in the Eliseo Diego and Lezama Lima narratives are at a loss, unable to retrieve that mythical, metaphorical book that embodies a cultural essence, or literary *cubanía*. In Ponte's 1992 essay, the *libro perdido*—precisely because it is irretrievable—does not hold out the promise of reconstituted wholeness. (166)

Ponte seems to be searching for this wholeness, however, in re-taking the literary characters of Lezama and Diego. It is, as Buckwalter-Arias suggests, "irretrievable"; nevertheless, Ponte must have felt something was askew. I believe, then, that the earliest publications of *Orígenes* poetry, specifically the formative work of FGM, to be evidence of these epistemes. If her poetry communicates the experience of the poet (according to FGM), to help them approach the divine unity of

all things, then why can't FGM's *miradas perdidas* embody this cultural *cubanía*?

FGM'S ROLE IN THE REVOLUTION

Before I discuss the role of FGM in pre-revolutionary writing, specifically as an *origenista* as well as a foundational *female*, I will examine three discussions: 1) The connection of FGM's poetic quotidianness to the daily mantra of (pre)-Revolutionary rhetoric (and the degree to which regime fidelity is distinct from her own religiosity), 2) How the political climate of the 1940s and 1950s affected her writing, and importantly, 3) What her writing embodied in the poetry and essays after 1959 as Castro-ism took firm root.

Díaz quotes René Depestre writing for *Revolución* in 1960 that Castro's idea(l) had initiated, "...la batalla del libro y de la cultura" whose protagonist sought to:

eliminar las fronteras entre el sueño y la realidad, la poesía y la vida...el pueblo cubano—añadía Depestre está justamente comprometido en una alta aventura humana en la que el sueño más luminoso y más dulce está a punto de inundar todas las riberas de la vida diaria. En la imaginación popular la Revolución es comparable... a esa Dulcinea del Toboso que tanto vale como la más alta princesa de la tierra. (13-14)

Díaz's use of Dulcinea to describe the "ostensible" desired confluence of revolution and poetics, of regime and idealism sensationalizes, romanticizes, and even fictionalizes the relationship by using Don Quijote's misgivings as a point of comparison. Arguably, the objective of any revolution, including the French one, was

to fight for a greater ideal, especially when considering the formative role the Cuban example serves as a model for the rest of Latin America. If Díaz suggests that the honeymoon of the Revolution lasted (at least) through the special period and that “poesía y nacionalismo colaboran al punto de prácticamente confundirse,” I question the harm in such a relationship (*Límites* 321). The *familia de Orígenes* was deeply mired in this rhetoric, of Cuban writers fighting for their independent voice. If the *origenistas* are the third generation of Cuban writers post-Independence who become the first group to dialogue with European philosophy, then it is unsurprising that their cultural and theoretical approaches are joined with their artistic liberty. During the first half of the twentieth century, Cuba lives the Machado dictatorship in the early 1930s, US-involvement in the Batista coup in 1952 and afterward, and as Catherine Davies points out “a background of corruption, violence and anarchy...[t]hese were the years of increasing US involvement in Cuban internal affairs, [There were] mafia gangsters in the Hotel Nacional, roulette tables, prostitutes, gun-runners, consumerism and crass vulgarity, and—as far as the educated Cubans were concerned—profound despair” (91-92). She then poses a provocative question, which I argue challenges Díaz’s suppositions that the *origenista* corpus developed hand-in-hand with the Revolutionary doctrine, so that, even today, they cannot be divorced. Davies wonders, “Would there ever be [for the *origenistas*] social reform, national and economic independence, political liberty?” (92). I would add to this list “artistry, poetic expression and poetic liberty.”

In FGM’s brief consideration of Zambrano’s formation under Ortega y Gasset, and her differentiation as previously discussed in Chapter One regarding poetic versus vital reason, she comments on her mentor’s particular emphasis on quotidianness: “...aquella misma atención preferente por ‘las cosas’ que están a

nuestro alrededor y había dejado atrás el idealismo, y que con grandes signos de admiración--";Santificadas sean las cosas!--, proponía Ortega" (García Marruz, *María Zambrano* 43). The sanctity of Ortega y Gasset's things undoubtedly strays far from any religiously charged philosophical ideal. However, his suggestion unpacks a theoretical approach that he shares with FGM's work, which relates to a Gestaltan worldview. The famous Ortegian formula, "Yo soy yo y mi circunstancia," dovetails beautifully with FGM's confluence of the divine and the mundane, by seeing their threshold not just blurred, but erased, to reveal the sanctity of "things." It is during this tumultuous time that FGM writes, as the poet who imbued the *Orígenes* corpus with Catholicism, to find a method of Cuban artistic expression. Does it not surprise us that religion, a stalwart poetic muse, surfaces? And further, that FGM searches for this religiosity within that which she experiences, within the daily Ortegian "*circunstancia*"?

FGM AS A FEMININE, *ORIGENISTA* POET

At this point, I will now discuss some aspects of French second-wave feminism, particularly Cixous and Irigaray, in order to further my myticalist analysis of FGM's work by carrying out a feminist reading. It is of utmost importance to note that FGM was only one of two female poets identified as belonging to *Orígenes*, Cleve Solís (1926-1997, Cuba) being the other.²¹ If FGM is often cited as the poet with the characteristically Catholic(ist) infusions, then her femaleness and her role of "religious facilitator" and foundational member must be considered. As Catherine Davies points out, "one of main purposes of the [Cuban] Constitution of 1902 was to separate the church from the state...it is perhaps surprising, then, that the Catholic

21 See www.cubaliteraria.cu to see a list of writers included in *Orígenes*. This website is edited by Ivette Fuentes.

religion should have figured at all in the work of women writers prior to the Revolution" (*A Place* 90). How then, did FGM put herself, a woman, into the poetic text within a context that eschewed religion and, presumably, feminine participation? French feminist and philosopher Hélène Cixous argues in her article "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1975) that "[w]oman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement" (1942). Cixous's presentation of her work is self-described as non-feminist, that is, she tries to resist the enforcement of the Freudian phallogocentric structure as describing the difference of sex as either having or lacking the phallus. Thus, she urges women to write to both contest and to contradict this phallogocentrism and its logic. Female writing is an assertion of the female body and thus, can only be written by women. Taking into consideration my arguments for FGM's physical constitution of poetry, by expressing poetically what is quotidian and mundane, she uses this female body to inscribe this meaning.

Importantly, I do not argue that FGM was strenuously reaching for a feminist presentation, but rather, that her work significantly affected and influenced the *Orígenes* corpus. Furthermore, her role as a woman was never much recognized by her counterparts, even her husband. Hedeon makes this point well problematizing how FGM's work propelled the *Orígenes* project in the name of creating a "national literature", though one that ignored her gender:

En definitiva, el proyecto de nación que adelanta Vitier en Lo cubano en la poesía conlleva una homogenización que tiende a borrar las singularidades de las mujeres y, en definitiva, a descartarlas como sujeto social. Esto se advierte claramente cuando, al abordar la obra del notable poeta cubano del siglo

XIX, José María Heredia (1803-1839), señala que [e]n medio de la naturaleza y del mundo femenino de la familia criolla, que es también esencialmente naturaleza, irrumpe el torcedor varonil de la historia; en medio de la edénica delicia natural, [...] aparecen los problemas de la conciencia: el escrúpulo, el eticismo, la indignación. (74)

Hedeen suggests, then, that CV, in recalling Heredia, signals a delimited case of Cuban national literature that perhaps not only discourages but rejects any “female project.” A female voice or presence, not to mention female authorships would cause only problems of “the conscious”. Whether or not any discussion of FGM’s gender was purposeful, it is noteworthy that her role as a woman was never discussed, either by CV himself or other *Orígenes* authors. Hedeen, however, argues that in FGM’s earlier work, that is, *Las miradas perdidas* there is considerable more discussion of the contemplation of poetry rather than “acción poética” itself. Here, I believe she means that FGM’s early work did not consider politics or social issues as much as her post-revolutionary commentary might have, including the aforementioned essays at the beginning of this chapter. She posits that Arcos errs in defining FGM as a poet vis-a-vis CV, “[y] de ahí que no se sostenga la afirmación de Arcos sobre 'la íntima correspondencia del pensamiento poético tal y como aparece transfigurado en la poesía [de García Marruz], con muchas de las ideas cardinales de [“Lo cubano en la poesía”] de Vitier” (170). I suggest, on the other hand, that FGM does in fact make a political mark through the use of her femininity, specifically, her body, as I will now discuss.

Let us consider Cixous’s essentialist or “somatic” view of female writing: she argues for an “essence” of woman as “multiple” and “open to the other,” meaning

that she sees women as inherently bisexual. She opposes the Freudian binarism of women as *lack* and men as *presence* in terms of the phallus. Thus, she opposes this “traditional” feminism because women’s sexuality is multiple—women’s sexuality is not confined to just the penis as it is for men, and thus, there is a plurality of possible sexual meanings and behavior inferred. This inclusiveness opens up the interpretation for the act of writing as a bursting forth, as an intellectual eruption, that both includes and supersedes the body, and for FGM, permits transcendence. In order to further develop FGM’s “writing women,” I cite again Hedeem’s feminist study on FGM’s work as gender and nation-based.

Hedeem discusses FGM’s “counter-discourse” as a female, neo-colonial subject:

Su poesía se nos revela así como un contradiscurso, como un ejemplo de las maneras complejas en que retos a un discurso dominante o establecido (específicamente esos de un centro imperial) puede ser montados desde la periferia, siempre reconociendo la poderosa “capacidad absorbente” de los discursos imperiales y neoimperiales. (Ashcroft et al. 56) Claro está, se trata de un contradiscurso de doble filo, pues García Marruz escribe desde su condición de género y desde su condición de sujeto neocolonial, en la búsqueda consciente de la transformación de ambas subordinaciones sociales. (“La cubana en la poesía” 171)

FGM is often characterized as the female voice that embodies the *Orígenes* ideals, particularly by her husband during the pre-revolutionary period. I propose that her work moves beyond just reciting *Orígenes* ideals because often, her role as

the (female) leader of this movement is overlooked as purely intellectual, without taking into consideration her sex. Notably, FGM writes within a framework that permits her to be a scholar and literary leader, and her poetic discourse permits her a position that is uniquely hers. Hedeem and Catherine Davies both explore the idea of FGM as underappreciated due to a variety of factors: her somewhat introverted personality, her marriage to CV implying a certain “decorum,” and her poetry’s resistance to being categorized (though, here, both scholars reference FGM’s work post-revolution) (Davies, *A Place* 90).

FGM'S MATERNAL GENEALOGY

FGM’s feminism encapsulates Cixous’s ideas of “women writing for women” because she shows her eminent knowledge of the female discourse of life—she writes about her aunts, mother, fashion, and domesticity. Yet, she simultaneously proves her intellectual prowess in male arenas by also directing and dedicating poems to other writers such as Jiménez, Che Guevara, and Lezama. Her desire to transcend is first served and established by examining as much as possible in this earthly world as a woman. Her argument for the place of the woman as an intellectual contributes to her understanding of the cosmos. Cixous says of woman, “[f]or once she blazes *her* trail in the symbolic, she cannot fail to make of it the chaosmos of the personal...” (*Laugh* 39). Cixous speaks of “what touches you, the equivoice that affects you, fills your breast with an urge to come to language and launches your force; the rhythm that laughs you, the intimate recipient who makes all metaphors possible and desirable” (41).

Davies sees FGM writing in a maternal genealogy, citing Kristeva’s notions of the “maternal semiotic, the music and rhythms of poetic language affording a

momentary glimpse of the inexpressible pleasure of the pre-oedipal union" (*A Place* 97). What then, about the quotidianness of FGM's poetic creation from the specifically female perspective? Discussing Emmanuel Levinas, Luce Irigaray argues against this Idea/Father episteme; rather, she suggests that the mother need be rescued to resurrect female language and female subjectivity. Davies accurately points out that it is best not "to confine García Marruz's poetry to Catholic readings," and I posit that FGM instead attempts this symbolic recovering of the female in Catholicist poetry (*A Place* 95). Mysticism, to Irigaray, blurs the borders between body and soul, immanence and transcendence, so that the "sensible" is established. A sort of figurative Catholic Eucharistic transfiguration takes place: that which is immanent becomes divine and the body can transcend through poetry.

Further, Irigaray explores the notions of biological essentialism in that, as Hollywood points out, "nothing is simply 'given'; there is no such thing as an unchanging, a-historical ground: neither the body, nor sex, nor nature itself...the body itself...[is] a-historical artifact" ("From Lack to Fluidity" 189). FGM's poetry, then, is a "right" to this amorphous genealogy, rooting itself in the memory of the maternal where "She" may be recalled.

Never is this maternal genealogy so clear as during a poem titled "Teresa y Teresita" (204) where FGM journeys through the life and works of Teresa de Ávila (Spain, 1515-1582) y Thérèse de Lisieux, "Teresita" (France, 1873-1897), both known for her simplicity and horror of pretense.²² Teresa is famous for her strength of character and doctrinal bravery; FGM uses the terms *fortaleza*, *robustez* and *huesos desnudos*, decidedly traditional masculine traits, to describe the first Teresa.

²²This poem "Teresa y Teresita" is from FGM's later publication *Visitaciones* (1970) which, clearly, is post-Revolution. However, for the purposes of this female-centered argument, I found it useful to include it in this section.

Teresita is often described with heightened fragility, as Teresa's youngest daughter (*más pequeña hija*) who prefers *secretos* and naïveté—decidedly traditional feminine traits. As a result, this maternal lineage is established concretely, with the mother providing virile logic and the daughter, effeminate emotion, echoing Cixous's inherent bisexuality in women. FGM is particular to note, however, that both the saints exalt ordinary life (*ama su vida ordinaria*) and participate in daily life (*participación en lo común*), calling the elder Teresa the saint of all that is material. Importantly, FGM proposes that these two saintly nuns sought out this quotidianness, perceiving it as “*el más levantado misterio*”. She declares that these women contemplate the mystery of the mundane and, within it, discover “*el aire de tu vuelo*” that awakens love for God (208). By choosing two resolute mystics as poetic subjects, FGM makes the turn towards mysticality foregrounding their ordinary desires and quotidian execution. This amalgamation of characteristics of mother Teresa and daughter Teresita offers the final proposition that we learn from them both because “*se complete con la lira y toda enemistad de lo / alto y lo bajo concierte el acorde del órgano*” (210).

I will examine a poem also analyzed by Davies to suggest an alternate view of the role of this feminine heredity. Here FGM does not just retrieve the maternal, where the home and the mother are the poetic voice's “previous experiences”, but rather, she inscribes into her poetry a female quality that marks it as sexually different (Davies 109). It is precisely this sexual difference, I'd like to suggest here, that renders mysticality possible for FGM. And while Irigaray would suggest that bodily sexual difference permits the recognition of the mystical other and union with it, I assert that FGM's sexual difference does not *only* permit mysticism necessarily. The body is inscribed in the poetic, cultural, literary, and social language

that FGM uses from where she explores what femaleness means in the *Orígenes* context. Davies posits that FGM's poetic work is "firmly grounded in a woman's experience of ordinary, domestic routine, interspersed with moments of profound insight" (95). I want to push this further to say that it is precisely the daily experiences (either traditionally "female" or "male") that allow for these "moments of insight". They are not mutually exclusive, nor does the former exist independent philosophically from the latter. Here is FGM's sonnet titled "Y sin embargo sé que son tinieblas":

Y sin embargo sé que son tinieblas
las luces del hogar a que me aferro
me agarro a una mampara, a un hondo hierro
y sin embargo sé que son tinieblas.

Porque he visto una playa que no olvido,
la mano de mi madre, el interior de un coche,
comprendo los sentidos de la noche
porque he visto una playa que no olvido.

Cuando de pronto el mundo da ese acento distinto,
cobra una intimidad exterior que sorprende,
se oculta sin callar, sin hablar se revela,

comprendo que es el corazón extinto
de esos días manchados de temblor venidero
la razón de mi paso por la tierra (*Miradas* 18).

Davies proposes that the poetic voice's "memory" is rooted in the home and in the world of the senses, specifically in "the mother's hand disappearing into the car" further arguing that "the vision of infinity is not the presence of God" but rather the presence of the mother (*A Place* 109). Conversely, I do not consider the presence of the mother and God, again, as mutually exclusive. The poetic voice can distinctly understand "los sentidos de la noche," a historically mystical time-space, because of the mother, the car, and the beach. It is through these comprehensions that the presence of the Other is accessed. These daily phenomena permit connection with transcendence, and FGM uses this mystical rhetoric to achieve it.

Just as Irigaray argues for the disruption of borders of immanence and transcendence in mystical thought, FGM disrupts the threshold: of light and darkness, of sound and silence, of past and future. The *tinieblas* are *luz*; revelation is occultation (*se oculta sin callar, sin hablar se revela*); and the long-gone is the future (*el corazón extinto...de temblor venidero*). By confounding the material differences she encounters, FGM uses mysticity to write the female conception of the cosmos. And if normative speech is where women fail to "speak" as Cixous contends, the moment where woman begins to write is crucial. FGM's crucial moment, then, is where the joining of the immanent and the transcendent takes a verb, such as "occurs" or "materializes." It is a struggle against the physical body itself and in which women fight eternally to open their mouths to speak. Because the female body does not function within this expression, it therefore is not an effective type of communication, so writing is, thus, a truer form of speech. It is more organically connected to the sexual body. Presence for female subjects, Cixous posits, can derive from knowledge and from the woman's cosmic awareness, and, for FGM, from woman's cosmic awareness of the immanent, not confined to one main object, like

the penis, as would be the case for men.

THE FEMALE BODY AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

Cixous sees a potential to imagine woman otherwise, beyond the phallocentrism in which she is inscribed. Woman can exist and stretch beyond being a commodified (and commodifying) essence and can draw her own strength of the female through writing. FGM offers a poem titled “El bello niño” where she focuses on the epistemic privilege entitled to children (here, a male child) over adults:

Tú sólo, bello niño, puedes entrar a un parque.

Yo entro a ciertos verdes, ciertas hojas o aves.

Tú sólo, bello niño, puedes llevar la ropa

ausente del difunto, distraída y remota...

Only children have the ability to enter the “‘park’ of knowledge and culture” and to take on the appearance of myriad images, as Davies argues, whereas the adult is given mere entry to undisclosed/unidentified “verdes...hojas o aves” (Davies, *Place* 111; García Marruz, *De qué* 115). Here, FGM's poem dovetails with Cixous's argument that the patriarchy has led women against themselves: “They have made for women an antinarcissism? A narcissism which loves itself only to be loved for what women haven't got! They have constructed the infamous logic of antilove” (*Laugh* 54-55). Cixous calls for a rejection of this division, for a liberation of the “New Woman from the Old” through writing. FGM also calls for a rejection of a division between male and female that privileges the former. Certainly, FGM seems to be lauding the magic and mystery so enjoyed during youth that is not only lost

but adulterated with maturity. But FGM criticizes the male child for his innocence:

...Yo llevo la ropa maliciosa

del que de muerte sabe de amarga inocencia.

Tú no sabes que tienes toda posible ciencia.

Mas ay, cuando lo sepas, el parque se habrá ido,
conocerás la extraña lucidez del dormido,

y por qué el sol que alumbra tus álamos de oro
los dora hoy con palabras y días melancólicos. (115)

It seems unlikely that a child would be reprimanded for his/her naïveté; after all, this is the hallmark of youth and what the poetic voice yearns for nostalgically in the initial verses. Thus, I argue that it is this boy-centered logic that stands as an obstacle. The female, the poetic voice, can imagine the Cixous “otherwise”: death and bitter innocence. It is only inside this park that the boy has access to “the magic of the exterior”; yet the poetic voice knows already what he is losing, because when the park disappears, he will finally come to know what she already does: “toda posible ciencia...[y] la extraña lucidez del dormido.”

Cixous adds, “[t]o write. An act which will not only ‘realize’ the decensored relation of woman to her sexuality, to her womanly being, giving her access to her native strength, it will give her back her goods, her pleasures, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal...” (51). How does FGM figure her own body, or more broadly, a female body, into her own words? For Cixous, as discussed earlier, that which is inspired bursts forth in the body in a

manifestation of language and metaphor:

Text: my body—shot through with streams of song...the...mother... fills your breast with an urge to come to language and launches your force: the rhythm that laugh you; the intimate recipient who makes all metaphors possible and desirable; body (body? bodies?), no more describable than god, the soul or the Other; that part of you that leaves a space between yourself and urges you to inscribe in language your woman's style. (62)

FGM chooses mysticality to express the Cixous "mother," as this vehicle by which to express her "woman style." For FGM, the body that is no more desirable (or describable) than God, is exactly what beseeches her to inscribe in language her writing. Her body, thus, moves beyond itself and the words become something more than what is immanent.

Here, I take a moment to turn to FGM's poetic expression as an *Orígenes* poet, particularly with regard to the subject matter of the mundane. For FGM the ethos of learning is literally universal. It can be completed in any shape or forms. When Cixous remarks of womanist writing: "To write and thus to forge for herself the antilogos weapon. To become at will the taker and the initiator, for her own right, in every symbolic system, in every political process," she speaks exactly of a female writer like FGM (*Laugh* 73). Her antilogos weapon is her femininity which she uses to seize a new insurgence of writing and of learning.

FGM'S DEDICATION TO SOR JUANA

Here, I will briefly introduce a poem of FGM's dedicated to Sor Juana and, in

conjunction, make some final remarks on the work of both poets. Beyond being female authors, both FGM and Sor Juana write about the mundane; they also write specifically about and, I argue, for women as well. In her famous *Respuesta a Sor Filotea* (1691), Sor Juana demonstrates shrewdly how within the stereotypical place of the woman, the kitchen, is born an unmatched narrative. She quotes, “[b]ien dijo Lupercio Leonardo, que bien se puede filosofar y aderezar la cena. Y yo puedo decir viendo estas cosillas: Si Aristóteles hubiera guisado, mucho más hubiera escrito” (*De la Cruz* 93). Sor Juana forges her own antilogos weapon—that which is decidedly feminine (cooking)—and turns it into a place of metaphysical erudition. Learning about scientific processes, the “*filosofías de cocina*” serve the greater understanding of God and what (S/H)e places before us on this earth. Cixous agrees that “[w]omen’s imaginary is inexhaustible, like music, painting, writing: their stream of phantasms is incredible” (*Laugh* 87). Sor Juana’s declaration that “there is no reason *not* to study what God has created” is truly a vindication of women everywhere.

In his analysis of FGM’s poem “A Sor Juana, en su celda y privada de lecturas, mirando jugar a unas niñas el trompo,” Roberto Méndez Martínez comments on the fluidity and empowerment of female expression occurring between Sor Juana and FGM: “...se encarga de reflexionar sobre la condición femenina y sus vínculos con el intelecto, estorbada por un mundo que la relega al hogar o a la sombra y desde debe crecer en sabiduría a partir de la observación de pequeños detalles, ya que se le priva de los grandes espacios de estudio y expresión (uneac.org):

Mira el trompo. Sus círculos desgana
olvidado de sí y ensimismado.
Así los astros en Dios, así olvidados
del tacto de Su mano, cada vez más lejana.

La breve pompa de la rosa vana
o el viento, en alusiones delicado,
le muestra en lo que torna lo esperado:
si de nieve, la verde edad lozana.
Qué extraño este vivir compadeciendo
vida que es muerte, muerte que es la vida.
En la mudanza oye cómo Su aliento crece.
Lo sabe antes del cuerpo y su medida,
no en lo que permanece siempre huyendo,
sino en lo que, huyendo, permanece. (*De qué*_187)

According to the last two verses, belief in God for Sor Juana is found not in the body, nor in its physical expression, but in what remains in its “escaping.” God might be constantly escaping us in his *mudanza*, but what remains is the contingency of life. Furthermore, FGM comments on Sor Juana's classic “living=dying,” but this recollection occurs in the second half and close of the poem. The first half, conversely, is dedicated to Sor Juana's excellent capacity to extract intellectual gain from her daily surroundings: a toy (*trompo*). In contrast to the *bello niño*, here we know Sor Juana is observing a group of young girls. This simple spinning top escalates her vision upward, towards the stars. Watching the top spin, Sor Juana sees the stars of God, far from His/Her touch. But what does still remain is the top itself, the girls, Sor Juana's cell, and her lack of books. It is from daily life's surroundings that both FGM and Sor Juana find a mystical meaning to the *bello niño's* “exterior.”

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter aimed to examine the presence of mysticism in the early poetic work of FGM and the degree to which it was uniquely feminine, profanely mystical, and Cuban. Through the analysis of a selection of poems that best exemplified these characteristics, I hope to have shed light on FGM's early poetry in a novel way. In the following chapter, I will examine the work of FGM's husband, CV, from the perspective of mysticism, particularly in reference to CV's religious conversion to Catholicism and how it shaped his politically-focused poetry in relation to the pre-revolutionary era. In order to more fully flesh out the notion of conversion and its relation to poetics, I will also perform a parallel analysis of the work of Jewish Argentine poet Jacobo Fijman and how he works Catholicism (a faith in which he was baptized at age 32) into his poetry. Chapter Three is additionally unique in that I make a comparative analysis between Cuba and Argentina during political periods marked by social unrest and imminent socialist-influenced governments vis-à-vis authors—in these case studies, both male—who search out a national religious identity.

Chapter Three: The Conversions of Cintio Vitier and Jacobo Fijman: Christian and Jewish Re-workings of Mysticality

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I will argue how both Cintio Vitier's and Jacobo Fijman's practice of religion offers a mysticist poetic product. I posit that there is a repurposing of the function of poetry from CV's early work, heavily influenced by Juan Ramón Jiménez (*Poemas* 1938), compared to that of his later works *Palabras del hijo pródigo* (1952-1953) and *Vísperas* (1953), where his conversion to Catholicism takes a more central stage in the poetry's content. There is an evident ontological search present that strays from preciousness, metaphorical overworking, or overly religious references. Can this mean that his poems are still "Catholic"? In these later books of poems, there is something unquestionably deeper and more transcendent. If, for Vitier the literary word is merely an "umbral," then what function does the poem serve? How does Vitier combat the limits of words, or better, perhaps it is this conflict that fuels him? Jacobo Fijman, a Moldovan-born, Argentine-raised Jewish convert to Catholicism, also experiences a similar struggle. In his three books of poetry, *Molino Rojo* (1926), *Hecho de estampas* (1930) and *Estrella de la mañana* (1931), this struggle is continuously present. Here, it lies between the two "Fijmans," arguably the Jewish and the Catholic, but also the "sane" and the "ill" resulting from mental illness and poor healthcare. As a poet who is constantly cognizant of the divisive line between life and death, death becomes a quotidian state of consciousness. Ruth Fernández explains that even the "Catholic Fijman" is "uno que sobrelleva aún su porcentaje exclamativo y tremendo de místico judío" (Fernández 24). My primary purpose in this chapter is to investigate

in what ways each author's religious identification affects his poetry in light of otherness, identity as poet-self, and the larger implications of national discourse on this identity.

Both poets are self-identified practitioners of Catholicism and both poets's work carries, I argue, mystical overtones. The purpose of this religious identity, I believe, is to serve as the vehicle for their social arguments, in both cases, secular movements. In the case of Fijman, it is to establish creative self-expression, as a formidable writer, in the face of mental health struggles; thus his psychosis will play a role in my analysis. In the case of CV, his poetic voice promulgates the revolutionary doctrine linked to national identity in 1950s Havana. The basis for comparing their work is twofold: 1) They are both converts. I problematize the effect this conversion has had on their poetic output and to what degree it manifests mystically, and 2) They both engage in poetic treatments of the intimate preoccupation of the role of the poet.

CV displays the foremost characteristics of mysticism but lacks the 'union' aspect, differing greatly from his wife, FGM and her employment of poiesis. He goes through two revelations/conversions. The first is the decision to use poetry to express poetry/art for its own sake, evident in *Luz ya sueño* (strong Juan Ramon Jimenez influences, short poems, simple titles, references to nature and the seasons, etc.). And the second conversion is to use his poetry for political ends. He is criticized for claiming that poetry is the only national narrative, though my analysis will be directed more at how his work dovetailed with political goings-on rather than make an ethical determination about its influence.

Thus, for both Fijman and CV poetry serves as a testimony to not just their faith but to their methodology of arriving to said faith. Their method, then, of

arriving to faithfulness is via poetry by confirming Godliness in their daily lives. It helps them overcome a certain non-conformity each experiences during his life, being in many ways an outcast (for Fijman, his self-described *estados místicos* caused others to label him psychotic, and for CV, his desire to establish and own a Cuban literary lineage was a result of an abandonment by his own father). Thus, these sentiments of alienation produce a merging of faith and poetry. Fijman and CV both look for a logos, and the method of arriving to such a logos is via poetry. Therefore, I argue that their logos is faith. Beyond just this conversion to and practice of faith, I contend that both CV's and Fijman's work is a pathologization of an ontological, spiritual, and/or social crisis each man experiences. For Fijman, it is due to his strangeness and social discord and others's (mis)understanding of his creative process due to his psychosis. For CV it is related to his bastardness. The nature of CV's "extrañeza" is multifarious: his mother was sent to the U.S. to give birth because his father did not officially recognize him. He is therefore "alien" by birth and by familial affiliation. Thus, CV's approach to teasing out a national identity is intimately tied to his own search for self. Because he is ontologically "disadvantaged," he attempts a nation-wide appropriation, to make his work ontologically- and nationally-meaningful. Cuba experienced a long period of illegitimacy, sired by U.S. intervention and occupation. CV, himself, was fathered by a Cuban, Medardo Vitier, but in a way marked by the U.S. and thus reared somewhere "in between." In both cases, however, this faith expressed via poetry confirms Zambrano's poiesis, in that the poetic writing is simultaneously symptomatic of their condition and their own treatment, self-prescribed. Their poetry both pathologizes their problems and cures the pathology. Both writers' poetic journeys exemplify the overcoming alienation, an alienation that is endemic

to their “*ser*” but also to their homelands as during both men’s lives, dictatorship in the form of Batistato and Peronism ensued.

VITIER’S CUBA

First, I will offer a brief biography of CV and his ties to his wife, FGM, and her work during mid-century in Cuba, particularly surrounding the time of his conversion to Catholicism in 1952 and the publications thereafter. Changes throughout his life, I believe, propel his quest of faith; his poetry comes to be a testimony to those moments of transformation and how those different conversions warrant a new type of poetic expression. Two of his drastic, stylistic, and thematic discourses on poetics, *Palabras del hijo pródigo* (1952-1953) and *Vísperas* (1953), are, according to Sainz, a “diálogo que alcanza una densidad conceptual profundamente auténtica, de búsqueda e indagación ontológica, ajena a cualquier tendencia preciocista o de regodeo formal” (8). There is something unquestionably deeper and more transcendent, an unexpected intellectual yearning for a landscape and a history that seemed impenetrable and enigmatic to the poet. Poetry, for CV, is not a playful thing, not a game. It is a rigorous methodology of knowledge and penetration in the daily and immediate “*ser*.”

In order to better understand the selections of CV’s poetry in this chapter, I will briefly offer information regarding the Cuban revolution as it pertains to CV’s work. Fulgencio Batista serves as elected president of Cuba for the first time between 1940 and 1944. Notably, in the same year as Batista’s office departure (1944), the *Orígenes* journal is formed, lasting until 1956. Of course Batista again serves as president for the second time, in a coup d’état organized in 1952, this time supported by the U.S. government (naturally, not Communist). As previously

mentioned CV converts in 1952 and *Palabras* and *Vísperas* are published in 1952 and 1953, accordingly. CV was witness to the drastic changes in leadership from presidents to foreign-instigated takeovers. It seems unsurprising that CV publishes prolifically during this era, particularly two books of poetry with politically suggestive, foretelling titles (in translation): *Words of the Prodigal Son* and *Vespers*.

During the early-1950s Fidel Castro is unsuccessful in overthrowing Batista in the Cuban court system, so he resorts to building an armed revolution. Castro resolves to launch an armed revolution. To this end, he and his brother Raúl found a paramilitary organization known as “El movimiento” stockpiling weapons and recruiting around 1,200 followers from Havana's disgruntled working class by the end of 1952 (Bourne, *Fidel* 68-69). In 1953 during attacks in Bayamo and at the Moncada Barracks in Santiago, many of Fidel's soldiers are killed or executed by the Batista regime and the brothers Castro are both imprisoned. After being freed from prison in 1955 due overwhelming political pressure, Fidel and Raúl flee to Mexico to organize, meet Ernesto “Che” Guevara, and eventually name themselves the Movimiento de 26 de Julio (M-26-7) in honor of the barracks battles. Perhaps the most notable of the M-26-7's attacks occur in the Sierra Maestra mountains where about twenty of Fidel's over eighty men survived retaliation by government troops. They retreat into the mountains, gaining rural supporters over the years, eventually successfully taking over Santiago on New Year's Eve 1958 and Santa Clara on New Year's Day 1959, forcing Batista to flee Cuba to the Dominican Republic.

Near the end of Batista's initial presidential office in 1944, CV presents his ideas about the genesis of the poetic work in a conference talk given at the age of twenty-two:

Sólo el ceñido entero puede ser amado, y la poesía es una

perenne batalla que controla la tentación e infinitud de los rumores, lucha ceñida y rumorosa que nos pide la devoción por ella misma, no por sus cándidos trofeos. Pero es también un método, el principal en mí de contacto desnudo con el ser de las cosas y la existencia humana, de angustiada religazón al origen milagroso del idioma y el espíritu, en cuyas relaciones actúan como príncipes sombríos la historia y el agitado peso de la conciencia. ("Experiencia de la poesía", conferencia leída en 1944 Antología Saíenz 10)

This notion of "naked recovered contact with the essence of things" is certainly identifiable as one of the aesthetic markers of the Orígenes group. One of the Orígenes's most prominent members and representatives, CV founded the Centro de Estudios Martianos (Center for Martí Studies) and the Martí Room at the Biblioteca Nacional (National Library) in Havana. Having worked as a French translator as well as a university professor at Universidad Central de las Villas, CV was widely known in Cuba as a poet, essayist, novelist, and scholar. Born in Cayo Hueso, Florida, in 1921, he spent his life in Cuba and published his first book of poems at the age of seventeen (Fuentes, www.cubaliteraria.cu). Ivette Fuentes, long-time scholar of FGM and CV, describes CV's work in that, "...se acentúa en su obra el tema de la 'cubanidad' y eleva a categoría poética el rango de la cotidianidad, que es también el tema del tiempo en su dimensión existencial," investigating, as I have discussed with FGM and will do so with CV, the access to the interior self by way of quotidian exteriority.

In his earlier essayistic work, CV highlights the poet's desire to transform the world with words "para que el reino de la justicia se cumpla en la tierra, misión

máxima del hombre" ("Lecciones cubanas" 52). Here, notes of poetry's prowess, the role of politics, and of the poet himself are given front-seat importance. In his series of essays—"Mnemósyne," "La palabra poética," "Sobre el lenguaje figurado," y "La zarza ardiendo"—published under the title *Poética* (1968) CV searches for a method by which his poetry dialogues with his own cosmovision. He wonders about the mystical qualities of poetry, stating that they are "inseparable[s] de la poesía; en el espíritu, que unifica su música, no puede vencer ese germen de la diferencia, de lo individual o irreversible. Todo pensamiento poético tiene que partir de la unidad en lo heterogéneo, de la síntesis que no anula sino exalta y paradójicamente ilumina la fruición de lo múltiple" (15). CV emphasizes poetic thought that praises *lo múltiple*, indicating a focus on the multifarious nature of the poet and his works.

In his later essays, post-revolution, there is a decisive change in tone, as he considers the effects of political change. Contrary to his prior work, which promotes "art for art's sake," he considers the participatory role of the individual citizen as paramount, rather than view the abstraction of poetry as uniquely important. For example, in his essay, "El Violín" (1968) CV explains why he asks these sorts of questions, revealing the political-ideological function of his aesthetic thought regarding "liberty." The Castro revolution was, for CV, a source of motivation and nutrition for his later poetry and prose that reflected the changes endured at home: his house, his family, his Cuba (Arcos 159). CV details these thoughts in "El Violín":

Las bodas, el hogar, el hijo, empezaron a curarme de la extrañeza. Si el país no tenía sentido, mi casa lo tenía. Desde su centro empezaba a desvanecerse aquel invasor Objeto Onírico que era al asunto de "Un entierro"[...] aquel devorador objeto onírico, surrealismo sin inconsciencia, copulación del deseo y

la memoria que no podía reconstruir ni engendrar la realidad...
(196).

Philosophical and lofty notions of desire and memory were unable to approximate reality, says CV. The quotidian aspects of his life in Cuba (weddings, children, life at home) are what the revolution reconstituted, giving it purpose, both politically and poetically. Hence, in CV's arguably seminal work on Cubanness, *Lo cubano en la poesía* (1958) he discusses the search for liberty, referring to the need to save Cuba's dignity. In this work he reveals that, as Arcos posits, "...[un] análisis es la libertad a través del proceso de la poesía cubana como expresión de la fidelidad del poeta con su historia" (115).²³ That is, freedom is derived from (Cuban) poetry, which, in turn, is an expression of the poet's observation of history. Cuban poetry, for CV, is a spiritual journey for authenticity, one that contributes to this freedom, to a resuscitated worth (Vitier, *Lo cubano* 13). However, in a post-revolution edition of this essay (1972), CV makes the following remarks, forcibly highlighting a lack that his poetry (or broadly, Cuba's national poetry) suffered:

Eliminada la acción (por desconfianza o por
desconocimiento de sus verdaderas posibilidades)
quedaban desconectadas las historia y la poesía. La primera
representa el sinsentido y la segunda, desde luego, el
sentido, pero en un sentido solo platónico o proféticamente
verificable. (Foreword, *Lo cubano* 10)

²³While *Lo cubano en la poesía* was published (immediately) before the revolution, I cite it in this section to highlight an evident apprehension witnessed by Vitier, that something about his prior poetic work was seemingly lacking. His anxiety expresses that, up until this point, some sort of action was necessary outside the purely aesthetic limits that the Orígenes poetry presented. The manifestation of his poetry had been missing some component part.

CV's years of writing and observation post-revolution reveal that poetry, despite its nationally-charged assignment, was, for CV, disconnected from history. He still insists that history is "senseless" and poetry "meaningful" without action. Perhaps this "action" he references was the revolution itself, but regardless, this striking observation by CV suggests a change in his cosmovision.²⁴ Sans action, poetry took on a more prophetic meaning, while post-action, it acquired a historical significance.

EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY ARGENTINA

I will now turn to detailing some historical and biographical information regarding my second author-in-question in this chapter, Jacobo Fijman. During the time Fijman lives in his adopted Argentina, the country experiences years of relative stability, after which much political movement is afoot, including coups d'état and vacillation between leftist and rightist politics. Because Fijman publishes his three books of poetry between 1926 and 1931, I focus on the political events of this era. Hipólito Yrigoyen (1852-1933) is twice elected to the office of President—from 1916-1922 and again from 1928-1930—as the leader of the Unión Cívica Radical (Radical Civic Union). Yrigoyen is championed as the voice of the poor and working class whose opponents were identified as anti-personalistas. He encourages programs that develop a universal education system, improved factory conditions, regulated working hours, and perhaps most notably, universal male suffrage, enacted during the former president's tenure. Solid relationships with the United States government and President Herbert Hoover are established at this time,

²⁴Scholars such as Duanel Díaz and Zoe Valdés suggest that in his post-revolutionary work, Vitier is still subscribing to a *castrofascismo* that he does not (or perhaps cannot) overcome. It is not my intention to argue this point; rather, my interest is to analyze the poetry in relation to its political context and mystical rhetoric, not to morally override meaning.

although Yrigoyen maintains neutrality during WWI. Economically speaking, Argentina experiences widespread growth, owing to its oil and grain production, situating the country among one of the wealthiest in the world. Argentina's fortunate economic growth was largely due to its ties to the European and U.S. markets. Ousted by a military coup d'état by far-right general José Félix Uriburu in 1930 after his second presidency, Yrigoyen dies a few years afterward. Known as the Infamous Decade for its electoral fraud and political scandals during the time of the Great Depression, the 1930s expresses a time in Argentina (and more broadly the West) when economic and social struggle are the most prominent features. Argentina, like Europe and U.S., experienced the Great Depression (Lewis, *The Crisis of Argentina Capitalism* 1990).

The relative political successes, economic upturns, and social improvements are prevalent in Argentina at the time a young Fijman (in his 20s) is publishing his books. Despite this time of perceived stability and growth, Fijman finds himself as an outsider, both nationally, religiously and psychologically. He suffers from mental illness, which causes legal action to be taken against him, resulting in internment in mental hospitals. As will be discussed shortly, Fijman identifies himself as a mystic, as having had mystical experiences, and recognizes that others see this as problematic. When asked about his mental state by friend and fellow writer, Vicente Zito Lema, the conversation follows as such:

Zito Lema: ¿Porqué está internado en este sitio?

Fijman: Según los médicos debido a que estoy enfermo. Trastornos mentales. Yo creo sin embargo que la mayoría de la gente padece de trastornos mentales, incluso los propios médicos. ¿O acaso la mayoría de los que están en los almacenes

y en las tiendas es gente de razón? ¡Ninguna! Y los médicos por ejemplo, el que más o el que menos padece de psicosis. ¿Y es que alguien sabe lo que es el alma, lo que es el intelecto? (Zito Lema, *Pensamiento* 78).

Fijman recognizes that others see him as ill and that the State holds him in the hospital for lack of a better option. Fijman, however, believes that this altered state he experiences is intimately tied to his soul and his intellect, arguing, in the last line, “¿Y es que alguien sabe lo que es el alma, lo que es el intelecto?” (56).

It is this suffering and connection to and awareness of the physical degradation of his mind and body that I argue catalyzes his poetry. In the view of Santiago Sylvester, Fijman was born, lived, and died as an outcast, a person marred by constant expulsion, from countries, cities, libraries, social groups, and literary canons (“El reloj biológico” 17). Born in Urif, Bessarabia, in what was Russian-controlled territory in 1898 (now Moldova), Fijman, a Jew, is expelled at the age of 6 and, with his family, moves to Argentina. Adept at drawing and music, he is trained in classical studies and works for a short while as a French teacher at a girls' school.²⁵ Abandoning his family in 1917, he is jailed in 1921, after which he undergoes his first internment in the mental hospital, Hospicio de las Mercedes, where he is given electroshock therapy. Able to find journalistic work after his release at newspapers, *Mundo Argentino* and *Vida Nuestra*, Fijman experiences what might be considered his first break: he meets Argentine writer, Leopoldo Marechal, who invites him to be a part of the literary magazine and group Martín Fierro. The

²⁵ Sources vary regarding the age when Fijman arrived to Argentina, some say in 1902 at age 4 and others in 1904 at age 6. Fijman himself is inconsistent in this matter. I am citing Alfredo Arias's complete work *Obras (1923-69 1: Poemas* (2005) where Arias indicates the year was 1904 as Arias offers the most comprehensive work to date about Fijman's published and unpublished works.

character Samuel Tesler in Marechal's novel *Adán Buenosayres* (1948) is based on Fijman.

Between 1922 and 1925 Fijman resides in Uruguay, Paraguay, and Brazil, and after returning to Argentina begins friendships with literary critics, writers and artists, among them Oliverio Girondo and Marechal. He was often expelled from churches due to his raucous worship and was once thrown out of a Belgian monastery after insisting to be admitted when he visited in 1927 and 1928. In 1930 Fijman is baptized in the Catholic faith after his first trip to Paris where he meets Bohemian, surrealist artists/writers Antonin Artaud and André Breton, though the extent to which he spends time with them is unknown (Arias 2). In the early 1930s literary journals *Número* and *La Nación* publish some of his work, including some poems from his book, *Estrella de la mañana* (1931). *Número* was a Catholic venue for poets, which imaginably influenced his conversion to Christianity. Many influential writers in Buenos Aires were either converting to or (re)affirming their faith in Catholicism (e.g. Ignacio B. Anzoátegui and Osvaldo H. Dondo), and given Fijman's association with them, he was likely influenced by their faith-driven decisions (Arias 2). Critic María Amelia Arancet Ruda affirms the presence of a "Catholic renaissance" where a group, including Fijman, called themselves "los Cursos de Cultura Católica," eventually founding *Número* as well as *Criterio* among others. *Número's* founder, Julio Fingerit, was also a Jewish to Catholic convert like Fijman (Arancet Ruda, "Hecho de Estampas, de Jacobo Fijman: Poetización de un proceso" 31). As this Catholic circle of writers was on the ascent The Sociedad Argentina de Escritores (SADE) took an interest in Fijman, allowing him a stipend while he was living at Hospital de las Mercedes, later to be referred to simply as "Dr. Borda" (Arias 3). Despite his close connections with Catholic writers, he still

affirmed his own brand of Catholicism, as identified by Naomi Lindstrom. After his return to Argentina, he becomes fascinated by medieval paintings and iconography, especially of the Virgin Mary, and befriends popular Argentine painter, Benito Quinquela Martín, with whom he shares visits with evangelical Benedictine monks. Ultimately, as a result, he never fit in well with the Catholics, likely because, as he concludes, “[p]orque lo de judío no se pierde” (*Pensamiento* 78). It is likely he did not have access to a Jewish education while growing up in Buenos Aires, though he clearly identifies the cultural, ethnic, and religious identity of Judaism inscribed in him. It does appear that he was not in much contact with his family during his adult life, and as much of Jewish identity is tied to the family, this distancing further pushes him to an in-between state of religious individuality.

Beginning in 1929 and through the early 1930s Fijman publishes well in *La Nación* and *Número*. When he is unable to find work, however, he resorts to playing music in the streets to make ends meet. In 1942 he is expelled from the National Library in Buenos Aires by library director and widely-known anti-Semite Gustavo Martínez Zuviría, known by his pseudonym Hugo Wast, for disorderly conduct. Fijman is taken again, to Dr. Borda where he lives the rest of his life—with a stay at Open Door and some brief excursions to meet with friends—until 1970 when he dies. Two years before his death, poet-playwright-psychoanalyst-lawyer Vicente Zito Lema seeks out a friendship with Fijman and acquires the ability to publish some of his works as well as *El pensamiento de Jacobo Fijman o el viaje hacia la otra realidad* (1970) (which as already been referenced), in which Zito Lema includes a sort of Q&A with the poet. Zito Lema came to be an important confidant, intellectual colleague, and legal caretaker of Fijman, who often took the poet to his private house on the weekends. As a lawyer, Zito Lema specialized in human rights issues,

specifically those of persons affected by psychological ailments. It is due to Zito Lema's close friendship and artistic curiosities that we know much about Fijman and his life. In just the year before Fijman's death in 1969, Zito Lema publishes the first edition of *Talismán*, a journal dedicated to "Jacobo Fijman: poeta en el hospicio," which would lead to decades's more inquiry and writing about the poet and his works (Arias 4).

Fijman makes problematic statements throughout his life in proclaiming to be both Jesus and God (and a saint and a priest), to be both Jewish and Catholic and consequently, he writes poetry that is not part of the Argentine canon. Sylvester proposes that, because Fijman's poetry defies categorization, it cannot be included in the canon; it simply does not respond to a contemporary theory, thereby rendering it difficult to understand. His poetry fails to correspond to something external to it. Sylvester explains in the preface of Fijman's posthumous *Poesía completa* (2005):

...un poeta no tiene mucha chance de incorporarse al canon si su poesía no sirve para elaborar una teoría; que la poesía sea apta para ser leída...qué puede decir una poesía que tiende a sacralizar lo que toca? ¿una poesía lírica en plena desconfianza del lirismo? ¿una poesía que habla del dolor metafísico, invoca a Dios, y, para mayor desorientación, elige palabras desacreditadas por su intención de perdurar una belleza antigua: la que nos viene desde Homero? (11-12).

Sylvester wonders what the purpose a poem has if it makes sacred (sacrilizar) everything that it touches, if it uses language dissuaded by the academe. I conclude that Fijman utilizes his religion, specifically his mystical experiences and

his very own awareness of his mental illness, to showcase his agency as a poet and as a productive member of his environment. His msyticalist tendencies help establish him as a noteworthy poet, one capable of lyricism, provocative verse, humor, and belief.

Fijman explains to Zito Lema in an interview conducted in Dr. Borda (published as *Viaje hacia la otra realidad*), “[t]uve experiencias místicas; de orden sensorial. Sentía perfumes. De incienso. Sentía olor a selvas de incienso. Y en el cuarto donde estaba no había ni una flor. Nada que me excitara o que pudiera provocarme esa sensación” (Pensamiento 22). Even in the realization of the after-effects of so much electroshock therapy, Fijman refers to these events with seasoned humor and acceptance explaining, again to Zito Lema, “[s]eguramente veían [los médicos] en mí un mal que pretendieron expulsar con la electricidad. Y ciertamente parece que me hizo bien. Hace años que no me resfrío” (Zito Lema, *Pensamiento* 21). Making light of the resiliency of his “electrified” body evidences Fijman's verbal clarity, mental acuity, sense of humor, and ability to connect socially. When Zito Lema asks him if he is a poet, Fijman wittily responds, “[a]quel [Zito Lema] que así pregunta, ya sabe, es poeta. Por qué difundir lo que los dos sabemos” (37). I exemplify Fijman's intellectual capacity not to defend his abilities in light of mental illness, but rather to showcase his capacity to nuance situations despite his psychosis. The quality of understanding his role as a friend, a patient, a poet, and practitioner of faith all contribute to his ability to employ these strategies in poetic verse. When asked about aspiring to be God, Fijman answers, “Dios hace otro Dios en la persona que quiere...la razón humana nos prohíbe conocer a Dios...A nadie se le ocurre aspirar a Dios. Sólo a mí. Yo soy Dios. Jacobo Fijman es Dios” (*Pensamiento* 47). Fijman additionally identifies the Virgin Mary as God; hence, I believe he views

this living experience of God as parallel to the idea that, as for mystics, Jesus is present/manifest in each human soul. Furthermore, in Fijman's short story "Dos días" he talks about "Cristo Rojo," and explains that Saint Paul teaches him to:

ser como otro Cristo, es decir, Cristo está en uno. La total identificación. Yo lo sentía como una cosa cierta, no literaria...del rojo, era para identificarme con la revolucion... que había estallado en todo el mundo. Cuando los policías me golpeaban les grité: Soy el Cristo rojo. Siguieron con sus golpes. Cada vez más frenéticos, enfurecidos. Antes que me desmayara, me pegué a la pared y dije: Yo soy el anunciado. El cuento lo escribí después. (37-38)

Here, Fijman describes his reaction to being beaten by police; and to survive the event psychologically, Fijman chooses the revolution as a way "out." Thinking about the "red" revolution helps him identify with a cause and gives purpose to standing up to police, enduring physical abuse.

However, Fijman points out that being Christ and "red" Christ were for different purpose. The latter, as previously explained, was connected to the revolution while suffering physically at the hands of the police. The first "total identification" with Christ where one "loses him/herself" in Him—and for Fijman it is a true state of being, not just a literary rhetorical device ("cosa cierta, no literaria"). One could then argue that the constant state of living "mystically" in the Jewish tradition is present here. Of course, the usage of Christ and Christ's existence "in one" is itself a very Catholic notion, yet Fijman's conception of grace is arguably pan-religious in that he draws from Christianity and Judaism to identify the motives for his poetics. Lindstrom affirms the conflation of Fijman's Christian and Jewish

tendencias: “A pesar de su evidente entusiasmo por estos elementos provenientes de las dos religiones que conocía, no los emplea en su contexto original, sino que los transforma de manera radical para integrarlos a su propio sistema de creencias sobrenaturales y prácticas discursivas. El resultado ni es judío, ni es católico, ni es una fusión de las dos cosas, sino que constituye un sistema formulado para acomodar y coordinar las preocupaciones fundamentales de un solo individuo, Jacobo Fijman” (“Discurso profético” NP). Thus, a unique “Fijmanism” is born, giving rise to what Lindstrom argues is the prophetic and messianic discourse in his poetry. I argue additionally that Fijman's ability to accept the mystical tenets of both religions and the subsequent development of his own ideology are further measures by which Fijman writes mystically and profanely. As Francine Masiello observes, Fijman considers himself to be “the first interpreter of life, and an authority on sacred knowledge” (*Jewish Writers of Latin America* 41). As earlier discussed, while he claims God to be the Virgin Mary as well as himself, one can choose to view this as mere heresy. However, I conclude that this presence of God is the source for his mystic identification as well as his mystical tendencies. His aspiration to be (with) God is patently present in his poetics, as will be discussed.

When asked about his conversion, Fijman explains:

No es conversión de judío a católico. Es simplemente la aceptación de la religión católica, apostólica y romana. Porque lo de judío no se pierde. Esta conversión es una concepción de la gracia. Dios seguramente ha encontrado méritos para convertirme. Para concederme ese conocimiento y esa fe. Cualquier enfermedad, aun el cáncer, es estado de locura. (*Viaje* 78)

If he does not convert in the traditional sense, he seems to be amalgamating religious doctrine to develop his “Fijmanism.” Notably, this conception of God, knowledge of God, and faith in God are likened to an illness. And this sort of illness, even cancer, Fijman suggests, is a “state of madness.” Thus, Fijman's perspective, and consideration of his own illness, reflects an experience to which any human can relate: corporeal disintegration caused by physical ailment leading to death. He argues for the commonalities between humans—the universal understanding of illness—instead of setting himself apart, so drastically. As a poet who suffers an illness, then, Fijman gives himself liberty to express himself poetically, discussing, in the end, the role of the poet as God. And Fijman is certainly not the first poet to liken his office to that of the divine.

Like Vicente Huidobro (Chile, 1893-1948) in his seminal poem “Arte Poética,” Fijman recognizes the role of poet as God. I cite Huidobro's poem below:

Que el verso sea como una llave
que abra mil puertas.
Una hoja cae; algo pasa volando;
cuanto miren los ojos creado sea,
y el alma del oyente quede temblando.

Inventa mundos nuevos y cuida tu palabra;
El adjetivo, cuando no da vida, mata.

Estamos en el ciclo de los nervios.
El músculo cuelga.
como recuerdo, en los museos;

mas no por eso tenemos menos fuerza:
el vigor verdadero
reside en la cabeza.

Por qué cantáis la rosa, ¡oh poetas!
Hacedla florecer en el poema.

Sólo para nosotros
viven todas las cosas bajo el sol.

El poeta es un pequeño Dios. (*Poemas árticos* 2008)

The poet “creates new worlds” where poetry “is the key that opens” them. And the poet, as such a being in this new world, is capable of even making flowers bloom. A single bloom, developing from seed to stamen, is the entire life process: a synecdoche for the entire life cycle. Everything under the sun, Huidobro reveals, is for “us” poets. The poet must be, then, effectively, a small God. And not “god” to be confused with a pantheistic or pagan sort, but the singular, omnipotent, capitalized, “God.” Huidobro’s words are often cited to pay homage to the creative power a poet wields, in the artistic sense, not the blasphemous. Yet, as such, both Huidobro and Fijman make similar arguments, as the former, is in fact, claiming himself (as a poet) to be God. Fijman’s proclamations are deemed less “intellectual” in that he proclaims from the confines of a hospital.

Similarly, both Huidobro and Fijman make reference to the role ancient Greco-Roman philosophers play in their intellectual treatment of poetry. Huidobro’s, of course, appears in the imitation of Horace’s “Ars poetica,” echoing

this famous poem by the Roman lyricist which detailed the “do’s and don’ts” of poetry and drama. Fijman ruminates in a similar fashion. When asked by Zito Lema, “¿Como siente la poesia?” Fijman responds, “[e]s un estado de ánimo, antes de la reflexión...remito a la obra poética de Aristóteles” (*Viaje* 51).

Keeping in mind Fijman’s intended emulation of Aristotle, how does his mental illness figure into his self-described “state of reflection”? How does his mental illness influence or hinder his output? How does he use mystical rhetoric to express his soul, which Fijman himself views as the source of poetry? The avant-garde characteristics such as synesthesia, free verse, and expression of the ideal art form are preferred certainly in Fijman’s first collection of poetry, *Molino Rojo*. These poetic “gifts” for Fijman, are God-given. He claims to be in constant search of God, wanting to see Him and to feel Him. To a certain extent, I argue that Fijman even claims that God and the thought/poetic process are equivalents. Zito Lema ascertains that in his work Fijman attempts to, “convocar las esencias de lo eterno, los castigos, la soledad, la obra de Fijman tiene un rigorismo, una profundidad exasperante” (*Pensamiento* 37).

CONVERSION AND POETICS

Both CV and Fijman, as earlier discussed, experience religious conversions that both motivate and influence their poetics. Before turning to textual analysis it is essential to ask what motivated their conversions. Do their conversions share similarities? And what types of conversion do they go through? Religious conversion, according to many scholars, including eminent critic Lewis Rambo, is first and foremost a process, being neither a unique nor a singular event. Even in what would be considered “instantaneous” conversions as in those considered

mystical, while there might be one vision or experience that spontaneously motivates the conversion, a litany of events still must occur before the person is, in fact, converted. I cite Rambo's foundational meanings of conversion in *Understanding Religious Conversion* (1993):

...a simple change from the absence of a faith system to a faith commitment, from religious affiliation with one faith system to another, or from one orientation to another within a single faith system. It will mean a change of one's personal orientation toward life, from the haphazards of superstition to the providence of a deity; from a reliance on rote and ritual to a deeper conviction of God's presence; from belief in a threatening, punitive, judgmental deity to one that is loving, supportive, and desirous of the maximum good. It will mean a spiritual transformation of life, from seeing evil or illusion in everything connected with "this" world to seeing all creation as a manifestation of God's power and beneficence; from denial of the self in this life in order to gain a holy hereafter; from seeking personal gratification to a determination that the rule of God is what fulfills human beings; from a life geared to one's personal welfare above all else to a concern for shared and equal justice for all. It will mean a radical shifting of gears that can take the spiritually lackadaisical to a new level of intensive concern, commitment, and involvement. (Rambo 2)

Thus, there are multiple types of conversion, labeled by Rambo as follows: 1) intensification, 2) affiliation, 3) institutional transition (what sociologists called

“denomination switching”), 4) tradition transition, and even 5) apostasy (13-14). CV undoubtedly falls into the institutional transition category as he moves from some “light form” of Protestantism to Catholicism. Fijman, on the other hand, belongs to the tradition transition category in that he shuttles between two major faiths, one non-Christian and the other Christian; though of course, as previously mentioned, he never fully abandons one faith system for another. Importantly, I suggest that both writers also pertained to the intensification methodology as well. In this sense, both writers are united in that they feel their commitment to faith and the call to God was present within them primordially—in CV he says since childhood he always felt a propensity for the Catholic tradition, that the gospels were somehow latent within him. And Fijman, as is well documented, certainly felt an intensified duty to carry out God’s will, whether it be a Jewish or Christian God. Both men write poetry as their way of mediating this conversion, as Fijman indicates that “...escribir poesía...es mi razón la que hace que entienda fácilmente las cosas sobrenaturales” (“Reportaje” *Talismán*.NP).

There is sustained argument about who determines a convert to be sincere in his or her conversion. Rambo explains, “[w]ithin Judaism and Christianity, for instance, conversion indicates a radical call to reject evil and embrace a relationship with God through faith. Some scholars in the human sciences limit conversion to sudden, radical alterations in people’s beliefs, behaviors, and affiliations. Others, such as A. D. Nock, make sharp distinctions between Christian and Jewish conversion and the form of conversion in the ancient pagan world, suggesting that Jewish and Christian conversion is radical, complete, and decisive, while pagan religious change is merely an ‘adhesion,’ or an add-on, to a person’s life” (5). Clearly, the aforementioned definition of paganism seems to adhere more to the Fijman’s

cosmovision of what it means to be a believer. What remains important is the notion that a relationship with God is fully embraced; Fijman's conversion can be problematic in that it defies a clean label, but I do not find his lack of categorization problematic for poetic analysis. The rest of this chapter's close readings rely on the fact that Fijman espouses his own brand of religion unabashedly and unapologetically inviting Jesus into his heart and affirming that He is the Son of God, submitting entirely to His will. For this reason, I believe Fijman to be a genuine convert as he sees himself as such. Rambo suggests that a convert "portrays the nature of conversion in terms of how far someone has to go socially and culturally in order to be considered a convert (Rambo 12-13). In neither Fijman's nor CV's cases do I argue that they are not socially accepted as converts. Fijman was baptized and any social outsidership had been present since before his conversion. There is no record of CV's baptism, yet he was certainly accepted as Catholic by his wife as well as by his colleagues.

By conversion, James meant, "a regeneration or reveal of life whereby the person acquires assurance that the divided self has been overcome" (Burkhardt Varieties, xxxiii). Of course, a divided self begs the question of a future unified self, to which James himself dedicates much scholarship. Effectively, he discusses the primary focus of said unification to be between the natural and spiritual lives and such a unification reconciles evil "as the pervasive element in the world we live in" (James, "Lecture VIII" 139). James warns, however, of a potentially murky line between alteration and transformation. Even the divided self can go through alterations—transient ones—and not come out the other a transformed being, even though a completely new and alternative set of ideals are accepted. To make this distinction clear, and to understand what a transformative experience must entail,

James cites the President of the United States (presumably Theodore Roosevelt) and his weekend endeavors:

...when with paddle, gun and fishing-rod, he goes camping in the wilderness for a vacation, [he] changes his system of ideas from top to bottom. The presidential anxieties have lapsed into the background entirely; the official habits are replaced by the habits of a son of nature, and those who knew the man only as the strenuous magistrate would not 'know him for the same person' if they saw him as the camper. (160)

Here, James explains that through our ability to take part in activities that define ourselves as human, we are necessarily pluralistic in our self-definitions. One is not merely the President of the United States and nothing more. Presumably, such a person is can also be a Parent, Stamp Collector, Camper, Cook, and Crossword Puzzle Solver. Thus, the mere acceptance of another set of values does not constitute conversion; there must a more universal truth that supersedes any other set of values that becomes universal for the believer.

Fijman and CV are adherents, though, to what Rambo describes as intellectual conversion, one of many identified "motifs," others being "affectional," "coercive," and "revivalism" (12-13). He explains, "[i]n intellectual conversion, the person seeks knowledge about religious or spiritual issues via books, television, articles, lectures, and other media that do not involve significant social contact. The person actively seeks out and explores alternatives. Belief generally occurs prior to active participation in religious rituals and organizations. Mystical conversion is considered by some to be the prototypical conversion, as in the case of Saul of Tarsus. Mystical conversion is generally a sudden and traumatic burst of insight,

induced by visions, voices, or other paranormal experiences” (Rambo 14). Both CV and Fijman are arguably members of the intellectual conversion, as both were known to be avid readers, though texts themselves are not the only avenue by which they achieve conversion. Clearly social, familial, and cultural contact influence them both as well. Fijman, in particular, speaks Spanish and had access to a long tradition of Catholic Spanish mystical poetry; given his association with Catholic intellectual circles, it is unsurprising that Fijman finds comfort in mystical experiences, thought, and poetry.

Lastly, I will highlight the emphasis of the dynamic context for both Fijman and CV in which their conversions take place. It is impossible to divorce their personal religious beliefs from the environment in which these beliefs arose. Such a context includes a massive “...panorama of conflicting, confluent, and dialectical factors that both facilitate and repress the process of conversion. When seen from a broad perspective, conversion is part of a human drama that spans historical eras and both shapes and is shaped by geographical expansion and contraction. Context embraces an overall matrix in which the force field of people, events, experiences, and institutions operate on conversion” (Rambo 16). Just as the act of conversion is not a sole event, the context is “more than a first stage that is passed through; rather, it is the total environment in which conversion transpires. Context continues its influence throughout the other conversion stages” (17). That is to say that the contexts of Fijman’s and CV’s lives, of the political forces at play, of the cultural components of their experiences, dynamically render their conversions alive and continually processing. John Gration puts it this way: “In a very true sense every conversion is in context, a context that is multifaceted, embracing the political, social, economic and religious domain in which a person is living at the time of his

or her conversion. Thus whatever the meaning of conversion, it never takes place outside a cultural context" ("Conversion" 157).

Now how does language, and thus poetry, play a role in conversion? I turn to Peter Stromberg in his "Ideological Language in the Transformation of Identity" (1990) and his contribution to the *Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*, "The Role of Language in Religious Conversion" (2014). Stromberg states, "[o]ur access to whatever we understand as truth is mediated through language, and this generalization covers the truths about the cosmos" ("Role of Language" 117). I assert that there is a phenomenological difference between conversion of experience and conversion of language, where the latter informs the former. Thus, I turn to Stromberg's assertions regarding the "conversion narrative," that is, what features generally present linguistically on paper around the time an author experiences a religious conversion. Stromberg identifies the appearance of "conversion narrative" as an academic subject post-WWII, when scholars differentiated it from autobiography and the novel. Stromberg's question regards scholars: How do academics study the relationship between language and conversion among convert writers? When do they begin weaving Biblical passages into their speech? What exactly are the conventions of writers who are converts? Meaning, just as there is the study of the novel or memoir or autobiography, so too was conversion narrative ranked among fields of study. I argue that both CV and Fijman write within this conversion narrative tradition, though as I examine their poetry specifically, I must focus on the relationship between poetic discourse and transformation. David A. Snow and Richard Machalek's well-known article "The Convert as Social Type" (1983) focuses on what rhetorical changes take place within the convert: 1) changes in talk or reasoning where a new kind of "grammar" is

adopted, 2) adoption of a new “master scheme” that allows for harmonious inclusion of the convert’s personal history, 3) use of metaphor’s the emphasize the convert’s uniqueness, and finally 4) the omnipotence of the convert’s new convictions which often form the core of the identity (“The Convert” 261). Thus, what I refer to is a change in self-consciousness, which raises the question: Is language the marker of conversion or the means by which it occurs? Certainly when a massive re-shaping of self transpires and a new self (perhaps James’s unified self) comes to be, there must have been a powerful persuasion where a new “master scheme” is adopted. Accordingly, the converts’ choice of words changes as well.

CLOSE READINGS

ELEMENT ONE: CONFLICTIVE OTHERNESS→POETIC PRODUCT

In the following section I will closely examine how both Fijman and CV poetically express their individual otherness and how this produces mysticist poetry. In CV first stage of writing and publication *Luz ya sueño*, 1938 and *Vísperas 1938-1953*, 1953) he explores the *no-saber*—Zambrano’s “not-knowing”—in his poetic expression of daily life through dualism: sameness (*hogar*) and difference [foreignness] (*lo extraño*). As Saínz describes the phenomenon, the Poet desires the “*ser*” in its fullest form but cannot approach it, words are merely a threshold: “El poeta anhela ser en su totalidad, pero la palabra le impide ese conocimiento absoluto, y asimismo no puede ver más que fragmentos oscuros, indescifrables, resistentes a la intelección de una manera que resulta imposible superar para el creador” (*Antología* 8). CV tells us that the word is merely an “*umbral*,” a threshold of darkened space behind light, as in an umbra of an eclipse. This conflict nourishes the poet in this dialogue with the unknown, and while it does not impede the poet

from continuing his tireless work, s/he is compelled by the intuition that, in this symbolic Christian charge, there is the possibility of finding an intelligibility that seems unattainable. As will be discussed, there is an avid frenzy circling CV's chosen poetic approach to achieve his famed "aesthetic, creative liberty."

Hegel also discusses creative liberty: "To think," says Hegel, "is to conceive, to bring forth one's object from oneself, not to ... thinking I am free, because I am not in another but remain simply with myself (*Phenomenology of Spirit* 132). I will now examine CV's poetic *mise-en-scène* regarding his own poetic creativity and ontology. CV offers the poem "Otro":

Nunca estoy conmigo. Otro.

El otro, en el sitio que
dejé por tener su burla.

El otro, por dentro, afuera,
entre, despertando olvido.

Voy y vengo, descompuesto,
juguete de imán profundo, niño.

Otro. Nunca estamos juntos. (*Luz ya sueño* 26)

The other is never together with the poetic voice—it remains only at the site that the poetic voice has abandoned. Using prepositions to describe perhaps this physical site (that can never really be conceived of, but that exists nonetheless), the other simultaneously encircles and encompasses the spot "por dentro, afuera,

entre.” At the same time the prepositions also serve to describe the essence of this other: it is at once inside and outside, in between and among. Much like the Borgesian Aleph, the other occupies a time-space that is both limited and infinite. Such a physical location is the site of the other, and the poetic voice discovers itself magnetized to it “descompuesto, juguete de imán profundo.” If, according to Martí, creation is a method of proclaiming liberty (when liberty is not achieved), then CV recognizes this lack of liberty vis-à-vis recognition of the other and moves to situate his poetic voice inside and outside of the other’s space. Marilys Marrero Fernández states that “creación es en ocasiones un placer, y siempre es agónico” (*Con Cintio Vitier* 36). The idea that this process is “agonizing” calls to CV incorporation of Christianity as a method of discourse for his poetics.

If I consider CV’s poetic “other” that occupies a site both interior and exterior to the self, I will further examine the dichotomy between otherness in life and in death. In his book *Poética* (1973) CV discusses the consideration of life as “something indestructible”: “No creo que la noción de la muerte no aparezca habitualmente en la esfera clara de la conciencia por el efecto de una represión saludable, que determina un impulso vital (es decir, vitalmente útil), y que hace posible lo que Schiller llama <<frivolidad metafísica del hombre>>” (*Poética* 60).²⁶ The consideration of death, then, is perceived as a vital impetus for a metaphysical experience. Feeling anguish thus serves as a bridge to the metaphysical. CV believes that anguish always incites a feeling of culpability because, “tememos haber matado en nosotros la vida, crimen que el hombre puede realizar **con su propia mano**” (61). CV identifies anguish as a human moment of emotion where poetic creation

²⁶Here Vitier refers to Friedrich Schiller, 18th century poet, playwright, and philosopher

happens. Thus, anguish, for CV, functions as a liminal space between life and death because life's function as well as death's are repressed:

Sólo en el momento de la angustia...en ese momento se aniquilan a la vez las vivencias de la vida (como actividad consciente personal) y de la muerte (como cesación de esa actividad). En la angustia parece que el fundamento mismo de la muerte cesara. Pero en su estado normal...el hombre no actúa por frivolidad sino, en rigor, por fidelidad; lo que en él se revela no es simplemente una represión, un oscurecimiento o alejamiento instintivo de la idea de la muerte. Aunque eso de hecho ocurra, lo que en él se revela positivamente, dándole un sentido mínimo siempre a su actividad es una fe, no digamos ya intuición, una fe radical en la vida como algo milagroso, espontáneo, omnipotente. (60)

What is truly revealed when confronting death is not the mere fear of it, CV explains. What is positively revealed in a human being is the process of faith, specifically the faith in Life and in Christ. What follows is César Salgado's consideration of the congruencies of the *Orígenes* writers:

...Vitier...use[s] modernist and avant-garde novelistic technologies to process personal and historical materials in order to instrumentalize—that is, authorize, legitimize—an interpretation of Cuban literary history within an arena of competing narrative poetics (the testimonial novels of Miguel Barnet in Vitier's Cuba...) The "Orígenes novel" promotes its author as "witness of an era" and anointed high modernist

literary craftsman to elbow out or disqualify adversarial claims about literary prestige and experience in Cuba and abroad. It instrumentalizes, in Vitier's case, the rehabilitation of origenismo in the Revolution. (Salgado 206-207)

Here, Salgado refers to the “rehabilitation” during the time after *Orígenes*’s publication as a literary magazine during the 1960s. He describes the writers whose work, “...becomes rehabilitated in the eighties and nineties as a symbol of a socially progressive Cuba and of a nationalist teleology of emancipation” (202). My analysis of CV’s work is decidedly pre-revolution; however, I underscore the idea of CV as “witness to an era,” in the sense of philosophical dealings and his relationship to national discourse in Cuba. CV processes, through his poetry, a personal and historical cosmovision. And, as such, I keep these notions of CV’s faith and capacities as this “witness” in mind when considering a few poems from his *Extrañeza de estar* (1944) in the following sections. CV favors the use of *revés*, in various poems: “Aquí donde yo sólo con mi vuelo de revés ante la cara, / con mi júbilo de crimen solitario, / con mi angustia de barco feliz ante la cara” (54). And again, the same word appears another poem, “La tarde vuela un rato por mi revés de muerto”. The poetic voice describes death as a “revés de muerto” (63). Given CV’s declaration in *Extrañeza de estar* of his intention to “*nacer de nuevo*” through the movement of “*autodescubrirse*” and “*la apetencia de autoidentificarse*,” the *revés* takes on multiple meanings (73). First, the *revés* is CV’s poetic “*vuelo de revés*”, the constant pursuit of an auto-discovery, in which he believed so fervently. During such an ontologic-poetic journey, mistakes are bound to occur. He cites this journey with words such as “*vuelo*” and “*vuela*,” both indicating flight, yet this flight is twice coupled with a suffered misfortune. Does he cite death as this misfortune or the journey to it,

marred by blunders and misunderstandings? CV explains the purpose of *Orígenes* as, “no sólo de las superficiales cabriolas del efímero y desvaído vanguardismo cubano...sino incluso de las mejores consecuencias que se derivaron de su impulso: las llamadas poesía ‘pura’ y ‘social’” (66). CV’s obsession with this impetus or push (*impulso*) necessarily makes it problematic. Saínz discusses the early CV with an avid “hambre de justicia, anhelo supremo de hallar un sentido totalizador, fusión de palabra y realidad, yo y los otros,” which Saínz later criticizes though omnipresent in his early work of *Extrañeza de estar* (Cintio Vitier, *Obras 1: Poética* 8).

Fijman also offers an interpretation of the other and how it ties into poetic creation/expression as well as the poetic voice’s own self-recognition. The poem is similarly titled “El ‘Otro’” from *Molino Rojo*:

Tarde de invierno.
Se desperezan mis angustias
como los gatos;
se despiertan, se acuestan;
abren sus ojos turbios
y grises;
abren sus dedos finos
de humedad y silencios detallados.

Bien dormía mi ser como los niños,
¡y encendieron sus velas los absurdos!

Ahora el Otro está despierto;
se pasea a lo largo de mi gris corredor,

y suspira en mis agujeros,
y toca en mis paredes viejas
un sucio desaliento frío.

¡La Esperanza juega a las cartas
con los absurdos!
Terminan la partida
Tirándose pantuflas.

Es muy larga la noche del corazón. (*Poesía Completa* 68)

Fijman's other is comprised of his anguish that sleeps and wakes—his self (*ser*) sleeps like children whose candles are lit by the *absurdos*. Here, *absurdos* could be read as semantically ambiguous: potentially those afflicted by mental illness, those who are enlightened, or those who simply are different in some way. He cites the frenzied action by including the absurd, turbid eyes, contrasted to the delicate fingers and gray eyes. These dichotomies awaken the Other, which whispers in the self's holes running along its gray hallway. This Other occupies a physical site, similar to CV's, that is both contained with the self and affects it from the outside by whispering and touching the self with cold despondency.

Fijman additionally speaks of death when Zito Lema questions him about its existence: "...existe la muerte. Ella también se corporiza. Pero aquí, en el hospicio, sus apariencias son las más terribles. ¿Acaso imaginan el velatorio de un loco...? Yo, sobreponiendo a todo, con ayuda divina, me considero un muerto. Vivo en Cristo. No es una muerte fácilmente entendible....De muerte en muerte...para los corruptos, muerte será la oscuridad. Nuna tendrán la visión" (32). Again, the importance of the

physical body is paramount: death is “corporealized.” Fijman's “Poema VI,” “Poema V,” and “Poema VI” in *Hecho de estampas* illustrate, I believe, the “vision” he believes himself to possess, that for those who are “corrupt” are not capable of seeing. He presents familiarity with death—specifically of recognizing himself as *un muerto* alive in Christ—because his body plays a crucial role, as Fernández explains that Fijman, “contiene en su cuerpo muriente el aliento eterno” (29). Citing the struggle between body and soul is autocritical, speaking of the grace of death, not its horrors. Death for him is quotidian, such that the conscious poet is the one who is aware of the conflation of life and death. Other poems in this same book, *Hecho de Estampas*, read as follows: “Yo estaba bajo los grandes soles, bajo los grades soles fríos...jamás podré seguir. Yo me veo colgado como un cristo amarillo sobre los vidrios pálidos del mundo” (27). His body is wasted, he wants to be removed from it, but cannot because it holds him back. He uses this poetic voice as representative of his body that he cannot escape. Illness binds him to his body and restricts him yet at the same time that likely allows for his mind to expand and experience.

To exemplify this idea, I turn to “Poema VI,” in which first, the poetic voice falls, but is recognized as the thing which makes him unique:

Ha caído mi voz, mi última voz, que aún guarda mi nombre.
Mi voz;
pequeña línea, pequeña canción que nos separa de las cosas.

Then, together with another interlocutor, the poetic voice and this other are distanced physically from his body (represented by his voice):

Estamos lejos de mi voz y el mundo, vestidos de humedades
blancas.

While residing both far from the world, the poetic voice is simultaneously

near it and his voice embodies death:

Estamos en el mundo y con los ojos en la noche.

Mi voz es fría y sucia como la piel de los muertos

(*Hecho de estampas* 111).

Fijman tells us, “[l]os médicos interpretan el dolor de manera singular. Para ellos es perceptivo por síntomas complejos” (44). His illness and the symptoms it manifests are understood by science to be linear and leading to only one thing: a death of “darkness” instead of one of “vision.” Thus, when Fijman writes about the role his voice plays in “Poema VI,” the significance it has during its last spoken word “*mi última voz*” becomes embodied in the world, manifest as a small “line” and “song.” His voice, like a dead body's skin, is “cold” and “dirty.” Fijman writes his own voice into a deceased body—the only way the voice is given these bodily attributes (cold and dirty) is due to its fusion with a body. Similarly, in “Poema IV,” Fijman describes his bodily flesh: “Herido de mi canto / por uniones de azar / toda mi carne mortal recoge la blanca limosna del misterio” (106). Mortal flesh is injured by the poetic voice's song.

ELEMENT TWO: SELF-EXPRESSION AS POET: THE BODY POLITIC OF POETRY AND THE CREATION AND AFFIRMATION OF THE POETIC SELF

In this section I will analyze some of CV's and Fijman's poems to discover the Catholicity present in their work and how they use mystical rhetoric to achieve these qualities. CV incorporate imagery of the infinity of the body, together with distinctions between the “strangeness of being” of *estar* and *ser*. It is now my intention to discuss, first, how Fijman uses his body, that is, the expression of his body's mundane attributes, to engender mysticist poetry. I am chiefly interested in

how the physical body—an integral part of Catholic communion, the taking of the body of Christ—is present in Fijman's *Molino rojo* and *Hecho de estampas*. There is explicit reference to the sense of loss/being lost, with words such as desert, silence, and desolation occurring frequently. There is an evident connection to nature—poems of “Mañana de sol,” “Tarde violeta,” and “Molino”—with reference to the stars, the sun, the moon, natural materials, wood, and metal, often in combination with human characteristics, particularly blood. Fijman uses a mystical rhetorical technique to understand the cosmos, or attempting to approach God through one's own body, and through the materials of the body.

FIJMAN AND THE BODY

To highlight this usage of the body, I turn to the narrative congruency of the way *Molino Rojo* is organized. Beginning with the poem “Canto del cisne” the poetic voice elucidates Fijman's personal circumstances: his illness and confinement, a poem that is more explicitly about his psychosis than any others. He situates the reader by describing his physical and psychological location, to allow the reader entry into the world he lives in: “Demencia: / el camino más alto y más desierto” (45). Allusions here to the desert may be references to Judaism and the story of Exodus. I believe, however, that Fijman's poetic voice orients the reader to his struggle: both a poetic and psychological one. He describes what the hospital's patients are like: an “oficio de las máscaras absurdas; pero tan humanas / Roncan los extravíos; / tosen las muecas.” Then, a physical rendering of the space: “El patio del hospicio es como un banco / a lo largo del muro”. And finally, the reader examines Fijman's experience inside: “Cuerdas de los silencios más eternos. / ¿A quién llamar? / ¿A quién llamar desde el camino / tan alto y tan desierto?” (45).

Within such a confined space, the poetic voice is still lost, strapped in by ropes (cuerdas) of “eternal silence”. Yet, his illness offers a plane of elevation (más alto) that is also a desert—barren and uncultivated yet vast and unencumbered. Despite the trying, restrictive circumstances, the madness permits transcendence to a desert, an openness filled with possibility.

To further Fijman’s understanding of his physical limits, I cite, again, his conversation with Zito Lema, where Fijman succinctly offers his definition of human language, in ten words:

Dios (immaterial)
Alma (immaterial)
Ángel (immaterial)
Piedra (physical)
Planta (physical)
León (physical)
Hombre (physical)
Psiquis (immaterial)
Espiritu (immaterial)
Pneuma (immaterial). (22)

I highlight Fijman’s selection of six immaterial and four physical terms because he provides a panoptic of the human being’s immanent capacity. He chooses aspects of humanity’s physical being, the body, as well as what inhabits the earth: flora, fauna and mineral. Beyond this physicality, the other realm that humanity can perceive is that which is transcendent, where the remaining six elements are described detailing man’s faith, creative spirit, and intellectual

capabilities. In short, Fijman quite concisely describes all of humanity's faculties in ten short words, using the one he left out: language. For Fijman, both the body and the soul are integral parts of his being.

Many critics such as Enzo Cárcano cite Fijman's aversion to the body, explaining it as the corrupt trap, impeding knowledge of and union with God. Cárcano affirms:

Pero luego de Molino rojo, Fijman elige un locus de enunciación completamente despojado para plasmar su experiencia purgativa, que considera, en consonancia con la tradición mística católica, el único medio para acceder a la visión de —y a la unión con— Dios. El cuerpo, su cuerpo, es para él un impedimento, una ligazón demasiado fuerte con lo terreno, con lo corruptible. (*Dios, cuerpo y poesía* 48)

If Fijman, however, explains to us that his illness is a “state of madness,” it must necessarily be the illness of his physical body that helps to propel mystical poetics. In attempting to transcend his physical body and the illness it presents, he uses the body as a vehicle to better understand what it expresses. Again, Cárcano points to the use of imagery and symbolism used by Fijman as a manner of distancing himself from immanence to achieve transcendence: “No se trata del mero y arbitrario reemplazo de imágenes corporales o sensoriales por símbolos, sino una evolución poética que remite a una experiencia de trascendencia, de una subjetividad que se prepara para la entrega y se desentiende paulatinamente de lo terreno” (Cárcano 48-49). Fijman's synthesis of body with illness are what I argue permit this “evolución poética que remite a una experiencia de trascendencia” (49).

I examine the title of Fijman's first book of published poems Molino Rojo

(1926). Fijman explicitly mentions the role his illness plays, “...la demencia, el vértigo, que buscaba un título para esa obra que significara mis estados y encontré un molinito que era rojo en la cocina, y ví en ese objeto todo lo que mí poesía quería expresar” (*Viaje* 17). He chooses red to reflect revolution, a symbolic gesture (previously discussed), but he also finds a daily object of his life, a coffee grinder in his kitchen, that perfectly encapsulates what he believes his poetry expresses. While also personally symbolic, I point out that the coffee grinder is a physical object, found among the quotidian items of one's life as inspiration and representation. Similarly, Fijman uses what is personally known to him, his madness, in the aforementioned first line of “Cantos del Cisne”: “Demencia: el camino más alto, más desierto” (6). Dementia, then, is the way to poetry for Fijman. He validates his illness and the role it plays; an imperfection of his body (illness) manifests as the transcendent camino, the way to God. His use of the swan, or cisne, parallels the avant-garde, imaginably, a nod to way he was influenced by it. Additionally, Fijman likely refers to the mythical/popular legend that a swan only produces one song in its life right before it dies.

Fijman opens *Molino Rojo* by describing his internal struggle: “Me hago la señal de la cruz a pesar de ser judío” (4). He indicates here a betrayal—his own, certainly, reflecting the phenomenon of “Fijmanism” earlier discussed. Yet the notion of betrayal appears again when he discusses his treatment by healthcare workers and the system in general. He never faults them, insisting, “hacen lo que pueden,” recognizing their inability to see this beyond his illness as he describes the medical workers with whom he interacts, “[s]e acerca Dios en pilchas de loquero, y ahorca mi gañote con sus enormes manos sarmentosas; y mi canto se enrosca en el

desierto" (32).²⁷ Importantly, Fijman puts emphasis on the body of the doctor. Here, he references the doctor as God in medical clothes with "gnarled, twisted hands," making observation of the doctor's (and, representatively, God's) physicality, focusing on the strangling the hands perform. Fijman's neck, like his spirit (canto), is grabbed and suffocated. Interestingly, Fijman parallels his observational scrutiny by establishing himself within the same framework as he has just described, also employing a word to imply twistedness: "se enrosca." Paradoxically, in contrast to the doctor's hands, here what is coiled or wound up is Fijman's own canto, something a-physical, something ethereal. His canto is generated by a part of his body—his lungs, vocal cords, etc.—but exits and detaches from the body upon its production. And canto takes on myriad meanings: Fijman could be alluding to his own poem "Canto del cisne," his own song, his voice (physical and certainly metaphorical), his spirit, his agency, his tribute to the world around him. Fijman draws a world of similarities between himself and the doctors who are treating him, while simultaneously highlighting his own transcendence of this common correspondence. Fijman concludes, "[a] veces pienso si no sería que ellos me tenían miedo. Envidia por poseer una carga de energía superior a todo lo humano" (Zito Lema, *El pensamiento* 21). His self-declared energy is beyond what is recognizably human. While Fijman's doctors undoubtedly viewed him as ill, Fijman is unaffected by diagnoses. He continues to write and to function, unaltered by others's perception of him.

Many of the poems in Molino Rojo express bodily experiences and entrapment. Titles include, "Hambre," "Mortaja," and "Máscaras" where themes such

²⁷I will discuss Fijman's idea of "beyond", here, beyond death at a later point in this chapter where he faults those who are not capable of any particular post-mortem vision.

as insomnia and nudity together with bulky materials such as bricks and iron express the poetic voice's corporeal misgivings, solitude, and exclusion. The poetic voice is again capable of escape, "entre el ayer eterno y el eterno mañana" because "[s]us máscaras de aromas me prenderán los astros!" (46). Eternal vastness, in the form of the cosmos, are ignited within the poetic voice's "ser." These examples of mystical language unify the poem to a greatness, an "above," comprised of the stars. The masks themselves, something that serves definitely to conceal and restrict, permit access to the universe. An overt reference to Christianity, Fijman writes, "sangró mi corazón como una estrella crucificada" (47). Furthermore, many kinds of wood and hard natural materials underscore Fijman's adherence to Christian imagery, perhaps alluding to Jesus' cross: "sándalo purísimo del sueño trabajaron la balsa de mi vida...el muelle de mi ser...barricas, ladrillo" (47).

As I have argued, the role Fijman's physical body plays in experiencing togetherness with the outside world, I further scrutinize this emphasis on materiality as a link to Christianity and unity with God. By highlighting conventional Christian allusions such as fishing boats, sheep, pastoral scenes, and doves, Fijman refers us back a lifestyle of simplicity and poverty, like that of Jesus. Through describing the physical experience of Jesus, of what the body experiences when it is poor, existing in a state of constant lack. Similarly, a shroud, (mortaja), another potentially Christian, though certainly religious reference, is likened to a tree that "ha cubierto de palomas mi soledad" but the poetic voice, again, furtively evades the constraint: "pero es en vano", it declares. Despite the shroud, the poetic voice is always uncovered, "Desnudo / siempre estoy como una llanura" (47). The plains (llanura) are another iteration of the desert and the opportunity it presents to the psyche: movement and freedom.

Another grouping of poems in Molino Rojo—"Vísperas," "Mañana de sol," "Ocasos," "Crepúsculo"—details the passage of time, another feature of life that progresses eternally but remains contained within the confines of his psyche. Again using to his physical confinement to his advantage, Fijman utilizes mystical language to achieve an exit and transcendence. In these poems, personification of the times of day and the poetic voice's synesthetic experiences help express mystical experience. The poetic voice characterizes the different times of day: "Silencios verdes...apretados de gozo y alegría." Then his body reacts to synthesizing the experience: "Enloquece en mis ojos la mañana!", and "Mis manos palpan el color de misa!" (53). The sunrise becomes crazed in his eyes and his hands palpitate the color of Catholic mass. The descriptions of his body experiencing nature and Catholicism serve to connect his body to the cosmos.

Finally, in the last poem of Molino Rojo, "El hombre del mar," Fijman describes the conflict between "hombre de los ojos" and "hombre salvaje." Among these two perceptions of himself, the latter intercepted the former. He provides closure for Molino Rojo by explaining what the hombre del mar teaches the poetic voice about nature and expressing oneself: "[le] ha iniciado en las expansiones, [le] ha libertado de los cuatro puntos cardinales" while the hombre salvaje teaches it to navigate this universe, using music, a *cósmica simpatía*.

VITIER AND THE BODY

In consideration of the dichotomy presented by Fijman, I now turn to CV's expression of the body. CV's incorporation of the body reflects his notions expressed in *Poética* (1961) where he problematizes the aforementioned liminal space between life and death expressed by anguish. CV highlights the infinity of the body

and the importance expressed by its potential in the poem, “Un hombre, un cruel tamaño”: “Que me oyeras, / espejo transeúnte, ávido parque o multitud / entrando en la infinita locura de mi cuerpo. / Oh musa del morir, / que tú me oigas” (*Extrañeza de Estar* 54). The “pedestrian mirror” reflects the “infinite madness of his body.” His body, his physical ser, exemplifies the strangeness of being, later described by CV as “extrañeza de ser.” This grouping of poems entitled *Extraneza de estar* included in *Vísperas*, echoes the notions presented in the section where I discussed otherness, particularly as in this poem, he switches to the verb *ser* instead of *estar*. With *estar*, the strangeness of physical location is conferred upon the body; the body's position bears the weight of this strangeness/wonderment. And with the transition to *ser*, the body itself, rather than its positioning, expresses foreignness. The strange becomes literally embodied and anxiety soon develops, “Qué desazón / de oír la tabla fantástica / mientras pulso el reloj y el barco arde / y aquel eterno de su penuria queda” (61). The anguish experienced by the poetic voice is rendered maddening by the body due to “el sueño [que] transparenta mi locura” (54).

Victor Rodríguez Núñez characterizes CV's early work as a ravenous yearning: “A nuestro juicio, esa hambre de justicia, ese anhelo totalizador, esa fusión de palabra y realidad, de yo y los otros están ya presentes en la poesía temprana de Vitier” (Rodríguez Núñez 25). It is this fusion of word with reality that permits CV to inscribe his body into his work. CV writes:

Qué extrañeza de ser. Qué desazón
de oír la tabla fantástica
mientras pulso el reloj y el barco arde
y aquel eterno en su penuria queda. (57)

The fundamental identification of this otherness, described as the “wonder or

foreignness of being” is anxiety (*desazón*) also understood as meaning a certain uneasiness or discomfort. While one may be in awe of such strangeness there exists a simultaneous uncertainty with such an unknown, foreign feeling. To corporealize it, CV ascertains the locus of his *extrañeza*, “ese hogar en la terrible sucesión...por la paciencia o la maestría, sino por el fuego de lo otro, en la memoria o en el deseo” (8). Rodríguez Núñez explains, “[e]n otras palabras, en Vitier la dialéctica del estar predomina sobre la metafísica del ser. Lo exterior así reconocido ejerce una poderosa atracción sobre el sujeto poético” (26). CV’s poetic other exerts such a powerful force over his poetic subject that “dialectic” or analysis of the “wonder of being” achieves more importance than the “being” itself. In this way, CV moves beyond the limitations of the poetic body, to supersede the metaphysical self. CV ravenous yearning for a confluence of the self and other, while transient, becomes transcendent. CV identifies “nuestra ruda y ávida metamorfosis / penetrándome a través de su discurso como una absorta espada” (63). The unity of the self and other, is an avid metamorphosis, complete and overwhelming. Yet the tool by which he achieves this poetic harmony is an “absorta espada,” that is, a suggestion of sharp metal, certainly an adversarial image to union. CV, according to Saíenz is “siempre fiel al misterio del suceder, mucho más que a una ontología del absoluto” (*Antología* 7). The sword, then, must be part of this desired mystery, paradoxical and uncertain. And together with CV’s known hungered yearning, it is something that constantly pushes the limits of the poetic body, and as such, the aforementioned poetic “revés” results.

CV’s closes *Extrañeza de estar* with a “Nota” which couches his conclusions of this self and other, and the position the body plays in the relationship between the two:

...el estar en nosotros, ya de por sí muy extraño pues comporta un realizarnos en lo nuestro ajeno, en lo nuestro infinito de otro y en lo ajeno infinitamente propio, prestamente se revela, cuando el bulto mejor de la conciencia arriba, un no estar en nosotros sino en el mundo, creído éste como reino de estancias, o, dicho absolutamente, vivido y desvivido como Estancia. (70)

CV explains that the body's "self" is, in itself, strange (*extraño*), so much so that our other is infinite. So unending, in fact, that it results in a fully "no estar en nosotros"—a disavowal from ourselves and full incorporation into the world around us. Our bodies, then, for CV, become primal property of humanity, sans classifications of race, politics, ethnicity, etc. Rodríguez Núñez suggests, "[s]í, la anulación del desarraigo está, sobre todo, en la identificación con el otro, cuando el yo se expande en el tiempo y en el espacio para definirse en su semejante" (47). This poetic subject is an abstraction, is an "extra-diagetic" body, a body that transforms into the ether surrounding it, again akin to the Borgesian Aleph.²⁸ And as such, poiesis is achieved: CV's poetic body exists and becomes the space it inhabits. CV closes by positing,

Miro otra vez al hombre sobre el mundo,
y otra vez sólo suenan estos ojos
oníricos sin fin de roca
funeral y perdida criatura. (57)

²⁸ Jorge Luis Borges's *aleph* is discussed in Chapter One; here I refer to the notion that in his book of eponymous short stories, the final story tells the experience of a man who encounters an enigmatic spark of light in a basement. This spark full contains all moments of time and space for all eternity.

ELEMENT THREE: COMMUNITY-FORGING: NATION-BUILDING AND CANON-BUILDING

VITIER'S NATION-BUILDING POETRY

In the final section of this chapter I will examine how Fijman and CV forge communities for their poetic voices as they respond to political or social pressures. Raul Hernández Novas offers an analysis of CV's pre-revolutionary work with regard to CV's treatment of national project/identity making. He posits, "[l]a vocación poética de Vitier, los temas del imposible, la nostalgia y la memoria tienen vinculaciones secretas con la experiencia de un vacío que el carnaval político apenas podía disfrazar" ("Cintio Vitier: La mirada poética" 1189) Critics such as Duanel Díaz discuss the political infusings of CV's early work (*Luz ya sueño* and *Vísperas*) as a representative "spokestext" for what would become the nationalistic, socialist revolution to begin in 1959. Instead, I wish to exemplify how it is not the political undertones of CV's poems that contribute to this nation-building rhetoric; rather, it is through creative liberty and mysticalist exposition (Catholicism) that CV creates political commentary.

CV describes his own discovery of Catholicism, which informs his poetic renderings of Cuba. I reiterate what I discussed in Chapter Two regarding Catholicism and the Catholicist poets's way of mediating the Catholic religion and poetics: The questioning turns away from a traditional approach in which the believer uses Catholicism first to ask and negotiate these mortal questions and instead prefers an avenue which first pursues these questions and then mediates meaning by way of Catholicism. I turn to CV's realization of the Catholic voice within him:

Desde la adolescencia me sentí atraído por el cristianismo, más o menos heterodoxo de Unamuno y de Pascal. Me

sensibilizaron también mucho en este sentido San Juan de la Cruz y Fray Luis de León, Vallejo, Dostoievski, Rilke, Bloy, Eliot, el Seminario de María Zambrano sobre San Agustín...supe que siempre había sabido que el Evangelio era verdad y que estaba viviendo desde la niñez una vida clandestina, oculta. ("Solo en la acción podremos vivir la belleza" 104)

CV converts to Catholicism in 1952, the year he marries FGM, yet we know that Christianity has resonated with his spirit since boyhood.²⁹ He describes both an intrinsic (internal) Christian identity (*desde la niñez*) as well as academic (external) one in which he cites all the Catholic/mystical writers who have influenced him. He accepts the Christian Gospels as Truth, as something "lived," that is, a durative process forming what CV describes as an "occult and clandestine" subconscious.

How, then, does a Catholic poet, well-versed in Christian mystical thought, express poetic liberty? And why does he use this liberty to offer political discourse? CV sources his theological and poetic thought in Christianity as a method of expressing liberty. Marrero Fernández explains that CV "proclamó que la libertad es lo único esencial para el ser americano...no sólo la libertad política, de las ideas, sino la libertad espiritual, la independencia del ser...la libertad como máxima y suprema aspiración del hombre, sustentada...en un arraigada concepción cristiana..." (*Con Cintio Vitier* 85). Employing a heavily Martí-influenced cosmovision of humanistic discourse, CV ties creative liberty to the most fundamental process of self identity. And this process of self identity translates into the self as part of a literary

²⁹ See the earlier part of this chapter that discusses relevant political events relating to the Cuban revolution in 1952 and thereafter.

community, eventually becoming part of writing the nation-self. Liberty becomes the (only) necessity for knowledge of the self, fortified by a cultural, social, humanistic and philosophical praxis (Marrero Fernández 120). This praxis is codified first by CV the man, then CV the poet, and finally, CV the citizen. In this way, I suggest that CV, the man-poet-citizen, is capable of posing personal, ontological questions that mediate meaning by way of mysticalical interpretation. Instead of a poet using Christianity first to interpret meaning, CV prefers the aesthetics of personal/creative liberty to permit the development of mysticalical poetry. In his “Cántico Nuevo” he even proclaims that the poems are not so much “de poesía como de conciencia...He pasado de la conciencia de la poesía a la poesía de la conciencia” (“Cántico Nuevo” 50). That is, poetry first comes from the (sub)conscious (CV, the man), then comes from CV, the poet, and eventually to become nationalistic discourse (CV, the citizen).

The role mysticality plays in this transformative poetic creation is significant and influential on CV’s aesthetics of poetry, particularly present in “Experiencia de la poesía” (1944) and “Mnemosyne” (1973). I argue that, like FGM’s expression of the Divine by way of the mundane, CV, the poet, is possessed by things. Marrero Fernández suggests that “[p]ara Vitier no hay belleza general o abstracta, el poeta traduce el lenguaje de las cosas a través de la creación, ‘el barro de la nueva creación, barro de la ternura humana,’ moldeado y fundido por el hombre como el artesano” (*Experiencia* 129). If CV’s muse for poetic production is not general beauty or abstraction, then he must seek out that which is concrete and present in his life to provide his poetic content. He therefore uses his political and sensorial milieu (as will be evidenced in his poem “Noche intacta: Hojas” from *Vísperas*) to influence the creation of his citizen-voiced, nationalistic poetry that differs so greatly from his

earliest work from the late 1930s.

CV proposes in “Mnemosyne,” “[l]a poesía quiere extática penetrar”; thus, the poetic word penetrates his self and his surroundings as created by God (8). He establishes the parameters by which he writes poetry as a Catholic. As a Catholic poet, his work is not founded in the universal acceptance of God's omnipresence, because we cannot see Him. Rather, he argues, we accept His presence exactly because of this “ecstatic penetration” of His presence in the substance of the Earth. CV explains:

...como cristianos, entendemos que la existencia no es una
insuficiencia infinita *per se*...La calidad de <<lo artístico>> no
debe atribuirse, como en rigor ninguna categoría espiritual, a
una mera negación o substracción de la existencia, sino, todo lo
contrario, a una inmersión cada vez más profunda en la
sustancia dinámica y trascendente de lo que existe.
(“Mnemosyne” 12)

CV, then, negates the *via negativa* and searches for the dynamism of God's presence around him, stating that it is both profound and transcendental.

The title of CV's prose-like poem “Noche intacta: Hojas,” evokes this concretization of spiritual experience in the three-step movement from abstract to concrete with the words “noche,” “intacta,” and “hojas.” Nighttime (an often poetic abstraction) is made specific and complete (*intacta*) and then even sacramentalized as something tangible (*hojas*). Leaves, in nature, or papers on a desk, are made known to the reader as the poetic voice introduces the idea that the “*noche intacta*” = “*hojas*” with the use of the colon. The reader is already invited to conceive of the

poetic body of the poem to be this very same “sustancia dinámica y trascendente” (94).

In the body of the poem, CV questions, apostrophically, “--Cómo explicarlo de otro modo? Estoy buscando ardientemente un sitio” (101). Again, the searching for a physical space, a *logos* for the poetic voice, becomes manifest. He goes on, “[c]amino, sobre todo. Papel, humo, fincas. También sabremos quedar inmóviles...” (101). Here, as differentiated from his earlier work, this poetic voice seeks a space for the Cuban “Casa” so often referenced in this poem, instead of a site for the poetic voice alone. A personal ontology is forgone in favor of a national poetic project. *Casa* (capitalized) appears three times in the poems, representing both Cuba and God's Kingdom. Twice the poetic voice finds himself “a espaldas de la Casa” and confronting the “Casa mortal e immortal,” that is the potential transience of Cuba's national identity pre-revolution (mortal) and the House of God (immortal) (100, 102). Near the poem's end, CV chooses instead “la Ciudad” to materialize Cuba (Havana): “la raza de los naranjos me deja absorto en la Ciudad, te deja absorto en la Ciudad, a entrada del silencio” (103). The orange trees leave the poetic voice and the apostrophic “you” equally absorbed and fascinated. The poetic voice knows only how to walk, to feel, and to observe Cuban life in order to know how to write about it:

Cómo salvar a un país que no se hunde? Pero era indispensable que cada uno de nosotros se asomara a su ventana, y las contemplaciones que subían como loo?res de vigor sublime, porque todos habríamos de ser indígenas de una tierra de callados príncipes (tierra donde nadie vive) y todo amábamos la sombra clara y grande (no se sabe hasta qué sueños) del Jinete! (97).

Cuba, where no one lives, is filled with silent princes and remains a country that CV suggests needs saving. But why? This poem is published in 1953, and was written sometime likely in the 1940s or early 1950s, certainly at least six years before the revolution is successful. Salvation is needed, though there is no reason for it because “no se hunde.” Cuba is not failing. Yet it requires saving. CV suggests that the climate in which Cubans were living during the 1950s was not sustainable, though it functioned. In the country there were princes, but they were silenced. He insists that everyone must be a responsible member of the salvation army, going to Cuba's window to appreciate the “sombra clara y grande.” It is his role as a part of *Orígenes* to take part in the struggle of creating a new Cuba, identified by its interior, its citizens, not by its exterior, the influence of foreign governments, and the Batista regime. If everyone, he says, is indigenous to Cuba, they must be part of the salvation. He has seen the outside, and it does not offer what Cuba needs:

--Yo he visto la ciudad gótica de New York, desde el Agua, y el
llanto ha saltado a mi cuello como una bestia de lentitud
sagrada.

--Yo he visto sus gigantescos edificios pasando trabajosamente
a la fábula del Agua de ayer, y todo el rigor de su pornografía.

--Yo he sido ese idiota invenciblemente esplendoroso en el
agua del Hudson. (97)

One of the primary tenets of Christianity is the need for salvation, so in this way CV underscores his political argument with Christian references. The “amena vocación” of Cubans was political and their “irreprimible vocación” was saintly (97). He uses Christianity to catalyze his political discourse, all the while rooting it in this very same “sustancia dinámica” earlier discussed. The visitors to the island wore

“escasas máscaras” and consequently, the poetic voice argues, “una angustia de historicidad se apoderaba de nosotros” (97). For this reason, the need for salvation becomes evident. Because of the foreign influence from the U.S., the poetic voice questions, “¿Estaríamos vivos, o muertos?”, a question asked “a la calma sangrienta del domingo y a la inmensa estupidez de indecifrable máscara” (97). This indecipherable mask is looming, enormous, and bloody.

In closing the poem, the poetic voice asks, “¿Quién soy y qué me hago?”. After a lengthy exposition of who Cubans are, how they have been influenced politically, the voice wonders how he is meant to negotiate this enigma. The last supplication is quite prayer-like, beseeching God:

Sombra de los Días,
sombra de los Ángeles
sombra de la Ley: escúchame! (103).

Saíenz tells us:

En medio de tanto no-saber, en medio de esa extrañeza que irrumpía de pronto y de inmediato no distanciaba de las cosas y las tornaba aún más oscuras e impenetrables, era natural la conciencia de lo imposible, mezclada con el caos de la vida nacional, factor que gravitaba también en los inquietantes diálogos del poeta con su propia vida. (*Antología* 12)

CV gives us the ability to express daily life through images of objects and entities that are delivered to us in everyday comings and goings. These bodies appear Cuban and foreign at the same time. They are made of themselves and their “sobrevida,” of their material limits and their transcendence; they are indifferent

bodies that are also symbolic.

CV expresses a yearning to understand *lo cubano* in his post-revolution work as well. So I now reconsider his famous lines from “Cántico Nuevo”: “[h]e pasado de la conciencia de la poesía / a la poesía de la conciencia” (“Cántico Nuevo” 50). He describes being between “la espada y la pared,” that he wishes to discuss the poetics of political commitment instead. He says that this impulse to describe reality is what in the end we end up calling poetry. Octavio Paz has said of CV’s work, “porque para mí su obra pertenece a lo que podría llamarse el segundo momento—el momento de la conciencia—de la poesía de Vitier—inequívocamente expuesto en esta frase de una de los ensayos que Vitier reúne en Poética: Ese irresistible impulso de la realidad hacia la palabra es lo que llamamos poesía” (*Antología* 15). “Cántico Nuevo” the immersion of the poet into the past, with “history’s dimensions”, as explained by Saíenz, takes on a more central role, as is true for the majority of the poems in *Testimonios* (15-16). The poem begins with a clear declaration of just exactly how this book differs from those before, underscoring the role of CV, the poet, and lessening the significance of poetry as an abstract medium. What is expressed, CV wants us to realize, is more telling than the fact that it is written in verse:

Este libro no es tanto de poesía
como de conciencia.

Sus versos resultan duros y desabridos
pero dicen la verdad de mi corazón
cambiante y una
como la profunda luz de agosto.

The truth expressed by the heart is both changing and singular, that is, a paradox. While the words of the poem might seem distasteful, or even insipid, the essential expression at heart is most valuable. CV continues:

Ya no vale la pena escribir
una línea
que o sea completa, aunque después resulte poca,
la verdad.

La poesía no está encima de nada.

Poetry, while previously considered a nationalistic symbol, no longer carries such narrow characterization in the sense that anything can be poetically expressed. What is most important is that the words must convey the truth of redemption. So, what, then, is CV's post-revolution truth? The ending of the poem explains:

...

Este libro no contiene las notas de una lira
salvo que una lira sea
el tiempo y el espacio que van de la espada a la pared.

La profunda luz de agosto me lo dice:

Nada está por encima de nada.

Todo va a salvarse o a perderse junto en un solo cuerpo y en
una

[sola]

alma. (319)

CV no longer (as in *Luz ya sueño* or *Vísperas*) feels trapped by the limits of words, remaining in the *umbral*. In prior poetic words, as earlier discussed, the poet approaches with patience and circumspection the revelation of knowledge. He is eager and willing to let poetry envelop him and imbue him with meaning. Now, he proclaims, adamantly, “Nada está por encima de nada,” decisively declaring that there is no “magic feather” solution to knowledge; not even poetry possesses such power. It is up to the individual, body and soul, where salvation or loss are both possible. Saínz describes CV’s evident change in approach:

Las páginas de *Testimonios* entran en la realidad de otra manera, de un modo directo—como no habían podido penetrar los textos de la complicación anterior—, porque la propia existencia del poeta había alcanzado una más nítida definición, proceso que comenzó en aquella vuelta hacia el hogar...el poeta nos dice simplemente lo que ve y siente, lo que la naturaleza de las cosas le dice al contemplarla desde la perspectiva de un diálogo distinto con ellas, el diálogo con los otros... (*Antología* 16).

CV’s search for self is claimed to be a national discourse. He describes his Cuba through poetry, something only CV’s own “historical dimensions” could wrestle out on the page. CV’s famous consciousness-poetry relationship, passing from one to the other and floating somewhere between, depicts CV’s participation in this politically-charged ontological pleasure.

FIJMAN’S CANON-FORMATION

Undoubtedly, Fijman's work also occupies a space in his poetic consciousness that drives him to define identity. Whereas it was clear with CV that his work drove a national identity formation, how does Fijman fit into a national discourse, if at all? The canon that Fijman builds is not canonical in the nationalistic Argentine sense. It is, nonetheless, pursuant to his "Fijmanism." In this last section I will discuss some of Fijman's unedited poems, collected by Alfredo Arias in his edition of Fijman's poetry, *Obras (1923-1969) 1: Poemas* (2005), to showcase the cosmovision Fijman was creating to establish his own canon.

Fijman was very purposeful in his writing. He states that despite his internment in the hospital, "...h[a] continuado en [su] tarea: escribir poesía" ("Reportaje" *Talismán* NP). He provides a *poética* in a short article he writes for "Número" in 1930 titled, "El misterio de la poesía,"—a cosmological explanation of the politics of poetics, of how he views poetry's larger fit in not just his own universe as a convert, but as belonging to the wider human experience:

La inteligencia toma cuerpo glorioso cuando descansa bajo la operación de la gracia; y a modo de esa operación, la poesía nos saca del afligimiento de la carne, y apacienta nuestros sentidos demorados en los objetos y en las tinieblas exteriores. La dignidad es cristiana; y el poeta no busca las palabras, sino el Verbo. (NP)

Poetry, for Fijman, "yanks us away from the ailments of the flesh." It provides a greater explanation for the way the world works. And a poet does not look for words, but the word of God (*Verbo*). Nearly forty years later, shortly before his death, Fijman makes a near identical statement: "Yo también creo [en la poesía], pero desde la resignación. El misterio de la poesía nos saca del afligimiento de la

carne y nos permite esperar la noche divina. Soy un poeta que ya no busca las palabras, sino el Verbo” (“Talismán” 1969; Transcribed “Unicornio” 1993). Fascinatingly, this worldview for Fijman, does not change from the year he was baptized in 1930 until his death. He is steadfast in his commitment to poetry as his work for God. Such a commitment, I argue, is the solid foundation for Fijman’s own canon.³⁰ To further this notion, I examine one of his previously unknown poems written in 1962, published for the first time by Arias in 2005, titled “Canon”:

Castilla parte en cruz las aldeas y torres,
los versos y los llanos.
El Cid cabalga en cruz;
y los siervos blasfeman con la sangre de Cristo.
Los molinos se tornan por un tiempo de muerte;
y Don Miguel Cervantes redime los cautivos
con ayunos y prosas consonantes.
Castilla dice el Canon en la sangre judía
de los niños judíos;
y las torres malditas de las viejas aldeas
asesinan en cruz
a los siervos y llanos. (211)

Fijman’s canon—what he believes to be representative of his poetic work during his lifetime—is multilayered, complex, steeped in Spanish history, contradictory and yet consistent. He cites one of the best-known, yet religiously complex moments in Spain’s history: El Cid, a Castilian nobleman recognized by

³⁰ By canon here I mean a body of literature, not the notion that Fijman believed he should be canonized.

both the Moors and the Christians, having fought for both sides. He travels on his horse in Spanish territory that is “cut/divided” (*parte*) by Castilla, the Catholic crown. Fijman describes the servants as blasphemers, implying they are false *conversos*, forced to convert perhaps, or maybe ill-fitting as Christians, disbelievers. Fijman then cites Spain’s most famed novelist, Miguel de Cervantes, who redeems with his pen by writing a book, whose Moorish “meta-author,” El Cide Hamete Benengeli authors Part II. Fijman identifies multiple aspects of Spanish history (also addressed in the *Quijote*) in this short poem that indicates pluralism, dissent, religious questioning and identity. He then goes further to declare that Castilla dictates the Canon in Jewish blood from Jewish children in an accusatory tone. The canon is presented by one religious system (Catholicism), yet rooted in another (Judaism); its symbol, the cross, is an assassin. Fijman’s canon, like the eponymously titled poem, is not homogenous. It is fraught with contrary images (Catholic and Jewish) that still, as history tells, existed simultaneously.³¹ Fijman describes his version of a canon, a canon rooted in historical events that he renders poetic. His canon additionally reveals the mystery of poetry and the writer (Fijman, the poet or Cervantes, the novelist) wields the power to unveil its potential.

Thus, the mystery of poetry is intimately tied to the mystery of mysticism, which in turn, informs Fijman’s cosmology. As Enzo Cárcano points out:

[L]a mística es la cifra de un misterio, de un ocultamiento, de una lucha y de una paradoja. Todo poeta místico tiene la certeza del decir insuficiente, del saberse incapaz. Sin embargo,

³¹ Here I reference the widely-debated notion of *coexistencia* of the Christians and Muslims during the time of the *Reconquista*. My mention is merely to cite its occurrence, not to argue whether or not such co-existence was harmonious. Fijman, as I do, recalls a moment in Spanish history that reflected pluralism, and as such, embodies conflict and complexity.

no todos dicen del mismo modo, desde el mismo lugar; cada uno adopta un *locus* de enunciación que establece su posición en relación con su propia experiencia trascendente, su propia interioridad, y con su coyuntura terrena (“Dios, Cuerpo y Poesía” 57).

Fijman’s *locus* (logos) is his canon, his methodology of situating himself as a mystic. Cárcano posits that mysticism is the way of measuring (*cifra*) paradox and mystery. Each poet adopts his own logos, in relation to his own transcendental experience.

Fijman’s third book of poems, *Estrella de la mañana*, is the most forthright in declaring his Catholic logos. It is a communication of religious assumption, a proclamation of his faith (published the year after he converted). The poems in *Estrella* perform, according to María Amelia Arancet Ruda, a dynamic vertigo or dynamic chaos (*Jacobo Fijman: un poética de las huellas* 199, 248). There is a consistent repetition of words, which for Raúl Roque Aragón, are penetrated by the “ritmo mental hebreo” of psalms and work written by medieval Spanish *conversos* (“Introduction” *Poesía religiosa argentina* 43). This sermon-like aspect is noted in Fijman’s Poema XXXVI:

Pongo este llano de mi llanto...
Pongo este llanto de soledad perfecta;
pongo este llanto dichoso d mi alma;
pongo este llanto de acabado recogimiento... (*Poesía* 159).

Thirty-one years later, Fijman’s canon is unchanged. In his unedited poems written during the 1960s, there is the same dizzying, religious adherence, reiteration of lexicon and prayer-like verse. I examine the following poem, from

1962:

Tú sentías la pura eternidad,
sinfigura, beata,
sinrazón, infinita,
sinfigura, absoluta, sinfigura, beata.
Tú sentías la pura simplición,
beata vestidísima beata
sinrazón, indistante,
a simplición harmónica beata,
sinfigura, beata,
de eternidad (*Obras* 210).

Fijman's use of anaphora, epistrophe, and apostrophe enhance this prayer-like quality. The poem's rhythmic repetition feels like a piously penitentiary prayer, particularly due to the use of the prefix "*sin*" and the word "*beata*." The poetic voice seems to supplicate the apostrophic "*tú*", knowing that s/he experiences such "pure eternity," existing infinitely and absolutely, formless and harmonious: the "you" is paradoxical. Fijman's mystical awareness is intensely manifest: his knowing himself to be incomplete and the certainty of using words that are insufficient. To this end, this poem, as is true with many of his later poems (in contrast to those published in his three books), exemplifies Fijman's use of neologism. Perhaps his creation of words speaks to this knowledge that his own language is insufficient. A word like "*simplición*" implies the word "*simplificación*". *Simplición* is shorter though, and even simpler than the word to which it refers. He is reducing the spelling to broaden the semantics, to include a type of simplification that perhaps he does not quite know. The creation of new words—*simplición*, *sinfigura*, *indistante*—reflects Fijman's

continued search for knowledge of God through a worldview that is unique to the poet.

Finally, the presence of *beata* is overwhelming during Fijman's poetry in the years before his death. Beatification is the process of honoring/titling a holy and devout person after his/her death, decreed a venerable servant of God by the local diocese in the name of the Pope. Beatification is always posthumous; I believe it is unsurprising, then, that the term *beato/a* becomes so omnipresent in Fijman's work in the years before his death.

In late medieval and early modern Spain, the term *beata* described any woman who was noted for her devotion and frequent attendance of mass, though it also was used generally for nuns. In both cases these women wore habits, even if they were not officially members of a religious order, though those that were, often were linked to Franciscan or Dominican orders. Beginning in the sixteenth century, before the Spanish Baroque, *beatitas* came to be associated with Protestantism, termed "*alumbrados*," and were at times protected by high-ranking officials of the Spanish Church, but eventually at other pursued by the Inquisition with the edict of Toledo in 1525 enforced by Inquisitor General, Alonso Manrique.³² As a formed mystical sect in the early sixteenth century, the *beatitas* were known to enter into ecstatic states, to experience the stigmata, and to have visions of Christ, and many were exiled or forced to confess and punished. Notably, Santa Teresa de Jesús writes at the same time *beatitas* achieve more fame, and she generally made effort to differentiate herself from the sect.

³² The "*alumbrados*" of the mystical sect briefly discussed here do not refer to the "*alumbrados bávaros*", or *iluminati*, or the Spanish Enlightenment to occur during the 18th century.

Thus, the term *beata*, is paradoxical: a person, lay or otherwise, who is devoutly religious as well mystic who is reprimanded for being too unorthodox. It represents a person who, in desiring to express his/her faith, is repressed and marginalized. Fijman finds solidarity in the *beatas* in the following poem “Seráfica cosmogonía” (published without date):

Los bosques se ocultaron en el magno desierto;
el cuerpo onnipotente de una niña de tierra
trae el fuego del mundo;
y tú beata,
de ánima beata,
creas lumbre beata
de número formal de toda cosa:
el número formal
que numera al vestigio de la suprema esfera,
idéntico, beato,
de ánima beata,
de serafín á mar,
y serafín de mar.
un cuerpo onnipotente de una niña de tierra
trae el fuego del mundo. (*Obras* 263) ³³

The poem begins with two strong paradoxes: forests hiding in desert and a young, mortal girl holds god-like omnipotence. The *beata* herself is meta-*beata*: she possesses a *beata* soul, creating *beata* warmth/light. A *beato* appears, of the same

³³ Arias mentions in his collection that this poem was found first published in *Talismán* in 1969, though there is no original evidence of the date it was composed: “No hemos visto manuscrito ni copia dactilográfica” (263).

make and model as the *beata*, of seraphic provenance. Seraphs, or celestial beings, important in both Christian and Jewish angelic hierarchy, are often associated with heavenly or apotheostic works, and are mentioned in the Book of Revelation. No stranger to apotheosis or paradox, Fijman explores the notion of *beata* in this poem, to highlight the struggle of such an ardent believer.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, Fijman is able, in his own way, to establish his canon, that expresses a proprietary blend of Catholicism and Judaism, derived from his poetry. His canon is a body of poetry, which is consistently “Fijman” during the span of his lifetime and to which he is fiercely loyal. Fijman is a devout believer, through and through, and the “Fijmanistic” canon he produces highlights his acts of faith, as he understands them. As he says, “...mis obras prueban que no sólo soy un hombre de real razón, sino de razón de gracia” (*Talismán* NP). Fijman uses paradox to his advantage, to underscore the immanent and transcendent aspects of his poetry, as is particularly showcased here in a selection of a poem titled “Cántico trascendente” (1963):

Las estrellas se fugan en el mar y la noche
donde encuentra su imagen la belleza fugada.
Pero también la noche en todo el mar
transfigura sus partes en la noche. (Fijman 76)

Fijman depicts nocturnal stars, which in their escape, discover their own beauty. And the night at sea, in turn, transforms its parts into/during nighttime. Fijman pieces together a cosmogony that supports his canon. He never strays from

his belief system; a conversion which ultimately forms and informs his worldview from every possible angle. Likewise, CV's conversion results in a belief system from which is also does not stray, influences his poetry and essays during the pre- and post-revolutionary period. On speaking of his own version of Cuban cosmogony, CV tells us in 1959, "[h]ay así en la poesía cubana la coherencia de un destino. Ella nos habla de un hombre, que al llegar a la plenitud viril, quiere conquistar su espacio y su tiempo" (Vitier, "Prólogo" *Las mejores poesías* NP). The coherence of a destiny drives CV's search for a personal and national poetic discourse. In conquering his own space and time in Cuban history, CV, among the other members of *Orígenes* will determine the effects of the revolution, effecting change and building their version of national identity. In the following chapter, I analyze how Brazilian writer, Clarice Lispector, also of pluralistic origin, seeks out her own cosmogonies by writing a psychologically-stirring lyrical novel.

Chapter Four—Lispector's mysticity

INTRODUCTION: LISPECTOR'S JEWISH, LYRICAL NOVEL

This last chapter serves to examine Clarice Lispector's novel *A paixão segundo G.H.: romance* (1964), and the degree to which the author writes mysticism into the lone, female protagonist.³⁴ My dissertation will conclude with the analysis of a lyrical novel whose narration exemplifies Zambrano's poiesis because it presents fractured grammar and mysticist apostrophe. In this chapter, I discuss Lispector's own identification as Brazilian and Jewish. However, my main purpose is provide another case study for mysticity vis-à-vis: 1) Lispector's "displaced" writing style and the protagonist's relationship to the reader, 2) a naming ritual, 3) alternate definitions of the word *barata* (cockroach) in Brazilian Portuguese, (as the protagonist's interaction with a cockroach is the central event of the narrative); and 4) the protagonist's concept of God. Much scholarship has been dedicated to establishing whether or not Lispector is a Jewish writer or whether her writing is Jewish; nevertheless, it is not my intention to pursue this avenue or corroborate the assertions of any particular scholar. I will allude to the enormous body of scholarship dedicated to examining Jewish allusions in *G.H.*, but my interest instead is to support my argument for mysticity. I argue that Lispector's thematic preferences in *G.H.*, as well as her manner of writing both contribute to a mysticist reading. My questions will concern the following: Is there a mystical union present? What does G.H.'s process of self-actualization reveal? Does Lispector use

³⁴ All textual citations in this chapter of *G.H.* are from the 1984 edition (Rio de Janeiro, Nova Fronteira). I additionally use Benedito Nunes's 1985 critical edition (Rio de Janeiro, Nova Fronteira) and cite it accordingly.

paratactical structures to foment mysticality, and likewise, what role does semantic paradox play in my mystical reading? I will first introduce the text and discuss some overall plot points to familiarize the reader. Next, I will provide some biographical information regarding Lispector to explain how her environment may have affected her writing. Afterwards, I will look at the way Hélène Cixous read Lispector's work, as she was an avid fan and critic of the Brazilian writer, which will support a mysticist interpretation. Finally, I will conclude with a variety of close readings to show how I evidence mysticality in the novel *G.H.*

The narrative of *G.H.* is simplistic in terms of plot. *G.H.*, a woman of high social class, narrates the events of the prior day: she ventures into her maid's room while no one is home (and the maid has recently been fired). Upon entering, *G.H.* describes luggage tags with her initials on them, which is how the reader learns her name. The protagonist then spends a great deal of time observing a charcoal drawing on the wall of three figures—a man, woman, and a dog. She describes what she perceives as their non-uniformity in that they do not actually form a group. And finally, the last “event” of the novel details *G.H.*'s discovery of a cockroach in the room. Her disgust and intrigue cause her to question everything about the cockroach, from the symbolism of its ancestors to the meaning of its bodily fluids. Finally, she kills and consumes the insect. The plot is concluded with *G.H.* recalling the parallels of humanity to the suffering of Jesus Christ. The protagonist never reveals what city she lives in, though many assume it to be Rio de Janeiro.

SCHOLASTIC DEBATE CONCERNING LISPECTOR'S JEWISH IDENTITY

First, I will briefly consider the existing scholarship that analyzes the Jewishness of *G.H.* Lispector engages with a variety of Jewish tropes—the desert, the

mystical abyss, the unknowing/impersonability of God—yet she artfully defies any categorical association with any particular genre, even that of the Jewish or feminist. She is supremely subversive and achieves a new rendering of Jewish mystical perspective in this novel. Lindstrom supports that “Lispector’s allusions to items that are specific to particular cultural traditions may reasonably be suspected of making ironic and parodic use of these borrowings, or of transforming them in other ways” (“Patterns” 111).

Ilan Stavans argues that a work of literature itself is not necessarily Jewish: it is the author that is so (*Tropical Synagogues* 1). In this sense, the author may imbue his/her work with qualities that reflect the Jewish author’s ethnic or religious background but a text, as it stands independent from its author, is neither Jewish nor non-Jewish.³⁵ Conversely, other Jewish critics see the narrative itself as Jewish, though the question here that arises is whether or not a Gentile could produce such a text. An alternate position is that of Nelson Vieira who explains that (whether or not the text or author is Jewish) there does exist a “Jewish gaze” particularly in light of his research on Lispector, which revealed what little importance she gave to her Jewish identity as an influence on her work. He quotes her as saying, “sou judia, você sabe. Mas não acredito nessa besteira de judeu ser o povo eleito de Deus. Não é coisa nenhuma...Eu, enfim, sou brasileira, pronto e ponto” (“Clarice Lispector” 117). Vieira believes she did rely on aspects of Jewish literary expression, subtly incorporating “spiritual and hermeneutical aspects of her Jewish cultural legacy into her unique style” and in so doing she “transcended the parameters of literary mimesis” (*Jewish Voices* 101). This transcendent gaze reflects a Jewish history (according to Vieira)

³⁵ This questioning relates to Foucault’s idea of the author himself and how the genealogy of writers either does or does not manifest in a work of literature.

and I believe this gaze is what propels her interpretive openness, allowing for compounded interpretations. Therefore, Lispector's inclusion of Jewish tropes arguably speaks to an inheritance of Jewish writers. Daphne Patai offers the most pan-Christian-Judeo critique in discussing the "generalized mystical language" (e.g. Jewish tropes referring to the Kabbalah) used in the novel stating that this language could be drawn from multiple sources ("Clarice Lispector: Myth and Mystification" 91). Especially given what we know about Lispector's own identity-forging, it seems impossible to conclude beyond any doubt that one aspect or another is decisively Jewish. Patai explains, "[b]ut a knowledge of these perspectives [Zen Buddhism, St. John of the Cross, Meister Eckhart] can itself lead to the conscious adoption of a typical 'mystical style,' which may present itself as the legitimate alternative to silence. This is apparently the path Lispector has chosen in her novel" (92). I think it is more realistic to acknowledge a potentially pluralistic reading, than to adamantly prefer any other influence, especially since G.H. herself, the protagonist, is not overtly Jewish. As Lindstrom points out, "[a]mong many Latin American writers from Jewish family backgrounds, Clarice Lispector, with her playful and creative use of language and multiple meanings...manifests her Jewish origin in her writing [and] does so in an exceedingly cryptic manner" ("Patterns" 111). In short, the presence of mystical language supports my argument and serves only to enhance Lispector's linguistic alterity producing mysticality.

Further scholars, such as Mario Valdés, discuss Paul Ricoeur's notions of ostensive and non-ostensive referents, which directly dialogue with Lispector's treatment of Jewishness (*A Ricoeur Reader* 35). If, for Lispector, the ostensive referent is Jewish mysticism, then the non-ostensive referent is the subversion she manifests in establishing and playing with this Jewish gaze. The non-ostensive

referent, for Ricoeur, is always extra-linguistic, that is, outside the means of language, and this chapter will serve to examine how Lispector herself view the role of language, in addition to how it stimulates mysticality. Valdés takes this a step further to delineate between “sedimentation” (ostensive) and that which is “innovation” (non-ostensive). G.H.’s journey to the basic substratum of herself, from self to cockroach and back again, precisely lies outside the context of language; it is non-ostensive and un-knowable. Though, as I will discuss, Lispector uses language to express what she knows might be inexpressible. She explains, “[m]inhas intuições se tornam mais claras ao esforço de transpô-las em palavras” (Waldman 20). Despite the fact that writing might be a transgression, for Lispector, it is the only methodological approach to expression. Transgression, as a trope, is evident throughout the novel.

LISPECTOR’S MIGRATION

Born in Chechelnyk, in what is now Ukraine, to a Jewish family of Lithuanian descent, Chaya Pinkhasovna Lispector (1920-1977), migrated to Brazil as a child escaping the Russian Civil War. Upon arriving to Brazil, the whole family changed their first names except for one sister, Tania. Chaya, now Clarice, together with her family are led by Father Pinkus (Pedro) and mother Mania (Marieta). By way of Romania and Austria, the Lispectors were able to make it to Brazil in 1923, settling first in Alagoas and later in Recife, where Lispector stayed until she was seventeen (1937). Marieta, ill and bed-ridden, died when Lispector was nine years old. Indicating that her first language was Portuguese when asked if she spoke Russian at home, Lispector insisted that her father spoke Portuguese as soon as they arrived to Brazil (“Recontres” 33). However, Elisa (the older sister) indicated that their

mother spoke Yiddish to them and that Jewish rituals were practiced in the home (Marting, "I never set foot" 89). While Lispector indicated she herself had a "speech defect" (uma lingua presa), Diane Marting explains that "interviewers often insinuated that she had a foreign accent" (89). Regardless, Lispector felt her birth in Ukraine was "irrelevant to her life choices, and thus her own self-image...[h]er place of birth is merely one of many places outside Brazil where she has traveled, literally or in her imagination" (91).

An excellent student, Lispector was raised in an environment where writing and education were praised. She received a Jewish education at the Colégio Hebreo-Idisch-Brasileiro and was then accepted into the most prestigious secondary school, Ginásio Pernambucano. Pedro was insistent that he find Jewish husbands for his daughters and moved the family to Rio de Janeiro (capital city at the time) in 1937 where he also hoped to encounter more economic opportunity. Pedro was a self-taught student of the Bible and the Talmud in addition to being an excellent mathematician (Vieira, *Jewish Voices* 104). It seems natural, then, that he encouraged scholasticism and the study of language. Thus, it should come as no surprise that, as Vieira points out, "Lispector's evocative language [is] a reflection of the mystic's journey beyond literal or rational meaning" (105). And many years after Marieta's death, Lispector discovered that her mother kept a diary and wrote poetry (110). In short, Lispector grew up in a family of writers who appreciated the study of the written word.

Lispector entered The National School of Law (Faculdade Nacional de Direito) in 1940 and while a student there published her first story, "Triunfo," in the magazine "Pan" in 1940, though shortly thereafter her father died. At the age of twenty, Lispector has already escaped violence in her native Ukraine, the death of

both of her parents, and at twenty-three she married a foreign service diplomat, Maury Gurgel Valente. In 1943 she publishes her first novel *Perto do Coração Selvagem* and also is a journalist for “Agência Nacional,” a state-run, (Vargas regime) newspaper as well as at “A Noite,” as the lone female employee (Waldman 15). As a result perhaps, Lispector downplayed the significance of her Jewishness—importantly, I point out that as the wife of a foreign service diplomat, and journalist for a state-run publication, it seems likely Lispector was interested in assimilation. As previously mentioned, Lispector enforced her Brazilianness, sublimating any importance of her Jewish identity. Her reticence to admit to being Jewish could arguably be due to her desire to assimilate given her career and family choices.

While in Washington D.C. due to her husband's assignment, Lispector forms friendships with Erico Veríssimo and his wife Mafalda in addition to Alzira Vargas, the daughter of Getúlio Vargas. It is during this time (the 1950s) that she begins publishing short stories in “Senhor” magazine in Rio de Janeiro, which might have increased her longing to return to her homeland. By 1959, she had become so unsettled by the foreign diplomat lifestyle that she left her husband in the U.S. and returned to Brazil with her two sons, living the rest of her life in Rio.

Thus, during the time Lispector was growing up in Brazil, Getúlio Vargas was in power, first between 1930 and 1945 as a dictator and later from 1951-1954 as a democratically-elected official. Marking the end of the Old Republic, Vargas was brought to power by the Revolution of 1930, which repealed the constitution of 1891. Leaders of several Brazilian states, Minas Gerais, Paraíba and Rio Grande do Sul, initiated an armed movement in response to failed elections earlier that year. Despite democratically electing the government's candidate, Júlio Prestes, the former never took office due to the coup and Vargas was instated instead. During

the 1920s the Old Republic was experiencing a crisis due to the ever-mobilizing industrial workers, particularly in the rural states of Minas Gerais and São Paulo, whose socio-political ideals were influenced heavily from European Nazism and Fascism (Loewenstein, *Brazil Under Vargas* 348).

This political background serves to demonstrate the environment Lispector grew up in, having lived in Brazil since childhood. Although I would not argue that any of her writing (*G.H.* or her other works) is in direct dialogue with the Vargas regime, I believe that Lispector favors a variety of rhetorical techniques that reflect in some way the political turbulence of her childhood years, as she fights against the grain, lexically and syntactically. According to Marta Peixoto, João Guimarães Rosa (undisputed master of Brazilian twentieth century novels) perceived Lispector's writing as follows:

Lispector's linguistic inventiveness centers not so much on the lexical level, on the use of unusual words or neologism (in which Rosa himself excelled), but rather on syntactical contortions and strange juxtapositions, creating semantic pressures that unsettle the meaning of words and concepts.
(*Passionate Fictions* xii)

I would suggest that Lispector's defiance of routine narrative and preference for unsettling paradox do reflect the contortions of her environment, as a wife of a diplomat, mother of two sons, and talented writer. Thus, I argue that Lispector's unorthodox methods of writing are expressions of mysticity that echo the unsettled environment in which she found herself.

LISPECTOR'S READER: A WARNING?

I aim to examine how Lispector responded to her milieu, the personal and political, in order to better understand why mysticality plays such a central role in G.H. She was always an active writer and journalist, and (as earlier mentioned) when she was unhappy in her marriage, she made changes, left her husband and together with her sons returned to Brazil. For this reason, she certainly can be described as decisive. In Benedito Nunes's annotated edition of *A paixão segundo G.H.* (Brazil 1988), critic and friend of Lispector, Olga Borelli, offers a prologue entitled "A Difícil Definição." In it, she describes an epistolary friendship she developed with Lispector after having read *G.H.* herself, feeling compelled to get in touch with the author (xx). Lispector explains to Borelli how she feels about her role in her family life and how she perceives herself as mother, writer, and human, describing:

Nasci para amar os outros, nasci para escrever e nasci para criar meus filhos. O amar os outros é tão vasto que inclui até perdão para mim mesma com o que sobre. Amar os outros é a única salvação individual que conheço: ninguém estará perdido /se der amor e às vezes receber amor em troca. (xxii)

Lispector's grand capacity for love and for the consideration of her family are at the heart of why she believes she is alive. She explains that no one could possibly be alone or lost if they love another. I argue that writing, for Lispector, is the expression of this love; she spends copious amounts of energy forcing an intense writing schedule, just as she spends time with her children. An astoundingly introspective person, she even takes into consideration how her own emotions affect her judgment, "[e]stou me cuidando muito. Procurando não viver na base do emocional...Estou escrevendo as 2 da madrugada, mas em plena forma" (xxii). It

appears that she might have repressed, or at least quelled her emotional state, to force a habit of writing in the early morning. According to Borelli, “[n]unca escreveu para desabafar ou como catarse. Para isso, dizia ela, tenho os amigos” (xxii). Borelli draws this conclusion because Lispector clearly states the type of reader she writes for, a reader who has “uma alma já formada.” But does this statement necessarily preclude her writing from being a catharsis of some kind? If she isn’t writing for cathartic purposes, then why does she write? As Vieira often points out, Lispector abhorred categorization, so I believe, simply, she writes to transcend categories. Vieira supports this argument, positing, “[h]er writing transcends the social notion of oppression, marginalization, and victimization because she focused upon the problematics of a fixed identity or existence” (*Jewish Voices* 101). As I will discuss, Lispector wrote because she felt she needed to; it was an effort to understand her provenance.

Borelli does make a fascinating statement about both the content and syntax of her writing, “Clarice escrevia simplesmente. Como quem vive. Por isso todas as vezes que foi tentada a deixar de escrever, não conseguiu. Dizia: ‘Não tenho vocação para o suicídio’” (xxii). Suicide—allegory for the greatest version of giving up—is not an immanent quality for Lispector. Instead, she marshals the feelings that result from her day-and-night intensive introspection and (one of) the products is *G.H.* She instructs her potential reader:

A Possíveis Leitores

Este livro é como um livro qualquer. Mas eu ficaria contente se fossa lido apenas por pessoas de alma já formada. Aquelas que sabem que a aproximação, do que quer que seja, se faz gradualmente e penosamente—atravessando inclusive o

oposto daquilo de que se vai aproximar. Aquelas pessoas que, só elas, entenderão bem devagar que este livro nada tira de ninguém. A mim, por exemplo, o personagem G.H. foi dando pouco a pouco uma alegria difícil; mas chama-se alegria. (NP)

She presents the idea that someone with a “fully forged” soul is the only one to take on G.H. And it reads like a possible warning to her “possible readers.” Lispector cautions that the idea of approaching something, even if with circumspection, can result in the opposite of the desired effect. Perhaps she means to say that this is what happened to her after writing this book. Caufield does point out, “[f]or the reading subject, G.H. is a fictional creation that is evoked through the act of reading; for G.H., who is narrating subject, the reader is a fiction that she evokes, but who is not there” (“Clarice Lispector’s *The Passion*” 404). Borelli says that Lispector was in a difficult moment, both in terms of her family and her own emotional health. However, Borelli claims that the “livro, porém, não reflete nada sobre esse momento de crise. A inspiração era algo muito especial e que nem sempre a visitava” (xxiii). Although Borelli knew Lispector well, I would suggest that claiming with certainty that Lispector was not at all influenced by her life in writing *G.H.*, is a difficult statement to make. Borelli supports this claim by stating that during a period of eight years, Lispector never wrote one word, and then suddenly, from a single breath, *G.H.* was born. She does not specifically cite a letter or communication with Lispector to indicate that *G.H.* was the product of one inspiration, thus making it a difficult claim to support. I posit, instead, that if Lispector did produce *G.H.* in one fell swoop, as it were, that the circumstances of her surroundings must have had influence on this swift and abrupt return to writing. What might have caused this cleavage in her life?

To answer this, I turn to Borelli's suggestion that God was an "intimate possibility" for Lispector, reiterating that she seemed to always be in search of something (xxiii). Still, search for something, whether it be for self or for a transcendental alternate/higher meaning, does not necessarily precipitate a mysticist reading. A questioning or transforming of the language itself is also necessary. Lispector's novel does intimately showcase her search for something, though I suggest the search for self is mystical only in terms of my definition of mysticity. Her language, her use of punctuation, her lyrical, non-linear plot, the lack of action (other than the entrance into the room and the killing of the cockroach) all are rhetorical devices Lispector employs that mimic mystical writing. In the end, however, what the protagonist achieves, through the consumption of the organic cockroach, is the re-wiring of the self through its own meta-union. There is no union with God, and as such, I argue this novel is not mystical in the traditional theological sense. Mystical language and structures are used to support the protagonist's pursuit of meaning, which ultimately is located within. Sonia Roncador discusses Lispector's "impulso autobiográfico" indicating that *G.H.* or *Água viva* "não havia nenhuma intenção da autora de que seus textos possam ser lidos como autobiografias. E somente a partir da publicação de "A via cruce do corpo" (1974) que Clarice envereda pelo caminho autobiográfico" (114). Nunes likewise offers the theory that, despite *G.H.* and *Água viva* containing first-person narrative, they do not necessarily represent the author herself, that the "eu" could be an impersonal "I" or merely anonymous. Of course, we determine an author's autobiography by the author's own statement that this is the case.

I turn, instead, to the notion of auto-representation. In terms of an argument using mysticity, Lispector's daily experiences influenced the way in which she

wrote her protagonist. Roncador goes on to suggest that in Lispector's novels published before 1974 (hence including *G.H.*) there is a clear element of "auto-representação" (114). It is this notion of auto-representation that informs this chapter's analysis. Minimally, auto-representation in *G.H.*, in my view, becomes *G.H.*'s own perception of herself, a meta-representation perhaps. The reader experiences what *G.H.* experiences, instigating *G.H.*'s representation of herself in the novel, manifest for the reader. Thus, I cite Roncador again, "[c]omo Clarice quisesse vincular a sua escrita ao momento específico de sua produção, ela prove informações sobre o tempo o lugar onde os contos do livro são escritos, como também sobre seu propriedade no naquele momento em particular" (115). Roncador speaks here of Lispector's short stories, "O homem que apraeceu", "Por enquanto" and "Dia apos dia". However, I suggest, then, as I have throughout this dissertation, that it is impossible to divorce a writer from his/her environment. Ultimately, then, Lispector's *G.H.* was created with some purpose that represents her circumstances, even though it is not autobiographical. The rest of my analysis in this chapter does not examine whether or not Lispector was inserting herself into her text; rather I scrutinize the circumstances in which she wrote *G.H.* (socio-political environment) to suggest *why* *G.H.* was created. Lispector herself says in *Água viva*, "There is much I cannot tell you. I am not going to be autobiographical. I want to be 'bio'" (40). The notion of "bio" implies biological, human, humanistic. She aims to write the human experience: an experience that necessarily reflects her own life, but also necessarily that of everyone else. "I am all of yourselves", she declares in *Um sopro da vida: Pulsacoes* and the reader must take it seriously (25).

WHY WORDS ARE LISPECTOR'S MYSTICISM

Lispector tells us “A palavra tem o seu terrível limite” (Nunes xxiii). Just like Vitier recognizes the terrible restraint of words, that they are merely an *umbral*, Lispector is similarly aware that words on a page do not constitute the entirety of human expression. Yet, they are her only recourse. Caufield suggests, “Lispector’s fiction utilizes discourse as the means of elucidating ontology...there is a self-reflexive awareness of the limitation of language and an acknowledgement of the impossibility of designating or representing the remnant” (Caufield 404). That is, being acutely conscious and explicitly verbal about the parameters language enforces proves Lispector’s self-awareness. Arguably, she inserts this element of self-awareness into the novel, either by way of her protagonist’s actions and words, or by her very own act of writing *G.H.* itself. She admits multiple times to Waldman, among others, “[e]u nasci para escrever. Minha liberdade é escrever. A palavra é o meu domínio sobre o mundo” (Waldman 10). Presumably, when asked why she writes, Lispector answers in a manner that is both rhetorical questioning and direct response:

Quem sabe, escrevo por não saber pintar. Escrevo sobretudo porque a vida é mortal mesmo antes de uma pessoa realmente morrer. Escrevo porque o que é que eu faria dessa onda de amor que as vezes existe em mim? Escrevo por amor? Escrevo...o que mais poderia fazer, se não escrevesse? Escrevo porque, se doi muito escrever, não escrever doi também e mais. Escrevo por que amo e odeio o mundo? Escrevo para saber porque nasci. E as vezes escrevo como quem da de comer a mim e aos outros, igual ao que você fez comigo. (Waldman 13-14)

Writing is a revelatory process; it informs Lispector's understanding of herself, explaining "why she was born." If words are her mechanism of "dominion" over the world before her, then she cannot conceive of any other way to manage her thoughts. Writing is her only remedy; as such, her use of mystical language enhances this self-described dominion.

Benedito Nunes mentions a variety of critics and their mystical interpretation of Lispector's *G.H.*:

Exemplo das novas condições da recepção crítica é o diálogo mantido por três importantes professores brasileiros: Benedito Nunes, Luís Costa Lima e Affonso Romano de Sant'Anna. Se o primeiro fala de uma "via mística" no itinerário de GH, o segundo de uma "mística ao revés" e o terceiro de um critério estrutural (as observações deste último referem-se aos contos da escritora—para ele, uma "contingencia", já que poderia estendê-las aos romances), eles se encontram quando apontam a associação simétrica tema-linguagem, processo enunciativo básico de *A Paixão Segundo G.H.* e do conjunto da obra de Clarice Lispector. (Nunes, *Vozes da Crítica* 203)

All of the aforementioned scholars cite some degree of mysticism ("via mística" or "mysticism in reverse"), which this chapter does not serve to wholly deny. However, I argue that it is mysticality, rather than any sort of mysticism proper, that best describes Lispector's novel. It is precisely because of Lispector's recognition that words merit only their limits, that mysticality is the best interpretation.³⁶

³⁶My arguments for mysticality are furthered in the "Elemental Analysis" sections.

One of the aforementioned critics, Affonso Romano de Sant'Anna, discusses the role of language in *G.H.* In "O ritual epifânico do texto," (1976) Sant'Anna states that Lispector's narration penetrates, "no laberinto mágico, místico e metafísico" (241). Lispector's narrative "labyrinth" responds to Lispector's creation of "stretched" or "scattered" (*espraiar*) textual events that somehow still remain in contact. He goes on, "[s]eu processo narrativo é assim: o texto é uma massa que vai se espraiando sobre o papel em círculos concêntricos" (242). For Sant'Anna, despite the scatterdness, the concentric nature of her narration keeps the storyline in check. Finally, Sant'Anna puts forth a variety of descriptors about *G.H.*, a few of which I will highlight here:

1. A narrativa de A Paixão Segundo G.H. como epifania literária, psicológica e mística.
2. A narrativa epifânica como ritual. G.H. é de passagem. A percepção de narrativa como exercício de *liminaridade*. (243)

I am most interested in Sant'Anna's expression of *G.H.* as "epiphany" in the sense that something new is revealed or illuminated in a singular instant at every step of the text, thus making it ritualistic. A psychological or mystical essence is intuitively grasped by either G.H. or the reader, as the narration progresses through this "passage" (*passagem*). By exercising this "mystical practice" so consistently in the narrative, Lispector achieves a mystical reality for her protagonist and a mysticalist reading for the reader.

Borelli suggests that Lispector, "...vivia num atualismo místico, Deus era a sua mais íntima possibilidade. Pelo conhecimento que dela tive notei que sua acao na vida sempre correspondia a uma busca" (xxiii). The notion that Lispector was "in search" of something does not inevitably presuppose a mystical existence. However,

the suggestion that God was “her most intimate possibility” does support a mystical reading. But how does Lispector achieve this? I will argue in the “Elemental Analysis” sections of this chapter that it is Lispector’s syntax and paradoxical semantics that prove mysticality, not the mere “search for self.” It is as much the grammar of the transcendent and the constant rhetorical apostrophe that generate a mysticalist interpretation. G.H., Lispector’s protagonist in *A paixão Segundo G.H.* states, “[a]lém do mais a ‘psicologia’ nunca me interessou. O olhar psicológico me impacientava e me impacienta, é um instrumento que só transpassa. Acho que desde a adolescência eu havia saído do estágio do psicológico.” (21). G.H. believes that the psychological gaze/examination is excessive; it is a recourse that the protagonist has overcome long ago, during adolescence. As a psychiatrist can explain the psyche, but not the soul; G.H. believes the yearning-questioning she experiences throughout the novel cannot fully be explained by psychology. Therefore, psychology provides no comforting remedy, and G.H. does not have the patience for it. I believe, just as the “warning” to potential readers, Lispector, (through G.H.) posits that a reductionist understanding of her novel—that it is a simple, psychology quandary—is not enough.

This struggle for meaning is present in Lispector’s other works as well. In her foreword to the 1989 translated version of *Água viva* (*The Stream of Life*) Hélène Cixous writes about Lispector’s manner of writing. Cixous beautifully describes Lispector’s usage of poiesis (though never calling it such):

In *Close to the Savage Heart*, Clarice had recourse to the geometric form of the circle of life. *Água viva* is its realization and its representation...The problem is that to delve into “the instant-already” is complicated by the fact that we deal with

depth and that the latter cannot be measured by watch alone...Themes relate to life: there is the constant inscription of birth in innumerable ways. It is a process that recurs from circle to circle, often dealing with the birth of the subject itself, the birth of moments of the subject. First, there of moments of gestation during all the moments of gestation. ("Foreword", *The Stream of Life* x)

Cixous's arguments here dovetail with argument about mysticality. Although Cixous discusses Lispector's first novel *Perto ao coração selvagem* and as well as *Água viva*, I will elucidate Cixous's comments in relation to G.H. Cixous's marvelous "instant-already" describes the mystical process evident in G.H., a process that is at once evolving and also the finalized product at the same time. It is simultaneously lyrical-poetic creation and manifestation, in short, Zambrano's poiesis. Cixous also insists that "[t]hemes [of the book, i.e., depth of the self] relate to life"; making certain that what Lispector writes is constantly inscribed in herself. *G.H.* echoes these encircling "Lispector experiences" in considering the character of G.H. If "the birth of the subject itself" as Cixous argues, persists from "circle to circle," then Lispector bears the subject of G.H. again and again. In reading G.H. there is a clear exploration, through figurative mud and brambles, to attempt to see who G.H. might be, to herself and to the reader. Nunes explains that this multi-faceted approach to G.H., the protagonist, offers the reader a multi-focal approach to the novel:

A experiência de GH, que procuramos circunscrever em seu aspecto confessional, abstraindo as circunstâncias da narrativa, é uma experiência multivocal. A via mística, eixo dessa experiência em torno da qual a ação romanesca se

esquematiza, é uma via aberta a múltiplos temas, como a linguagem e a arte, entramos ao da busca espiritual, e que são fundamentais ao desenvolvimento da narrativa. (Nunes, *Leitura de Lispector* 60)

THE RITUAL OF NAMING TO EXPRESS MYSTICALITY

In the following section I suggest that Lispector included a “naming ceremony” for her protagonist, which one could argue parallels the Jewish naming rituals for babies. The forthcoming analysis of this Jewish cultural and religious event, serves, I believe, as a type of Jewish sedimentation (here Ricoeur’s sedimentation) for Lispector, but nothing is sedimented, that is, forcefully or traditionally Jewish. Lispector parallels the multiplier effect of the search for knowledge and therefore God, and in her case, the search for self. I question the usage of the initials G.H. as additional religious allusion. The reader learns they are the initials of the protagonist as viewed on a luggage tag when she enters the maid’s quarters. No additional information is ever given by Lispector as to the relevance or choice of these letters, other than that they belong to the protagonist. Vieira points out, “the first-person narrative of this novel is only known by her initials G.H., thereby turning the text’s compass toward an ontological direction of identity that points to universal issues of self, otherness, nothingness, self-knowledge, exile, action, and possibly redemption” (“Clarice Lispector’s Jewish Universe” 103). She reveals early on, in the second chapter, that she is named G.H. It is the first “event” upon entering the room, before the analysis of the “family portrait.” Thus, the presentation of the initials is significant in that 1) it occurs so early on, and as such, 2) catalyzes the rest of the novel’s events under the notion specifically of how G.H.

perceives herself, how (un)connected she is to the labels that are ascribed to her. She explains:

Nunca, então, havia eu de pensar que um dia iria de contorno a este silencio. Ao estilhaçamento do silencio...Esse—apenas esse—foi o meu maior contato comigo mesma?

G.H. first establishes that she has never, ever been faced with such silence. And in order to reconcile such a novel experience, she immediately turns to self-actualization and classification: a name.

O resto—o resto eram sempre as organizações de mim mesa, agora sei, ah, agora eu sei. O resto era modo como pouco a pouco eu havia me transformado na pessoa que tem o meu nome. E acabei sendo o meu nome. E suficiente ver no couro de minhas valises as iniciais G.H., e eis-me. (21)

The protagonist is transformed into the person that owns her name and she eventually turns into the name itself. It is arguable that this polysyndeton could be described as a kind of circumlocution—instead of just simply stating “Eu sou G.H.,” G.H. describes the encircling of the name, like a speck of dirt going down the drain. There is an approach to the name from various points but eventually they are so many that the name, together with the person it represents, is sucked downward as the water rushes through the pipes and gravity takes its course. And for the first time, the protagonist refers to herself in the third person: “A G.H. vivera muito, quero dizer, vivera muitos fatos” before going on to examine what her life has meant so far (21). Referring to herself both in first- and third-person is both a semantic and conjugational method of creating distance, or maybe confusion. Perhaps it also reveals the internal turmoil experienced by G.H., having entered for the first time a

location that should be known to her, but is novel and mysterious (her maid's room). After being "named," G.H. reveals a litany of questions:

--para ficar depressa livre do meu destino humano menor? E ficar livre para buscar a minha tragédia. Minha tragédia estava em alguma parte. Onde estava o meu destino maior...A tragédia—que é a Aventura maior—nunca se realizara em mim. Só o meu destino pessoal era o que eu conhecia. E o que eu queria. (21)

It is perhaps logical to conclude that the "tragedy" G.H. speaks of refers to lack of economic need, i.e., she does not know what it means to suffer as she is a well-to-do woman. I suggest, however, that after receiving a name and conceptualizing herself as this mutual first- and third-person she is at a precipice, and knows it. What could possibly happen, what tragedy or adventure that she has never experienced, awaits?

The letters "G" and "H" are concurrent in the Portuguese alphabet. They are also the seventh and eighth letters. Many scholars such as Vieira, Lindstrom, Waldman, and Schiminovich have discussed the presence or lack of a literary Jewishness, but I believe the mere letters of G.H.'s name indicate, minimally, a Biblical reference. The seventh day, in Genesis, is the first day of rest for God, after he has completed his task of creating and ordering the world. The eighth day, therefore, might represent this very same mystery, perhaps tragedy or adventure, that is unknown to humankind. G.H.'s own name propels her on a trajectory so forceful that she will be flung off the edge into the world and must survive with nothing more than what she knows about herself. And she knows only her name.

If we take into consideration that Lispector did come from a Jewish family,

her mother speaking to her in Yiddish until she was nine, I think it is possible to examine this naming ceremony as potentially an echo of Jewish culture (Marting, “I never set foot” 89). Thus, in Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist families, a “b’rit milah” (for boys) “b’rit bat” (for girls), a Jewish baby naming ceremony, is performed to don the newborn with a Hebrew name in addition to his/her English/secular name. Rabbi Karen Companez of Flint, MI explains the details of the baby naming ceremony’s purpose:

During the ceremony, there is an opportunity for the parents of the new baby to explain their choice of name and its significance to them. Blessings are said during the ceremony acknowledging that the child has been entered into a brit, a covenant, with God. Blessings are also recited for the baby’s well-being. The traditional wish is offered - that this child may grow into a life of study of Torah, of loving relationships, and the performance of good deeds. (reformjudaism.org)

For boys, this ceremony takes place on the eighth day after birth, coinciding with the circumcision, and for girls it can be on the eighth day or thereafter. Doubly significant is G.H.’s own naming ceremony. Just a baby is new in the world, unaware and naïve, so too is G.H. in the maid’s room, completely unfamiliar with what is happening to her at any given moment in the text and what may come to pass. G.H. knows her destiny, she says, but her greatest tragedy or adventure lies waiting. She names herself in her own ceremony and the name itself reflects new beginnings of unknown adventure.

It is true that naming ceremonies are not unique to Jewish culture. In relation to what has just been presented, however, I do not believe this not is a coincidence.

Lispector belongs to a Jewish family; Jewish babies are named on the eighth day (or after), “G” and “H” and the seventh and eighth days letters of the alphabet; and finally, the passage of the novel described is, in my view, a ritual enacted to bestow a name. I believe it can be reasonably argued, given Lispector’s penchant for semantic complexities, that this mere encounter with a luggage tag is, in fact, a naming ceremony key to the plot of the novel.

CIXOUS’S LISPECTOR

In the following section, I will address how Cixous read Lispector in an effort to gauge what aspects of feminism speak to the evidence of mysticality. As argued above, it is paramount that this “naming” occurs first. The sequence of events occurs as such: 1) Naming of G.H., 2) Observation of “self” in charcoal drawing, 3) Interaction with cockroach, and 4) Understanding of self. G.H.’s adventure leads her down a path that, while inducing vertigo in the reader, is actually quite systematic. There is a purpose and a plan, though G.H., like the reader, becomes dizzy in the vehicle on the bumpy, switch-backed road leading her there. It is my belief that all of these techniques (and the order in which they are presented) serve to highlight my reading of mysticality. In order to further understand the significance of these systematic events permitting a reading of mysticality, I turn to Cixous. Cixous was an avid reader of Lispector, writing several books about her work, one of which I will highlight here, *Reading with Clarice Lispector* (1990). It is significant to note that Cixous never wrote a specific study about *G.H.*, though she references it often in her analysis of Lispector’s other novels and short stories.³⁷ Verena Adnermatt Conley,

³⁷Given Cixous’s works’s importance to this dissertation, I would be remiss in not addressing the way she read Lispector’s novels and short stories. Any comments I make in linking Cixous to *G.H.* are my

editor and translator of Cixous's *Reading with Clarice Lispector*, speaks overtly about the way Cixous reads Lispector as a female writer:

In the relation that Cixous holds with Lispector, *écriture* feminine is a working term referring less to a writing practiced mainly by women than, in a broader logical category, to textual ways of spending. It suggests a writing, based on an encounter with another—be it a body, a piece of writing, a social dilemma, a moment of passion—that leads to an undoing of the hierarchies and oppositions that determine the limits of most conscious life. (Conley xii)

Certainly Lispector's *G.H.* has an encounter with an "other" (many of such "others" surface during the course of the narration) and Cixous's "undoing of hierarchies" is transparent, I argue, in the transgressions performed by *G.H.* in dealing with these "others." It is true that both Lispector and her protagonist are female, but it is more the sense of unraveling a status quo of emplotment and narrative that permit Lispector's *G.H.* to fall within *écriture* feminine.

Cixous discusses the journey in *G.H.* "in proximity to a vital experience"; here, referencing I believe her earlier suggestions that both the gestational journey and destination are one in the same. Cixous posits that *G.H.*, "progressed orthogonally, step by step, chapter, by chapter. The trajectory went from self to cockroach. A space of perhaps three yards had to be covered. Three yards divided into a multiplicity of tiny movements of thought that are inscribed slowly, minutely in the text. The book has time to develop between the moment when Clarice opens the

own suppositions to strengthen my argument, and I carefully choose moments where Cixous specifically addresses *G.H.*

door to the room where she had first seen the cockroach and the final moment when something is happening between her and the insect" (109).

Cixous compares *G.H.* to "O ovo e a galinha" (1975, first published "A legião estrangeira") suggesting that "instead of the slow mobility [in *G.H.*]" that the story exemplifies some order of gravitational pull: "it gravitates and gravidates. Let the egg be! It engenders a text that is written in a system of phrases, a linking of phrases, which turn around this little essential object" (110). As I have discussed, there is a systematic movement through stages of expression (naming, drawing, cockroach), but the way of arriving to each stage is anything but orthodox slow mobility. It is hindered mobility, certainly, but I believe the manner in which *G.H.* questions herself, and the reader, wondering aloud what the consequences of such questions might be, offers a dense and complex experience for the reader. While *G.H.* might not be a system of phrases like "O ovo", it is indeed a series-system of thoughts, which pivots on the axis of *G.H.*, the novel's "essential little object."

Thus, I deem *G.H.*'s "essential little object" to be this series-system of thoughts. And therefore the developmental, systematic thought processes that the reader witnesses as the emplotment. However, the reader must let go of this hierarchy of novelistic structure forcing an understanding that a "beginning, middle, and end" to a narration must necessarily be linear in an anticipated manner. Cixous remarks on the structure of *G.H.*: "It is the same process of incessant leaping [as in "A Maça no Escuro" (1961)], of letting go of the border, that traces the path of love in *The Passion* according to *G.H.*....it is not a state of being, but a path that is not following step by step but leap by leap, always from one extremity to another, and always into the unknown, into the void. The goal is the movement toward, not the arrival" (77). As I have argued previously, both the reader and *G.H.*, the protagonist,

are essential to one another; without one the other fails in his/her practice. The reader does encounter a border: that of the text itself and the confines of the narrative—we know only what G.H. chooses to tell us. Yet, as Cixous asserts, the reader must be willing to forgo the expectation of what a border will produce. The journey toward G.H., not the arrival to her is what should matter to the reader, and arguably, what Cixous believes Lispector intended to happen.

Lastly, Cixous makes interesting remarks with regard to how *G.H.* should be read on a macro-level by looking at the micro-level techniques with which it was created, “[o]ne has to reread *The Passion According to G.H.*, or Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling*, in which a single thought is being developed in three hundred pages. What can happen, by chance, is the moment of encounter between oneself, a space capable of thought, and something else. It produces a vibration. If one has been receptive, that is where one can begin to work, at the very point of impact” (163). In describing the “self” as a space capable of thought, Cixous extends the means of interpretation for the self indeed. The space of G.H.’s maid’s room, just like the space of the self become fused together. At this point of fusion a “vibration” is produced that reverberates throughout the whole narration, and the reader rides the wave to Lispector’s chosen end: “A vida se me é, e eu não entendo o que digo. E então adoro-- -- -- -- --” (Lispector 175). Her ending declares her own suspicion the previous 175 pages might have been her erring, for naught. Regardless, though, she loves. As we know Lispector values writing, family, and love above all else, it is difficult to wrestle too much with G.H.’s conclusion. And finally, Cixous concludes that *G.H.*, “...is a difficult text, written at the point of reversal of contradiction; and, of course, language only wants to say one thing at once. Language wants to go straight. To force it to produce ambiguous statements requires extraordinary strength and

labor. It is precise, minute work that requires a lot of time” (163). I will now examine the effects of punctuation and syntax to seek the textual manifestations of Lispector’s wrestling with language and whether or not she manages it to “go straight.”

ELEMENT 1: PUNCTUATION AS A MEANS OF MYSTICALITY

In this section I will discuss the more meta-linguistic aspects of Lispector’s work, specifically commenting on syntax and anacoluthon (a construction that lacks grammatical sequence) as well as what it means to be considered “lyrical prose.” The purpose of this section is to suggest that lyrical prose as written by Lispector foments a reading for mysticity in that sentences and sentence structure lend themselves to suitable mysticist interpretation.

What is the difference between the poetization of prose verses the prosification of poetics? Broadly, lyrical prose exhibits characteristics of linguistic inventiveness, remaining a text in prose form, but containing elements that feel poetic, e.g. non-linear or ambiguous (in terms of narrative or plot structure) to the reader. Robert Pickering, in his analysis of early twentieth-century French poet-philosopher Paul Valéry’s “Cahiers” (1894-1914), discusses the limits of self-expression. Just because an author employs lyrical prose, “[a]mbiguity, however, does not equate in the lyrical prose to vagueness of intention and response” (Pickering 40). As Lispector’s novel is titled a “romance” (i.e., a novel), I choose the notion “poetization of prose” based solely on the author’s suggestion that the narration is, in fact, a novel, though it is important to note the difference. Pickering explains, citing Valéry, “[i]n effect, at the basis of the poetic prose there lies a principle of communication based on notions of lyrical potential, rather than poetic

materialization: “Ou cesse l’expression, mais non le besoin d’exprimer, la commence (par definition) la Mystique [...]” (Pickering 40, Valéry XXII 351). The potentiality of something lyrical, says Pickering, weighs more than the manifestation of something poetic in lyrical prose. Thus, the mere possibility of an aesthetic, expressive quality in the work equates to lyrical prose. Interestingly, he also chooses the word “mystique,” indicating that in the cessation of expression, mystique begins. Mystique or mystery, as I have discussed in Lispector’s protagonist, drives the expression. By way of Valéry, Pickering details this idea further:

The impulse to expression which precedes languages, moreover, is poetic in its own right, since never actually circumscribed in any one particular form. Plurality and ambiguity are the touchstones of poetry: beside the homogeneity of intention underlying prose, poetry by its very nature avoids clarity and statement, opting for heterogeneity of expressive means and effect. (40)³⁸

Therefore, I conclude that this goal of “expressive means and effect” so endemic to poetry is what makes the “lyrical” in “lyrical prose.” For a meta-linguistic analysis, particularly of punctuation and its effects, I am interested in the negative space it creates in the lyrical prose of Lispector. Valéry believes the “état du manque de mots” (the state of lacking words) due to “inexprimabilité” (the unexpressable) engenders meaning. Valéry explains:

³⁸Personally, I disagree with the notion of prose=homogeneity and poetry=heterogeneity. I believe that poetry can certainly boast a “statement”, in contrast the Valéry’s indications that it *avoids* a statement in the way logic, philosophy, or positivist discourse does. In fact, my dissertation has served to prove exactly the opposite. However, for purpose of sussing out the difference between lyrical prose (poetization of prose) and prose poems (prosification of poems), I think it important to lay a framework for the rest of this chapter.

Inexprimabilités signifie non qu'il n'y ait pas des expressions—mais que toutes les expressions sont incapables de resituer ce qui les excite—et que nous avons le sentiment de cette incapacité ou irrationalité comme de véritables propriétés de la chose-cause. (XVIII, 350/OCI 374)³⁹

The problem is not that there is no manner in which to express oneself, as Valéry suggests, but rather the fact that our expressions simply lack the capacity to constitute what they were meant to communicate in the first place. As such, poetic authors (Lispector) search for a vehicle by which to express this negative linguistic space, and it turns out to be lyrical prose. Thus, the ultimate linguistic deficiency to signify such negative space is silence. And textually, silence is exemplified by myriad methods of punctuation (dashes, commas, empty space, and so on). As such, as Pickering agrees, this deficiency “acquires a peculiarly positive meaning, as something desirable in the tentative groping towards as complete participation as possible in existence” (41). I will now examine the ways in which Lispector uses punctuation and syntactical strategy to achieve negative space, silence, and ultimately lyrical expression.

In G.H. the reader first “meets” the narrative by a massive leap into the text, indicated by a series of six dashes without any preceding words. Similarly, the reader must brusquely exit the text in the exact same manner: six dashes leading to nothing. The reader enters and exits the text in *medias res*, *sans exposition*, decontextualized, and alone (being the first-person without an obvious dialogic interlocutor):

-- -- -- -- -- estou procurando, estou procurando (7).

³⁹ All words in italics are Valéry's own emphasis.

A vida se me é, e eu nao entendo o que digo. E então adoro. -- --
-- -- -- -- (175).

Lispector is well-known for rupturing regulatory grammatical regimes. In her description of Lispector's short story, "O ovo e a galinha" (1975) Cixous describes the writing as, "The sentences are short. They are here one after the other, in a paratactical model, without coordination, without subordination.... Here we proceed by leaps, without coordination" (110). G.H. differs from the aforementioned story, but I argue that the paratactical model is still at play. Lispector intersperses short sentences with rhetorical apostrophe, together with repetitive syntactical structures and longer, stream-of-conscious paragraphs. The parataxis manifests itself as the previously mentioned "series-system of thoughts", thus a kind of semantic interpretation on a syntactical mechanism. Cixous presents why Lispector chooses the dashes: "Clarice does not say: 'I leap.' She performs it in a moment when she literally cannot use words.... What comes about in terms of punctuation shows that it is a text of silence. To make a space for this silence is an infinite art and...is made through the art of typography, through paginal setting, through the space of paragraphs" (70). Presenting G.H. as a "text of silence" in its entirety is rich for commentary, but certainly the lack of dialogue between characters and relative deficiency of action signal a certain amount of "silence." Arguably, Lispector defies even the category of silence, proposing a new conceptualization of what it means to write silence into a text. Cixous's point is that Lispector employs writing strategies that express the incompleteness of a story and moments of narrative paucity in which words would suggest a false sense of fullness or plenitude of meaning. Here I believe this is precisely how Lispector invites the reader, of fully-formed soul ("alma já formada"), to leap into the text. The text begins with six dashes, implying much

more than a leap. It is a leap of faith, into the unknown. Perhaps, it is a leap more than words on a page can permit, and hence, the extensive use of dashes to imply something extra-textual.

Further, the use of the present progressive (“procurando”) suggests the protagonist is actively involved in a process, to which the reader has just become witness. If the narrative voice is “trying” or “attempting” as she suggests, what precisely is being searched for? Waldman explains this search:

Entre eles [the six dashes], a narrativa que aponta para uma busca (as palavras iniciais são)...mas que so dobra para o retorno, se bem que o ponto de chegada nao é propriamente ao ponto de partida. O texto inicia quando a personagem está retornando do distanciamento prolongado que a tinha isolado de sua experiência de vida anterior, quando já se tinha desfeito a ruptura que a tinha separado do mundo e que vai ser narrada. (Waldman 52)

Stephanie Sweet describes Lispector's mobilization of another technique, the anacoluthon, to signify another type of lapse in the logical flow of a sentence. Sweet explains, citing Cixous, “In commenting on ‘E para lá que eu vou’ Cixous says, ‘There is a displacement, from border to border, from relay to relay. But we do not enter because we stay at the edge of the circle. I read it as a jump, as an anacoluthon, or a break of classical construction’ (*Reading Clarice* 74). Arguably, everything from syntax to thematics are a “break of classical construction,” but it is the punctuation, in particular, that heralds what Sweet calls “rhetorically sanctioned breaks.” Such breaks, or breakdowns, of language are indeed sanctioned by G.H. herself. She constantly encircles her own story, removing herself, becoming conscious of her

role as narrator, making the reader aware of the “meta-text.” Caufield argues similarly:

G.H. alternates between “confessing” to this constructed other and stepping out of her own story and acknowledging what she is doing: 'But I am afraid to start writing to be understood by that imaginary someone, I'm afraid I'll start 'making' a sense, with the same meek madness that up to yesterday was my 'healthy' way of fitting into a system. Will I have to have the courage to use an undefended heart and go on speaking to nothing and no one? (Caufield 404).

Lispector's use of quotations to indicate uncertainty or figurativeness implies that the reader must accept multifarious possibilities of meaning. What does “making sense mean”? Or specifically, what does it mean to G.H.? The quotation marks around “healthy” call into question G.H.'s entire cosmovision up until her experience in the room. She wonders if everything she has accepted as standard or “healthy” is perhaps thwarted or “other” now that she lives on the other side of the experience. G.H. additionally recognizes the “system” into which she fits (or formally did, pre-experience). I posit that G.H.'s newly-minted “series-system of thoughts” overtakes her prior conception of her life; and as such, she transforms this system herself.

Another such anacoluthon, is also considered when G.H. apostrophically directs herself toward the reader, “Dá-me a tua mão:” (94). G.H. three times commands the reader as such at the close of the prior chapter, where she has never previously spoken to the outsider so directly, in grammatical command form. She first supplicates, “Não me abandones nesta hora, não me dexes tomar sozinha esta

decisão já tomada” (93). She does not know what to do with the cockroach. She then reaches to the reader to shed light, to explain what has happened, to explain why, to assure G.H. that she still persists:

--Dá-me a tua mão. Porque não sei mais do que estou falando.
Acho que inventei tudo, nada disso existiu! Mas se inventei o
que ontem me aconteceu—quem me garante que também não
inventei toda a minha vida anterior a ontem?

Dá-me a tua mão: (93).

G.H. leads herself from one existential question to another. If she insists first that she has invented this story, then who is to say that everything up until the experience wasn't also fabricated? Her experiences cause the signifier to flee the signified; her only respite is to look outside the text to a voice, her “imaginary person,” to help maintain focus. G.H. represents the transcendent to which it refers, making the extra-diegetic reader effectually diegetic, necessary. Caufield argues, “[t]he transcendent reference is intricately woven into the textual strategy: the narrating ‘I’ requests: “give me your anonymous hand” (505). The text is ostensibly G.H. attempting to explain her experience to an unknowable reader. In this literary structure, the reader functions as G.H.'s sought-after (silent) dialogue partner; the ineffable (to G.H.) reader assumes the role of transcendent referent for the protagonist. Thus, in confessional study, the reader has a role within the diegetic world: to be the receptor of G.H.'s story in addressing the reader in this way, “the narrating ‘I’ creates an ineffable—yet actually existing—other” (506).

Toward the end of the novel, however, G.H. comes to realize that a reality inside or outside the text, is ultimately rooted in language, a mystical rhetoric to

support her experience: “A realidade é a matéria-prima, a linguagem é o modo como vou buscá-la—e como não acho. Mas é do buscar e não achar que nasce o que eu não conhecia, e que instataneamente reconheço. A linguagem é o meu esforço humano” (*A paixão* 172). G.H. recognizes the necessary limitations of her own language, her own “human effort,” as well as the role of the outsider. Now, I turn to how she uses this language to speak mystically about her experiences.

ELEMENT 2: SEMANTIC PARADOX: CONTRADICTIONS IN TEXT

In G.H. there is continuity in non-conformity. Lispector begins each chapter as previous one ends, literally repeating the entire sentence/phrase at the beginning of the chapter that concluded the previous one. The entirety of the plot takes place in one room, in the space of three yards at Cixous's estimation; yet, this confined space in a familiar place (her home) is an unknown space. The unexpected paradox is anticipated. In the section that follows I will analyze specific instances of “contradictions-in-text” that draw together the narrative in such a way that the impurity and asymmetry are ripe breeding grounds for expression in mysticity.

1. THE ROOM AND THE DRAWING

Like Muñiz-Huberman, Lispector examines the process of naming, yet the resolution to such a process is to transgress it rather than accept its intrinsic value as just a name belonging to an object. I argue that the transgression of a name is mysticalist—G.H. is seeking some name beyond a name. Ultimately, the odd otherness within G.H. relates to her suspicion that an unknowable God is rooted in all lived experience (including the drawing on the wall as I will point out). If God represents that which is unknown, then this room for G.H. is an unanticipated

unknown and her attempt to know it is the utmost transgression.

For this sequence of events to occur, G.H. first decides to clean her apartment and begins with her maid's quarters, a space she has never before visited. When she enters, G.H. encounters a charcoal drawing on the wall of a man, woman, and a dog. This first contact with that which is unknown to her is unsettling to her core and she dislikes the experience. Why does she react so negatively to her own portrait? I argue that this is the first experience (and the first push in this journey) where she sees herself as the "other." This room in her apartment, ostensibly, belongs to her in the way that legal documents permit one possession of a home. Yet, symbolically, it is not hers. It is not even familiar to her. Here begins her journey; she experiences the nascent disavowal, where she observes and scrutinizes herself as an outsider, as something to be detected and evaluated. The transgression lies in her attempt to nominally appropriate the space that does not belong to her.⁴⁰ It is unfamiliar and unknowable because of this new perspective of "other". Thus, the nominal appropriation is forbidden, just when she explains, "É proibido dizer o nome da vida" (12). G.H. is capable of the recognition of this unknown abyss but she cannot resist the temptation to trespass this threshold. This transgression fundamentally speaks to the Jewish paradigm because she asks how to name something she cannot name; in Kabbalah, *Ein Sof*, or the name of God, means the "nameless being," implying infinity and unknowability. The disavowal is furthered in that G.H. endeavors to recuperate the non-ostensive referent, that is, the oblivion. She is attempting to archive what happened to her the day before yet with no memory of it whatsoever. This pursuit to reconcile this abyss, this unknown, speaks forcefully to the Jewish paradigm of knowing and (necessarily) accepting the unknowability of

⁴⁰See the earlier part of this chapter where I discuss the idea of "naming" as central to my analysis.

God (the Great Unknowable). Here, we see Lispector's innovative literary art where she establishes a clear ostensive referent but thwarts it and moves to defy it.

This room G.H. occupies for the entirety of the novel is transformed from the physical place that contains her to the mystical dimension Borgesian Aleph where time and space are limitless.⁴¹ G.H. evokes the desert often during her internal struggle in this room and Lispector writes "desert" frequently in the novel. Does this room transform into the desert, as a place traditionally described as one of purification, emptiness, self-search and ultimately the place of revelation of God? It is trope that is significant for Jews. Likewise, Jacobo Fijman discusses his madness (and it is fitting as Lispector also suffered from debilitating depression) as "el camino más alto, más desierto"; so there exists this contemplative state that accompanies the desert imaginary. I argue that while the desert is referenced in *G.H.* often it does not necessarily come to represent that physical space of aimless movement in which the Wandering Jew finds himself throughout history. G.H. does find herself in a desert, symbolically, in that she searches for what it is that she searches for, a paradoxical Jewish question. However, what she finds is ultimately herself, represented by the cockroach, and an understanding of the term "*paixão*."

In the room, G.H. contemplates the charcoal drawing of a man, woman, and dog: "as três não formavam um grupo" (35). G.H. describes a drawing of three individuals (two persons and a canine), potentially representing her family, yet insists that they are unrelated, so much so that even three individuals appearing together on a visual surface do not constitute a group. All evidence, as humans are meant to perceive drawings, even those dating to the earliest of human knowledge,

⁴¹ Again, the notion of the *aleph* comes from Jorge Luis Borges's collection of short stories "Ficciones". One story, titled "Aleph" describes an encounter a man has with a concentration of energy that simultaneously contains all of time and space.

suggest that images of people together indicate relation of some kind, a grouping, potentially kinship. But G.H. not only defies seeing a visual link between them “nenhuma figura tinha ligação com a outra,” she presupposes that they themselves are sentient beings and are rendered incapable of mutual recognition. Caufield argues that this space of the maid's room where the drawing is encountered is a “container” where G.H.'s spiritual journey takes place. In confronting the cockroach, Caufield argues, “the physical container of the room is transgressed, becoming boundless, like a Borgesian *aleph*—...[t]he “reality” of physical space is transformed into the reality of mystical place in the present of narrative time where all place and time converge” (503). I fully support the notion that the maid's room is a transformed space, as G.H. herself describes it as “livre flutuando acima de uma extensão ilimitada” (Lispector 30). Description as an *aleph* is apropos as well, in that G.H.'s transformative experience occurs in this single space. However, to label such a space as additionally mystical is somewhat problematic. In the Judeo-Christian sense of what is mystical, either persons or texts can be described as such, but a physical location cannot bear markers of mysticism. It is a person that interprets a text as mystical or practices in meditation to achieve a mystical union with God. As would follow, the spaces they occupy during these events might be special or sacred, but the space loses meaning without the experiencer/believer to bestow it. Thus, I argue that the drawings, much like the wall and room in which they are contained, are not a mystical spot, *in situ*. The room and the portrait would not have garnered significance, mystical or otherwise, had G.H. not entered it or viewed it to begin with. It is G.H., together with her reader, that ascribe meaning. And as G.H. is our narrator, she confesses to us. And perhaps we, the reader, are the fiction created by G.H.'s storyline. In fact, it might be possible that we exist apostrophically for G.H. in

place of a transcendent being—perhaps G.H. addresses an “external” voice, hoping that it is divine and instead finds the reader. And likewise, her experience comes to being through her own narration of it, describing the events of the day prior, a very casual, quotidian consideration. She vacillates between supplicating the reader in clear apostrophe, and then textually leaping from the text to look back at her words/actions, questioning them, as if she were an alternate version of herself: “Até agora achar-me era já ter uma idéia de pessoa e nela me engastar: nessa pessoa organizada eu me encarvava, e nem mesmo sentia o grande esforço de construção que era viver. A idéia que eu fazia de pessoa vinha de minha terceira perna, daquela que me plantava no chão. Mas, e agora? Estarei mais livre? (Lispector 8). Caufield goes on, “G.H. does not feel awed by this glimpse of the Holy. She feels irritated, notes that the room physically bothers her, that she detests the room and view it with repulsion and despair” (503). The unsettled unfamiliarity with the space engenders the experience-to-come; it does not itself represent the “Holy.” Hence, the unfolding events of the cockroach sequence express mysticality because G.H. uses language via Lispector using writing. The room itself is not mystical until G.H. moves through her transformative experience.

2. THE COCKROACH

In the middle of this journey, in G.H.’s contemplation of her meaning in this unknown, lifeless space, the antithesis of the desert appears: life. A cockroach emerges and it is living, breathing, moist. Most importantly, it is organic life material that cuts through the dryness and inexpressive state experienced in the maid’s room. If this desert trope were orthodox Jewish/mystical, the cockroach would come to represent God, as God should be the only life form manifest in the desert.

But I am more interested in G.H.'s relationship to the cockroach. At the same time, the cockroach is G.H. herself. She examines it, just as she examined her "self's" charcoal drawing, and chooses to violate the natural law of the desert trope and eat it. She squishes the cockroach with the edge of the wardrobe and observes as its innards, its insides, ooze out. Just as she has entered a space that is inside her home, within the confines of what she knows, the maid's room represents the innards of her psyche, what she does not know, that only manifest when transgressed (killed). The cockroach is G.H. and she even shocks herself at this self-revelation; stupefied she questions what she has done to herself. G.H. reveals that which codifies and fabricates G.H. herself and in consuming its material, finally appropriates that which is unknown to her.

After first confronting the cockroach, G.H. remembers her childhood, recalling that "percevejos, goteiras, baratas e ratos," era de cómo um [seu] pasado pré-histórico, [ela] já havia vivido com os primeiros bichos da terra" (44). The cockroach is like a fossilized fish, so old in fact that it is akin to mythical creators like griffins, chimeras, and "leviathas" (51).⁴² G.H. believes the cockroach to be anachronistic. Culturally, the cockroach is known for its ability to survive catastrophic events and is well-known for its resilience, dating back to the Carboniferous period about 320 million years ago. But G.H.'s cockroach is more than just a pest. Paradoxically, it is human; she describes its face and eyes, its mouth, gaping open. She contradicts everything culturally known about cockroaches and does not just personify it, she humanizes it. G.H. details her existence as a child as

⁴²It seems that *leviathas* in Portuguese reveals a monstrous creature that is capable of possession and metamorphosis. In Anglo-culture it is often equated with "Leviathan," most often represented as a sea monster. Regardless, its origins are in the Hebrew Bible.

both contemporary and pre-historic in her thought process concerning the cockroach. It is a semantic anachronism.

In her intense and thoughtful consideration of the cockroach, with her full energy focused on its location, meaning, and lifespan, G.H. simultaneously considers every expectation/concern she herself has ever experienced. She simultaneously focuses fully on something else while opening up her psyche to exploration, a presumed paradox. G.H. explains:

Fiquei imóvel, calculando desordenadamente. Estava atenta, eu estava toda atenta. Em mim um sentimento de grande espera havia crescido, e uma resignação surpreendida: e que nesta espera atenta eu reconhecia todas as minhas esperas anteriores, eu reconhecia a atenção de que também antes vivera, a atenção que nunca me abandona e que em última análise talvez seja a coisa mais colada a minha vida... (47).

In the singular breath of intensity on a singular item, the cockroach, G.H. finds the capacity to consider every other fear she has ever faced. I find it useful here to momentarily consider G.H.'s problematic in psychoanalytic terms. Perhaps her ego is functioning in overdrive to mediate what the superego observes (the cockroach) and must reconcile and the id (G.H.'s involuntary past, incumbent in the background). Regardless, G.H. at this moment becomes omnipotent in her psychological ability, occupying all of her own time-space in a single instant. In describing this feeling, G.H. submits to the vastness of her identity, the previously unknown pathways that transverse it, "[e] que eu olhara a barata viva e nela descobria a identidade de minha vida mais profunda. Em dorrocada difícil, abriam-se dentro de mim passagens duras e estreitas" (53).

And the cockroach itself is a paradox. It is feminized in a variety of ways, when G.H. knows nothing of the cockroach's sex. In Portuguese the word *barata* is feminine, so this element is somewhat inconsequential. But Lispector chose it, when any number of other household pests were available, such as mosquitoes, ants, or rats. And *barata*'s significance is manifold depending on the region in Brazil: cockroach is universal, but other definitions include an elderly woman who frequents church, a girl who has lost her virginity, and a vulgar word for vagina. It would be nearly impossible to insist that Lispector intended for all of these uses to be contemplated at every turn that *barata* appears in the text. What is clear, however, is Lispector's clear mastery of double and even triple entendre, as is evident by all the scholarship dedicated to determining the implication of Jewish allusions in her work. Thus, in collective consideration of the multiple feminine associations of the word *barata*, I turn toward an analysis of the cockroach's eyelashes in particular.

G.H.'s description of the cockroach is thorough, to say the least. The reader learns of the cockroach's emotional state, of her physical features, of her insides (when G.H. describes the process of innards becoming exterior), and particularly of the effect her eyelashes:

A barata é pura sedução, Cílios, cílios pestanejando que chamam. Também eu, que aos poucos estava me reduzindo ao que em mim era irredutível, também eu tinha milhares de cílios pestanejando, e como meus cílios eu avanço, eu protozoária, proteína pura. Segura minha mão, cheguei ao irredutível com a fatalidade de um dobre—sinto que tudo isso é antigo e amplo, sinto no hieróglifo da barata lenta a fragia do

Extremo Oriente. (56-7)

Undeniably associated with sex appeal and femininity, eyelashes are meant to seduce. And the cockroach's do not disappoint. They beckon G.H. (chamam), batting themselves, turning the cockroach, in its entirety, into "pure seduction." Lispector transforms an ideal of feminine beauty on its head, evoking here the best of Cixous's *écriture féminine*, the subversion of gendered hierarchies. Marta Peixoto discusses Lispector's many works in reference to gender and violence, and I cite her, "[c]hallenging limits and courting excess, Lispector invokes a Dionysian force in her attempt to question and disrupt the fixity of genres of establishes genres and narrative forms..." (*Passionate Fictions* xiii). G.H.'s excess comes in the form of "thousands of eyelashes" situating her in antiquity, reducing her to "pure protozoan protein." Eyelashes become ahistorical, no more part of a woman's body than part of the evolution of life itself. And paradoxically, the cockroach's own eyelashes reduce, in G.H., what is irreducible. I argue that what is irreducible for G.H. is her definition of herself up until this textual moment, where she had never before considered what eyelashes could mean outside of shading her eyes, laced with mascara. Now, the implication that they are more than just facial adornments for women and markers of femininity requires G.H. to call into question that which she defines as G.H. G.H. completes her thoughts on the cockroach's methods of seduction:

E neste deserto de grandes seduções, as criaturas: eu e a barata viva. A vida, meu amor, é uma grande sedução onde tudo o que existe se seduz. Aquele quarto que estava deserto e por isso primariamente vivo. E chegara ao nada, e o nada era vivo e úmido. (56-7)

G.H. equates herself with the cockroach and life and love. Thus, if the

cockroach is seduction, then life must be as well. I suggest that the opposite of life is “*nada*”; and G.H. labels it as alive and moist. Nothing is fixed; meaning of what is black and white, alive or dead, becomes interchangeable. And so, G.H. must further push her limitations to discover what happens when she consumes something that is both life’s seduction and vacancy (*nada*). She kills the cockroach and eats it.

Finally, after squishing the cockroach, G.H. reveals the following about her synecdochic transformation:

Eu, corpo neutro de barata, eu como uma vida que finalmente não me escapa pois enfim a nejo fora de mim—eu sou a barata, sou minha perna, sou meus cabelos, sou o trecho de luz mais branca no reboco da parede...os pedaços continuarão estremecendo e se mexendo. Sou o silencio gravado numa parede, e a borboleta mais antiga esvoaca e me defronta: a mesma de sempre. De nascer até morrer é o que eu me chamo de humana, e nunca propriamente morrerei. (61)

What G.H. suggests feels to the reader to be more than a figurative or metaphorical transformation into the cockroach. She is both one and the same as the cockroach, yet bodily cockroach bits that continue to ooze out continuously interlace with her own: her hair, her legs. She becomes both the process and the product at the same time, a poiesis of physical transformation. And as a result of such a transformation, G.H. will never actually die. How is this possible? In consuming the cockroach, she has co-opted the history of the living world, not just of cockroaches, but butterflies too and the “silencio gravado numa parede.” The silence represents the humanity of the living world, her family's portrait on the wall that lacks meaning as unified kinship. Yet, one in the same, G.H., post-cockroach

communion, has become omniscient.

G.H. further puts life and death into oppositional terms, yet simultaneously suggesting that they are one in the same. Such a practice, is of course, very mystical, as in the case with Santa Teresa.⁴³ Although, G.H. suggests an alternative: “A vida é tão contínua que nós a dividimos em etapas, e a uma delas chamamos de morte” (61). Humanity, she correctly points out, observes the continuity of life. But instead of considering progeny as the means by which to carry it forward, she believes we (as humanity) actually just divide the continuity of life into parts, one of which is death. By scientific definition, life is the opposite of death; believers of certain religions might suggest death is a next step, but certainly different than life itself. Even those that believe we are re-born still consider death as an alternate reality to the one a person currently lives. G.H. believes life is the overarching narrative that continues on forever and death is contained within that trajectory.

GOD MANIFEST

The last element I will consider is the presence of God in the text. I will argue that there is not mystical union with God, but rather with G.H.’s cosmovision of humanity. Finally, as the novel draws to a close, G.H. re-visits her name, this time, as it pertains to her conception of God, depicting how G.H. perceives humanity. G.H. tells the reader, “E eu também não tenho nome, e este é o meu nome. E porque me despersonalizo pronto de não ter o meu nome, respondo cada vez que alguém disser: eu” (171). The name that G.H. had so carefully considered and inspected at the beginning of the novel has ultimately disintegrated. Not being named is the new “name”; she is de- or un-personalized to such an extent that she is both an un-name

⁴³Here I refer to her famous poem “Muero porque no muero” among others where she describes life as dying because only death permits her union with God.

(nothing) as well as every name (every time someone says “I”). G.H.’s journey through the text has proven that she represents both the process of naming as well as its product, an un-name, another example of Lispector’s textual poiesis.

If we consider for a moment the psychoanalysis of this naming practice in mystical terms, it is useful to apply Julia Kristeva’s thoughts from her book *This Incredible Need to Believe* (2006). According to Kristeva, “The path of mystical belief plunges the ego into the id by means of a sort of sensual autoeroticism that confers a kind of omnipotence on the id: revelation and absence, pleasure and nothingness” (*This Incredible Need* 11). Thus, mystical language permits G.H. to revel in this paradox of revelation-absence and pleasure-nothingness. G.H., I argue, does not unite with God, nor with Christ, but rather with a new conception of and appreciation for herself. If she can simultaneously conceive of her ego as “G.H.” as well as every “I” that is ever uttered, she is united with the concept of humanity. She does symbolize humanity; she embodies it. And she reveals, “[e] é aceita a nossa condição como a única possível, já que ela é o que existe, e não outra. E já que vivê-la é a nossa paixão. A condição humana é a paixão de Cristo” (171). It is the collective “condition” that is “ours” that becomes the only possibility, the only “possível linguagem.” And she goes on to elucidate that her natural condition, that is, the human condition, is equivalent to pain. We are human because we suffer. G.H. explainz, “Só então minha natureza é aceita, aceita com o seu suplício espantado, onde a dor não é alguma coisa que nos acontece, mas o que somos (171). Pain is not something humanity experience because it defines us—just as G.H. does not experience humanity, she defines it.

Is G.H. now a disciple of Christ because her condition is humanity’s, which in turn is also Christ’s? Here Lispector uses language that speaks to a large audience, a

Christian audience, that will identify with a struggle that is familiar to them, one they have read about and believe in: that of Christ. The apostrophe she has engaged is a transcendental one. G.H. never explicitly ascribes to Christ's teachings, or suggests that she was or is Christian. She likens humanity's passion/condition to the suffering of Christ; a formidable metaphor with such intense implications that it is possible for the reader to understand the weight G.H. means to convey. Perhaps it is as Kristeva notes, with regard to the way secularized, modern society reacts toward ontotheology (that is, the ontology of God), "the uncertainties of secularization in our time reopen this recurring problematic in a new way. The remains of the ontotheological continent...seem...more and more like laboratories of living cells whose exploration might allow us to clarify present aporias and impasses" (32). At a minimum, G.H. is aporic in the presentation of any sort of ontotheological questioning. G.H.'s own awareness of Brazilian society's internal conflicts are evident—she is unable to even deal with her own narration without reaching outside the text to the reader, often supplicating him/her. This reach outside the text is a transcendental apostrophe. Thus, I suggest that Lispector skillfully employs language that is theological in nature to speak to a common humanity to help her protagonist navigate her own ontotheology. Plus, G.H. finally reveals the problematic of her own voice and the language that it produces, "[m]inhas civilizações eram necessárias para que eu subisse a ponto de ter de onde descer. E exatamente através do malogro da voz que se vai pela primeira vez ouvir a própria mudez e a dos outros e a das coisas, e acietá-la como a possível linguagem" (Lispector 171). G.H. therefore must be strategic and universal in her approach.

And finally, the consumption of the cockroach, then, must also be considered paradoxical. Peixoto claims, "In this tense encounter [where G.H. kills and eats the

cockroach] observation yields repulsion, identification, and dizzying reversals of relative power as the woman feels engulfed by the cockroach, which is in turn victimizer and victim. I think it fair to say that Lispector narrative often demands a victim, or conversely, that the victim demands narrative" (*Passionate Fictions* 82). G.H. as the victim of the series of events throughout the text finally succumbs, "[s]enti que meu rosto em púdo sorria. Ou talvez não sorrise, não sei. Eu confiava. Em mim? no mundo? no Deus? Na barata? Não sei (174). G.H. is sure she believes and trusts in something (*confiava*), but that something is unclear. The narrative's victim is G.H., who demands an outside, a humanity to trust her, and in the final accepting of this humanity, she finally can find a bit of happiness (*sorria*). To close, the penultimate page of narrative reveals the following baptism, "Oh, Deus, Eu me sentia batizada pelo mundo. Eu botara na boca a matéria de uma barata, e enfim realizara o ato ínfimo" (174). Based on my analysis of G.H.'s identification with and co-optation of humanity as her condition, she is not baptized by God, but by the world itself. Her respite is in humanity, which is both metonymic for herself as well as for every other "I" it contains.

CONCLUSIONS

There is no room for doubt that Lispector included myriad mystical elements in *G.H.* It is my belief that these elements are presented in such a way that mysticism is not the most appropriate interpretation; rather, mysticality better allows for Lispector's thematic nuances and semantic contortions in her lyrical prose. G.H.'s naming ceremony, together with her subversion of the feminization of the cockroach, the paradox of God's textual presence, and reliance on the reader all

permit a reading of mystical rhetoric to achieve these ends. Peixoto tells us that Lispector's deft use of unusual phrases and abstract linguistic formulations evade rationale intelligence (Passionate Fictions xii). However, G.H. narrates the novel to the reader in an effort to present her own narrative rationale, making an argument that ultimately, she turns herself over, willingly and confidently to the "desconhecido" (175).

Conclusions

Throughout the analyses of this dissertation I hope to have demonstrated the overwhelming presence of mystical language in mid-twentieth century Latin American poetry. Developing my notion of mysticality requires an in-depth examination of many authors from various countries to prove it as any sort of rhetorical strategy. However, I believe I have exacted several detailed, close-readings of four Latin American authors in an effort to prove mysticality's incidence. I have learned that writers favor language that is religiously charged to talk about events that are decidedly secular. It seems that this linguistic paradox permits authors to express their poetic sentiments regarding religion by way of revolution, identity, and nation-building. I have gleaned from my analysis that the environments of these writers necessarily influenced both the themes of their poetry/lyrical prose as well as the rhetorical structures they employed.

The primary theoretical underpinning I have presented in this dissertation is María Zambrano's notion of poiesis. Such poetic creation and expression is so paramount to my argument because it offers an explanation of how and why writers express mysticality in poetry. Zambrano constructs a philosophy of poetry by examining the emergence of poetry (poiesis), the crisis of the word, relations of time and poetics, poetry vis-a-vis ethics and history, and the poetry of Gods. Zambrano's discussions of this "poetic reason" examine the exteriority of poetic words versus the interiority they are meant to express; the function of Zambrano's poiesis is to engender this spirit as a rejection of more secular philosophy. Here, I again supply Zambrano's baseline definition of poiesis:

Apegados a cultivar discernimientos y a ahondar diferencias, habíamos olvidado la unidad que reside—y sostiene—en el fondo de todo lo que el hombre crea por la palabra. Es la unidad de la poiesis, expresión y creación a un mismo tiempo en unidad sagrada, de la cual por revelaciones sucesivas irán naciendo, separándose al nacer—nacimiento es siempre separación—la poesía en sus diferentes especies y la filosofía. (*Algunos lugares* 61)

The poet is the person who is capable of pushing the limits of the self, specifically to explore these limits. “The poetic word trembles over silence, and its rhythm’s orbit sustains it [the poetic word]” (102). The poet does not renounce words or seek them out; s/he simply possesses them (*Filosofía y Poesía* 17). The poet possesses that which is in front of him/her, as much the sensual and tactile as well as anything that affects his/her senses. Plus, the poet has the advantage of drawing from his/her own dreams, their own interior ghosts, that, when mixed with dreams form an opened world where anything is possible (18). Is this open world of revelatory possibility, of uninhibited intellect and knowledge, I have demonstrated that the poetic word also the “beyond” of the Hegelian self-consciousness dialectic. In Hegel’s rhetorical terms, Zambrano’s poet accepts and recognizes the confrontation of his limits and, as such identified with the poet-self, the poetry being, de facto, what belongs to the self. I have presented in the previous four chapters that the poet’s creation is also this ongoing process of “poetic being” that form the stages of being leading towards a full self-consciousness/creation, or poiesis.

Lastly, I have also examined the idea of the poetic word as capable of

transcending communication, though every case, each author confronted the limits presented by language. I believe each author examined struggles with words and through this struggle mystical language is the preferred method of poetic expression. Zambrano's supposition is that the poetic word generates something beyond the meaning of the word itself and thus transcends communication. I have argued that each of my authors's work attempted some kind of transcendence. This notion of poiesis as a simultaneous poetic expression and creation, of being and becoming, is a proliferating logos, that is, a reasoning that is continuously burgeoning and multiplying. This germinating logos manifests in Cuba, Argentina, and Brazil—Zambrano's poetic word is discovered in each of these places and I have argued that the poetry produced is mysticalist.

The other thematic concept linking my arguments is mysticism. I have discussed at length the varying definitions of mysticism in early modern European contexts as well as contemporary Latin American texts. By using critics such as Hollywood and Irigaray, I examine how mysticism is an expression of and expressed through the body. I have argued that mysticism is imperative to my argument because my authors use rhetorical mysticism to express themselves poetically, and I have called it mysticality. In citation of a point made earlier, if a mystic is in constant search of a body, either through ecstatic experience or biblical exegesis, then I have proven that mysticality—and not necessarily mysticism—uses poetry as the medium by which to search for this body. I have relied on Hollywood's notions of "emotional, bodily and excessive forms of mysticism" (*Sensible Ecstasy* 5). Because I argued for mysticality, insisting on the extra-mystical writing offered by my authors in question, then I had to consider

these “excessive” types of mysticism that other scholars discuss. In my argument, however, the end result (the poetic words) did not achieve nor propagate mystical thought alone. Rather, the desired side effect was political, ontological, identity-seeking, or feminist in nature. I believe I have successfully discussed that a mystical literary rhetoric permits a body of written work whose tone is religious, yet not necessarily mystical in the traditional sense.

I also presented the psychoanalytic review of Helene Cixous and Amy Hollywood in their discussion of the intersection of femininity and mysticism. As Hollywood observes, “Cixous’s argument leads to the conclusion that mystics, in that they are religious, are obsessive-compulsives, whereas in that they are hysterical, they are artists and revolutionaries” (4). Hollywood identifies this classification as a “transvaluation of values,” or “a radical reversal of the deployment of medical and psychoanalytic categories...” (4). While Cixous’s observations are rich for commentary, I presented mysticality as a movement beyond this transfiguration of medical/psychoanalytic lexica. I hope to have proved that a (female) poet can write mystically without being chained to diagnoses of hysteria, religious fanaticism, or obsessive-compulsive disorder. All of my authors, I believe write with some consciousness of William James’s “mystical state.”

The authors I have considered in Chapters Two, Three, and Four all shared some foundational characteristics of the mystical logos: they identify as religious or mystical, they write mystically in such a way that the profane is divinized—thus instituting Hollywood’s “transvaluation” of religious identity values.

I have argued that Cuban authors Fina García Marruz and Cintio Vitier as well as Argentine Jacobo Fijman and Brazilian Clarice Lispector all perform mysticality in their poetics. In the case of FGM, the poet fuses the mundane and the divine,

avoiding what Saínz called “sterile” division in poetic fields. I describe her poetry as intimate and private, yet the mysticalist tendencies call apostrophically to Jesus and God in a way that is consumable for the reader. The *origenistas* aimed to “encontrar su unidad esencial y alcanzar entonces su verdad más profunda” (Saínz 296). Amid this poetic ontology, Catholicism [or Catholicity] was the methodology by which to achieve personal intimacy. I posited that FGM successfully writes about the sacramental, precisely by reflecting intimate moments and experiences outside the Church and its dogma, such as items of clothing, liturgical descriptions, and relationships of love depicted by nature. As the primary female representative of her literary movement in Cuba, she discussed the “phenomenon of perception” of being a woman writing a female heritage in her poem about Santa Teresa and Saint Thérèse de Liseux. I presented that FGM uses a “perceptive” female body to experience the phenomena of subjectivity, of experience, and of poetic embodiment.

In my comparative chapter on Vitier and Fijman I discussed how their poetry was a testament to their faith as well as testimony to their canons (national or personal). Each author was a sort of “fish out of water” in his environment and wrote (poetically) to confront this non-conformity. For Vitier, he established his poetic and essayistic voice as the trumpet of Cuban identity; for Fijman, governmental forces often muted his voice, though he experienced beneficiary relationships with the Catholic writers community in Buenos Aires and the SADE that helped him to promulgate his work. In both cases, I have contended that their mysticalist poetry confirmed Zambrano’s poiesis, in that the poetic writing is simultaneously symptomatic of their condition and the remedy for their own treatment. Both writers’s poetics are exemplary of overcoming outsidersness, an

alienation that is endemic to their “*ser*” but also to their homelands that experienced dictatorship. Mysticality expressed via poetry was the proved way to express a new or “reborn” cultural identity.

In my final chapter, I turned to Brazilian writer, Clarice Lispector and her “mystical” novel, which I hope to have proved exhibited mysticalist tendencies. I presented some of the scholarship revolving around Lispector as a Jewish writer, though it was my intention to prove at what points textually mysticality was present. To this end, Lispector depicted a series of encounters for her protagonist, G.H., to experience—I then examined these encounters through the lense of mysticality. G.H. moves through a naming ceremony, which I presented as ritualistic; G.H. contemplates the non-conformity of human life as represented by a family portrait on the wall; and finally the protagonist’s intimate “conversation” with a cockroach, which Lispector humanizes. I chose to analyze specifically the ways in which Lispector subverted traditional feminist critique by probing the meaning of the cockroach’s symbolism and eyelashes. Ultimately, I argued that G.H. did not encounter ecstatic union with God, as in a customary mystical experience. Instead, she was baptized by humanity and came to embody the Borgesian *aleph*: the simultaneity of time and space, an alternative version of poiesis.

To conclude, there are several angles that should be examined in future iterations of this work in order to make it more well-rounded. Firstly, as *Orígenes* was comprised of predominantly white, male, and Catholics, issues of race must and should be addressed. Critics such as Duanel Díaz consider racial tensions and exclusions in his book *Los límites del origenismo* (2005) and *Palabras del transfondo* (2009). Poets such as Nicolás Guillén, who wrote extensively about Cuban identity

from a racial perspective (including religious elements of *santería*) is well worth exploring. To that end, Eastern religions such as Buddhism are known to have influenced *Orígenes* writers like Lezama Lima and merit investigation. As I mentioned in the Introduction, I believe an argument for mysticality can be made for authors from Puerto Rico, Francisco Matos Paoli (1915-2000), from Argentina, Alejandra Pizarnik (1936-1972), and from Uruguay, Delmira Agustini (1886-1914), though this is not a comprehensive list. Additionally, I believe there is room for the examination of more lyrical prose, including that of Cuban Dulce María Loynaz's novel *Jardín* (1951), which I intended to examine in this analysis but proved too much for this particular project. There are many comparative elements between Loynaz's novel and Lispector's, notably the authors's use of domestic space as a portal for self-exploration.

Finally, I would like to explore some further sub-trends that are correlated to this project, namely, the notions of mental illness in mystical writing, and "writing the life cycle." By "writing the life cycle" I refer to how authors's work changes throughout their careers, specifically taking into account what shifts occur in their work as they confront death (in the face of illness, potentially, or mortality otherwise). Questions I am interested in exploring are: How does mysticality present in works written toward the end of life? Does end of life alter their mystical rhetoric? Are there just semantic changes or also rhetorical shifts during this time? Questions regarding mental illness might encompass: Can mental illness be the catalyst for writing mysticality? Can be excluded as a reason? In what ways do authors rely on or refuse their mental capacities to write mystically? In short, I believe there are numerous avenues to explore how mysticality manifests itself, given a wide array of potential authors and their environments.

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